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Tainted Ideals: The Rise and Fall of the Tupamaros

Jennifer Ann Dufau
Bard College

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Tainted Ideals: The Rise and Fall of the Tupamaros

Senior Project Submitted to
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by
Jenny Dufau

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Introduction

The Tupamaros, also known as the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional – Tupamaros (MLN-T) was a revolutionary movement in Uruguay in the 1960s and 1970s. Using guerrilla warfare, the Tupamaros hoped to overthrow the government and remove repressive elements from Uruguayan society. Using a combination of military and political activity, the Tupamaros became the most successful urban guerrilla group in Latin America. This study explores the Tupamaros' rise, which reached a climax in 1969 and their subsequent fall in 1970 when the Tupamaros commenced their revolution with an assault against Uruguay's oppressive forces, leading to the country's military dictatorship in 1973.

Nestled in the southern cone of South America between Brazil and Argentina lies a small nation known for its tranquil existence. Uruguayans will proudly tell you that it is the best nation in the world. The country has been called “the Switzerland of America” and a “Picture of Democracy” by its admirers, titles which are perpetuated by Uruguayans themselves.¹ Generally, the country has been praised for being “a country traditionally pacifist, prosperous and with great democratic traditions.”² Uruguay was blessed with a history of a strong socialist democracy with a policy of social justice that has manifested in a number of progressive reforms.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, Uruguay was viewed as a utopia in a region rife with corruption, poverty, repression and violence. To Western observers, Uruguay was an exemplar for the rest of Latin America to follow. In reality, this was a racist interpretation of the region, considering the fact that over half of Uruguayans are direct descendants of European

¹ Maria Esther Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas*, trans. Anne Edmondson (New York: Saturday Morning Press, 1972), 13.

² Major Carlos Wilson, *The Tupamaros: The Unmentionables* (Boston: Branden Press, 1974), 15.

immigrants, largely from Spain, France, Germany and Italy.³ This perception of exceptionalism has persisted both internationally and within Uruguay, alienating the country from the rest of Latin America.

Uruguay has never been perfect or anything of the sort. It has never ceased to be Latin America, despite the trouble that its leaders went through to Europeanize it. The famous slogan of “the Switzerland of South America” is purely an Uruguayan fabrication, invented for precisely that end: to ostracize it from the whole of America, to make it appear as a rare case. Uruguay went through a reformatory era which was the fruit of a certain economic prosperity that allowed its government to create a fictitious atmosphere of social welfare that kept us mesmerized for a long time. But it has never ceased to be a dictatorship of class and when the time of prosperity passed, “Socialism” ended and the people were forced to bear the burden of the crisis.⁴

In this manner, Uruguay was not unlike the rest of Latin America. By the mid-twentieth century, Uruguay was plagued by a failing economy and increasing disparity between the rich and the poor. Corruption was rampant, considering that the country was run by oligarchies. Considering this, it wasn't unreasonable that radical Uruguayans considered the possibility of revolutionary action, inspired by their Latin American neighbors. These sentiments culminated in the creation of the Tupamaros in 1963.

The Tupamaros began preparing for the revolution with a number of captivating operations designed to garner public support and humiliate Uruguay's political and business elite. In this manner, the Tupamaros became Robin Hood figures, acting in the interest of the poor and working classes of the country. This preparatory period of the Tupamaros' history was

³ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 22.

⁴ *Ibid*, 16.

their most romantic and memorable. By 1970, the Tupamaros determined that conditions were right to ignite the revolution through a violent campaign of kidnappings and murders. Through a series of miscalculations, the Tupamaros lost their public support. In this sense, the Tupamaros' fall is more important than their rise to power, considering the fact that it represented their actual goal of revolution. Moreover, the Tupamaros' attempted revolution against the state led to the imposition of emergency powers and martial law, allowing the military to defeat the Tupamaros by the end of 1972. Despite the fact that lawlessness was brought to an end, the military had become politicized in their fight against the Tupamaros, leading the armed forces to take power in 1973.

In my study of the Tupamaros, the majority of the sources I have used are journalistic. The periodicals largely focus on the Tupamaros' exploits, which provide compelling tales of bank heists, kidnappings and shootouts. Other journalists sympathetic to the Tupamaros' cause have written longer accounts to explain the Tupamaros to audiences unfamiliar with their organization and Uruguay as a whole. The other sources I utilized are American intelligence reports from the National Security Archives, which were declassified in 2005 under the Freedom of Information Act. In general, there is little scholarly work written about the Tupamaros, considering the fact that Uruguay is often overlooked in Latin American literature and viewed as an exception to the region.

Considering the narrative of exceptionalism surrounding Uruguay and the Tupamaros, I hope to connect the two into the narrative of Latin America's era of guerrilla groups and authoritarian military dictatorships. "The Tupamaros: Uruguay's Light Bearers" follows the rise of Uruguay in the early twentieth century and its subsequent decline, leading to the conditions that produced revolutionary fervor within the country. The Tupamaros successfully enlightened

the Uruguayan population of their plight through a sequence of brilliant operations, gaining a significant following. They then proceeded with the revolution, which culminates in “Plan Satán: The Fall from Grace.” In this chapter, I have developed an account of the kidnapping of Daniel Mitrione, as the Uruguayan state and the Tupamaros struggled to take control of the country. My study concludes with “Uruguay’s Moral Decline,” an analysis of the connection between the kidnapping of Daniel Mitrione and the end of democracy within Uruguay.

The Tupamaros: Uruguay's Light Bearers

In the nineteenth century, Uruguay was fragmented by two political parties: the Blancos and Colorados. Generally, the Blanco party has been thought to represent rural interests, while the Colorados represented the urban interests of Montevideo, but each had a sizeable pull in both sectors.⁵ Historically, the Blancos and Colorados have retained roughly half of the electorate, meaning that the two parties were constantly in conflict as they tried to retain control of the country. In 1839, the Colorados declared war on the Blancos, beginning a twelve year civil war known as La Guerra Grande. The Blancos had the upper hand; they had taken Montevideo. This led the Colorados to sign an agreement with Brazil, allowing them the right to intervene in Uruguay's affairs, bringing the war to an end in 1851. In the years that followed, there were several uprisings against the government as *caudillo* rulers on both sides tried to take control of the nation for their respective party. Altogether, twenty-five leaders ruled the country from 1830 to 1903; two were assassinated and ten were forced out of power.⁶

While Uruguay was in turmoil due to political warring, the country was otherwise doing well. Uruguay experienced an economic boom due to the Paraguayan War and increasing trade with Europe. The country had a rise in population as a result of Italian and Spanish immigration. The era of *caudillismo* came to an end in 1897, when the Blancos led a civil conflict against the Colorados, who had been in power since 1865. The Colorados conceded, offering the Blancos more representation. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Uruguay was moving towards a modern state after a destructive period of contention.

⁵ Arthur P. Whitaker, *The United States and the Southern Cone: Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 50.

⁶ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 22.

In 1903, a new president came to power, representing the Colorado party. José Batlle y Ordóñez was unique for during his two terms in office (1903 – 1907 and 1911 – 1915), he introduced a number of progressive reforms that led Uruguay on a new path of progressivism and democracy. Batlle's first term was devoted to improving the economy through foreign investment and recovering from civil conflict, as the Blancos had led another revolt.⁷ During his second term, Batlle used the economic prosperity to introduce a number of reforms. To begin with, Batlle modeled the country after Switzerland's socialist structure, mimicking its economic and political system.⁸ His most important impact on Uruguay were his efforts to minimize the gap between the rich and poor through social welfare, education and organized labor. Education went through massive reform, ensuring equal access to secondary and higher education, which was now free to all.⁹ Meanwhile, trade unions' rights were guaranteed and protective legislation was provided for workers, including the implementation of an eight-hour day and six-day week, regulated working conditions and a minimum wage.¹⁰ These were coupled with other economic reforms and prosperity, allowing Uruguay to extend welfare and social security to the country.

Uruguay was at its peak, now home to a social democracy and a booming economy. With the Great War consuming Europe, Uruguay prospered greatly through the export of agricultural necessities, such as beef, wool and wheat. More funds were provided by the newly nationalized assets and infrastructure, including insurance companies, electricity and power, petroleum and alcohol.¹¹ With these newly acquired funds, President Batlle worked to provide social security

⁷ Whitaker, *The United States and the Southern Cone*, 106.

⁸ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 22.

⁹ Juan A. Oddone, "The Formation of Modern Uruguay, c 1870 - 1930," trans. Dr. Richard Southern, in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 466.

¹⁰ Whitaker, *The United States and the Southern Cone*, 111 – 112.

¹¹ Maria Esther Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas*, trans. Anne Edmondson (New York: Saturday Morning Press, 1972), 1.

and welfare for the nation. The also state took control of insurance, monopolizing the industry to provide workers' compensation and health insurance.¹² Batlle successfully secured social stability by redistributing income in a period of economic prosperity, promising social mobility and enterprise within Uruguay.¹³ While this system of socialist democracy allowed Uruguay to flourish, it also served as the downfall for the country.

By 1930, the money was drying up as Uruguay was hit by the Great Depression. Since Uruguay could no longer rely on exports to finance the country, the social security system began to crumble as it lost funding.¹⁴ As a result of the economic hardship, Uruguay fell to dictatorship in 1933. The next decade brought a return to democracy under the Colorado Party and economic prosperity as Uruguayan exports increased substantially during World War II. However, with such a strong focus on exportation, Uruguay was unable to feed its own population.¹⁵ *Batllismo* made a resurgence in the 1940s as Uruguay sought to address poverty, poor living and labor conditions and economic insecurity.¹⁶ As a result, Uruguayans became increasingly dependent on the state, which caused immense strain on the nation.

In 1950, Uruguay was forced to accept loans from the United States through the International Monetary Fund. "As a result of US assistance, in terms of loans and 'economic advisement,' wages were frozen, inflation and unemployment increased and the peso was devalued."¹⁷ The Uruguayan government requested more loans, pushing the country further into debt. The economy had crumbled until Uruguay was a shadow of what it had once been. The

¹² Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas*, 1 – 2.

¹³ Henry Finch, "Uruguay Since 1930," in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 196 – 197.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 197 – 199.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 257.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 203.

¹⁷ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 29.

cost of living doubled between 1951 and 1957.¹⁸ Inflation quickly rose in the 1950s, reaching disastrous numbers through the 1960s. By 1962, inflation had reached forty-nine percent, rising to eighty-eight percent in 1965 and finally one hundred thirty-six by 1967.¹⁹ In ten years, the peso had been devalued from two-fifty to two hundred fifty for one dollar.²⁰ Banks now either refused withdrawals, went on strike or closed entirely.²¹ With the economy in such a disastrous state, popular unrest was at its height as Uruguayans watched their quality of life deteriorate. Meanwhile, there was a shortage of food subsidies, particularly meat.²² For Uruguayans, the lack of meat on the market was a particularly telling example of the dreadful state that they had fallen to considering that beef was fundamental to Uruguayan culture and their largest industry. Uruguay was in turmoil; the economy had collapsed.

Public demonstrations became part of daily life in Montevideo in this period, as Uruguayans displayed their vexation through protests, strikes and riots. This behavior was actively encouraged by Uruguayan Communist Party who sought to radicalize the population.²³ Strikes were so consistent throughout this period that the country could not properly function. In fact, newspapers featured an entire section dedicated to “Strikes of the Day.”²⁴ All unions, representing all forms of occupations went on strike in the 1960s. “The only people who never went on strike [were] the football players.”²⁵ Alongside the striking unions, university students protested the plight that they and their country faced. The government responded to the public’s

¹⁸ Whitaker, *The United States and the Southern Cone*, 260.

¹⁹ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 23 – 24.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 36.

²¹ Pablo Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas: The Epic Journey of Uruguay’s Tupamaros*, (CreateSpace, 2014), 24 - 25.

²² Finch, “Uruguay Since 1930,” 211.

²³ *Ibid*.

²⁴ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 36.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

dissent with force and repression. These are the conditions that molded the Tupamaros and inspired them to create a revolution within Uruguay. The small country had reached its time of revolution. The people needed to be liberated from the oppression that they endured economically, socially and politically.

The Origin Story

The revolutionary movement in Uruguay began with a motley group of leftist and revolutionary thinkers who loosely joined together in 1962 to discuss Marxist theory and the possibility of revolution. What became known as Coordinador represented many different factions of leftist thinkers, including socialists, anarchists, communists and others who did not identify with the two main parties of Uruguay. Some members hoped to actively ignite a revolution, while others preferred legitimate politics, but wanted to prepare for the possibility of an authoritarian coup in Uruguay.²⁶ Together, the members of Coordinador trained, discussed strategies and shared tips of the revolutionary trade.

Coordinador was beneficial in aiding the plans and skills of its members. However, since Coordinador was a coalition of various political organizations, there were no shared ideologies, goals or strategies. This threatened the coalition as a whole, considering the fact that one organization's actions could endanger or compromise another organization or Coordinador as a whole. Faced with these issues, some members of Coordinador looked to create an improved organization to ignite a revolution in Uruguay.

Meanwhile, another form of insurgency was taking root in the northwest of Uruguay in a town called Bella Unión in the state of Artigas, bordering Brazil and Argentina. There, a group of disorganized sugar cane workers were trying to garner better working conditions. In late 1961,

²⁶ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 29.

they met a man named Raúl Sendic, a Marxist who had studied law at the Universidad de República in Montevideo. With the aid of Sendic, the sugar cane workers formed the Unión de Trabajadores Azucareros de Artigas (UTAA). Even though they were small and untrained, the UTAA became the most militant union in Uruguay, which was remarkable considering that at this time, the labor movement in Uruguay was condensed in the city of Montevideo and dominated by the Uruguayan Communist Party. Nobody would have thought to go to the rural and poverty-stricken parts of Uruguay.

The UTAA conducted occupations and strikes at sugar cane plantations, many of which were owned by American companies. In April of 1962, UTAA marched to the city of Montevideo to gain more support for their cause. The march was nearly three hundred seventy-five miles, about the same distance as marching from Sacramento to Los Angeles. In Montevideo, the UTAA were introduced to Coordinador. The relations and alliances they made culminated in their first collaboration – together, the UTAA and Coordinador would steal weapons from a shooting club to be split between the two organizations. However, they failed in their escape and were discovered by the police. They offered Sendic a deal: “If he would surrender himself and the rifles, he would receive a fair trial as a political prisoner rather than a common criminal.”²⁷ Raúl Sendic refused, making him an outlaw in the north of Uruguay.

The Beginning of an Era

A new organization was formed by UTAA and Coordinador’s largest sector, the Socialist cell. This group would be more unified than Coordinador and the goal was no longer to plan for the revolution but to launch a revolution in Uruguay. They took the name Movimiento de Liberación Nacional – Tupamaros, which expressed their desire for the liberation of both

²⁷ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 30.

Uruguayans and Latin America as a whole. This ideal was present in their name, since “Tupamaros” is derived from Tupac Amaru, the Incan resistance leader in Peru who fought the Spaniards in the eighteenth century, and has since been applied to other radical groups, including Uruguayan *gauchos* who rebelled against the Spaniards in the nineteenth century.²⁸

The Tupamaro’s first operation earned them the title of Robin Hood figures. In December of 1963, the Tupamaros ordered a large delivery of Christmas foods, including turkeys and wine to be delivered to a poor neighborhood in Montevideo. Ten Tupamaros proceeded to hijack the truck and deliver the food to the residents. By 1965, Coordinador had come to an end, leaving the Tupamaros to take its place. Like their predecessor, the Tupamaros were willing to include anybody, so long as “the goal was natural liberation through armed action.”²⁹ The Tupamaros began recruiting, using the slogan “*foco o partido*” to express their willingness to accept any revolutionaries, even communists. In this sense, the Tupamaros came to be the leading revolutionary force in Uruguay, considering the fact that they were the only active insurgency.

The year of 1965 also marked the inauguration of another organization with very different goals. The United States launched the Office of Public Safety (OPS) in Uruguay to augment police capabilities with advisement, advanced technology and training, which would all be funded by the Agency of International Development (AID). The help was necessary; Uruguay’s police force had a low morale, considering that they were underpaid, undersupplied, undertrained, and underappreciated by the public. From the Americans’ perspective, they wouldn’t be any match against the communist threat, which was the main concern of OPS.³⁰ In

²⁸ Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas*, i.

²⁹ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 51.

³⁰ A.J. Langguth, *Hidden Terrors: The Truth About U.S. Police Operations in Latin America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 40.

later years, Uruguay would become one of the top funded OPS program in all of Latin America, receiving a total of one million three hundred thousand from 1969 to 1971.³¹

The problem with OPS and AID was that they were involved in dubious practices. OPS's job was to send officers to the International Police Academy and the School of Americas, where police, military and paramilitary officers were trained "in techniques of population control, repression, and torture."³² While torture in Uruguay was rare in the 1960s, it became commonplace in 1970. Many prisoners recall the presence of Americans and American equipment. The most notable charge against OPS was Daniel Mitrione, the Chief Police Advisor in Uruguay, a man who continues to be shrouded in mystery. Many rumors and allegations circulate around him, including his involvement with torturing suspects or at minimum, advising and teaching torture. However, his story will come later.

The Tupamaros' Goals and Strategies

Uruguay was broken. Oligarchies and foreign exploitation, especially from the United States, Brazil and Argentina, had caused a failing economy and rampant corruption. The Tupamaros believed that the country could only be restored through the overthrow and seizure of the government. However, the leading revolutionary theorists from Cuba had a different opinion of Uruguay's ability to stage a revolution. In 1960, Ernesto "Che" Guevara spoke about revolution at the Universidad de la República; in his opinion, Uruguay's democracy was worth preserving. Then in 1964, Régis Debray, a radical French intellectual, spoke with members of Coordinador. "Debray insisted that any attempt at urban guerrilla was doomed to fail, and that Uruguayan radicals ought to model their revolution on Cuba's Sierra Maestra *foco*."³³ In later

³¹ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 101.

³² John Stockwell, *The Praetorian Guard: The U.S. Role in the New World Order* (New York: South End Press, 1991), 74.

³³ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 36.

attempts to form an alliance, Cuban leaders suggested that the Tupamaros ally themselves with either Argentine revolutionaries or the Uruguayan Communist Party.³⁴ In other words, the Tupamaros were on their own. In this manner, they began formulating their own strategies, which would be inspired by the Cuban example, but entirely new.

The Tupamaros hoped to create a *foco* within Uruguay, using urban guerrilla tactics in a Cuban-style offensive to fight against capitalist exploitation and oligarchies, which they saw as the source of inequality in Uruguay. When the conditions were right, the Tupamaros would commence their revolution and overthrow the government. The Tupamaros' ultimate goal was "the creation of an independent nationalist identity for Uruguayan society and the implementation of socialism as a socioeconomic system for the nation."³⁵ Through nationalism, Uruguay would renounce political and economic dependence, while reestablishing a national and regional identity. Socialism would provide government nationalizations and allocation of resources, as well as a more equal distribution of wealth and income. In this manner, the Tupamaros concentrated their revolutionary efforts.

Much of the Tupamaros' strategy was based on Che Guevara's notions of guerrilla warfare. However, there would be notable deviations, particularly in location. Guevara wrote, "the guerrilla fighter needs to have a good knowledge of the surrounding countryside, the paths of entry and escape, the possibilities of speedy maneuver, good hiding places; naturally, also, he must count on the support of the people."³⁶ He notes that mountainous areas or the jungle would be ideal. Yet, in Uruguay, the highest peak is no more than two thousand feet above sea level and

³⁴ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 62.

³⁵ The Tupamaros' definition of a nationalist socialism was completely separate from the Nazi Party and referred exclusively to Latin America. Arturo C. Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 6.

³⁶ Ernesto "Che" Guevara, "General Principles of Guerrilla Warfare," In *Revolution and Revolutionaries: Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, ed. Daniel Castro (Oxford: SR Books, 1999), 68.

only three and a half percent of the land is forested. There would be nowhere to hide, for about ninety-five percent of Uruguayan land is used for livestock and agriculture.³⁷ The Tupamaros would not be able to escape across the borders either, for Brazil and Argentina had fallen to authoritarian anti-communist regimes in 1964 and 1966 respectively. Montevideo provided the same advantages as a rural setting, as well politicized urban masses to inspire and copious targets for their operations. In this manner, the Tupamaros chose Montevideo as their battleground.

The most important lesson the Tupamaros took from Che Guevara was that “it is not necessary to wait until all conditions for making revolution exist; the insurrection can create them.”³⁸ The Tupamaros took to creating the revolution immediately, following the belief that “the very act of arming oneself, preparing, equipping, and pursuing activities that violate bourgeois legality, generates revolutionary consciousness, organization and conditions;” in other words, revolutionary action precipitates revolutionary situations.³⁹ The Tupamaros focused on acquiring funds through bank robberies, stealing weapons from the state and gaining support by engaging in armed propaganda. This emphasis on preparation set the Tupamaros apart from most other Latin American guerrilla movements.

“Nobody can deny that an armed group, however small, has more possibility of becoming a people’s army than does a group limited to issuing revolutionary positions.”⁴⁰ Following this notion, the Tupamaros avoided publishing lengthy political statements. Instead, “they felt that actions were the most important way to create ‘revolutionary consciousness.’ In other words, they believed that actions speak louder than words.”⁴¹ Thus, the Tupamaros instituted a policy of

³⁷ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 101.

³⁸ Guevara, “General Principles of Guerrilla Warfare,” 66.

³⁹ Raúl Sendic, “Thirty Questions to a Tupamaro,” In *Revolution and Revolutionaries: Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, ed. Daniel Castro (Oxford: SR Books, 1999), 154.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 155.

⁴¹ Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla*, 1.

armed propaganda, meaning that their operations always had a political motivation. The Tupamaros' operations were intended to gain the support of the people by portraying the rampant corruption and greed of the government and the elite. By humiliating the authorities and portraying their superiority, the Tupamaros would gain the sympathy and admiration of the people.⁴²

Becoming a Tupamaro

While the goal of the Tupamaros was to gather the sympathy of the country, the hope was that it would lead to tangible support. "Sympathizers were those who, in one way or another, aided the Tupamaros by knowingly supplying 'inside' information; selling them arms, ammunition, chemicals, and other needed raw materials; suggesting potential recruits; and assisting in the provision of medical and legal aid."⁴³ Much of the Tupamaros' most famous operations were based on information or aid from sympathizers and disgruntled employees. More active supporters could then make the choice to become part-time Tupamaros who lived "legal" lives as peripheral Tupamaros. Sympathizers and peripherals were vital to the Tupamaros' organization; in fact, peripherals did most of the recruiting for the organization.

Becoming a Tupamaro was a lengthy process of background searches, character analysis, sponsorship and training. Everything would be scrutinized to ensure the quality of the candidate and the safety of the organization. Newcomers would be given a false identification and a nickname to be used by the rest of their cell. They would first be assigned to a service cell that focused on providing necessities for the Tupamaros. "All new guerrillas must participate in some form of action. The new guerrilla can only learn how to wage successful guerrilla warfare

⁴² Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 85.

⁴³ Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla*, 33.

through active participation.”⁴⁴ Service work was not considered grunt work for the Tupamaros, as it was vital to the functioning of the organization.

Service cells provided meeting places, intelligence, food, hideouts, safe houses and clothing. They also obtained and maintained weapons, built explosives and provided medical treatment.⁴⁵ As a Tupamaro proved their reliability, they would be given the opportunity to receive more responsibility. If they chose to, Tupamaros could move from a service cell to a combative cell. Combatants were regarded as “the more experienced, reliable, and dedicated Tupamaros.”⁴⁶ They worked full-time and lived clandestinely. Combatants were involved in the organization’s operations, including sabotage, reprisals, robberies and other illegal acts.

The Tupamaros were a diverse group, representing different demographics, backgrounds and occupations. As is true of most revolutionary groups, the Tupamaros were generally in their twenties. However, the Tupamaros boasted members as young as eighteen and as old as sixty.⁴⁷ Women accounted for roughly thirty-nine percent of the organization and were involved in every form of revolutionary work.⁴⁸ Due to Uruguayan socialism, most Tupamaros were educated and of the middle class.⁴⁹ However, this certainly didn’t account for all Tupamaros. The organization was very inclusive “from semiliterate peasants to distinguished intellectuals and professionals; from unemployed and similarly isolated individuals to the relatives of the highest government officials; from students in their late teens to mothers of over fifty.”⁵⁰ Tupamaros and their supporters were everywhere, in all branches of society, providing intelligence and expertise.

⁴⁴ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 79.

⁴⁵ Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla*, 32.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 33.

⁴⁷ Arturo Porzecanski collected data on the Tupamaros’ demographics based on information of captured Tupamaros. *Ibid*, 30.

⁴⁸ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 49.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

⁵⁰ Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla*, 28.

They were impossible to pinpoint, for anybody could be a Tupamaro, even police officers or government officials. This was the Tupamaros' advantage, making them incredibly successful in their activities.

The Tupamaros' organization began with a single cell consisting of two to six members. Cell members did not know the identities of other members and only referred to each other with nicknames (for example, Raúl Sendic was known as "*el Bebé*"). Any unnecessary information was avoided for the protection of the organization as a whole. Only the cell leader, appointed by an executive committee would know how to contact other members of their cell. Each cell either engaged in service work or combatant work. Both were expected to gather intelligence to inform the next operations for their cell or the organization as a whole.

Multiple cells made up a column, which might be grouped according to location or type of work (for example, the medical column). Columns were "administrative entities put together to facilitate and coordinate the action of individual cells;" they had no hierarchy or leaders.⁵¹ They were independent entities, intended to merely divide labor within the Tupamaros. "Each column was designed to be self-sustaining in the case of trouble at the top; thus the columns were equipped to gather intelligence, maintain supplies, and undertake armed or propaganda action independently, making it theoretically possible for one surviving column to regenerate the movement."⁵² Columns provided the advantage of familiarity since members were accustomed to the locale and residents of the area, making them more effective in their operations. However, within a columns and its cells, secrecy and anonymity was essential. Generally, Tupamaros only

⁵¹ Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla*, 33.

⁵² Thomas C. Wright, "Urban Guerrilla Warfare," In *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), 99.

knew members within their cell and were unaware of other members of their column for cells maintained minimal contact with one another.

Together, the various cells and columns worked to further the Tupamaros' mission of preparing for the revolution. Their strategy for the present and future was "to form an armed force with the greatest possible speed, with the capacity to take advantage of any propitious conjuncture created by the crisis or other factors. To create an awareness in the population, through actions of the armed group or other means, that without revolution there will be no change."⁵³ Thus, the Tupamaros began preparing for the revolution through a series of operations meant to garner support, funds and supplies. In the following years, the Tupamaros would rob banks, steal weapons and explosives and bomb symbols of their enemies. Through these operations, the Tupamaros were gaining reputation and experience as they moved towards their most prolific period.

Strange Forces Working in Uruguay

The conditions of Uruguay took a turn on December 6th, 1967, when the Uruguayan president died shortly after he was elected; he was replaced with Vice President Jorge Pacheco Areco. The newly inaugurated president "wasted no time in forming the image of himself that he wanted to create: that of the 'strong man.'"⁵⁴ Immediately, President Pacheco worked to rid the country of lawlessness and subversion. In 1967, he banned popular leftist newspapers, as well as the Socialist Party and the Communist Party, both of which were well-established political parties in Uruguay, formed in 1910 and 1920 respectively. This was the first time a party or the press had been banned in Uruguay, considering that there was such a strong democratic history within the country. President Pacheco also requested American assistance to defeat the

⁵³ Sendic, "Thirty Questions to a Tupamaro," 161.

⁵⁴ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 39.

Tupamaros. With official approval, more CIA officers were dispatched to Uruguay, while the first nine police and military officers were sent to the School of Americas to be trained that year.⁵⁵

President Pacheco continued his onslaught in 1968 when he invoked emergency powers in June in response to strikes and protests addressing the country's rising inflation and cost of living. Using Article 168 of the Constitution, Pacheco froze prices and wages, closed labor unions, banned public meetings, established limited censorship and jailed political agitators. By the end of the month, martial law was declared, which placed newspapers under official censorship.⁵⁶ However, the emergency powers did nothing to stop the rising inflation or the strikes and protests that persisted throughout the city.

In one of their leaflets distributed to the public, the Tupamaros described the state of Uruguay in the late 1960's:

There is no freedom of opinion. Newspapers, radio programmes and political parties are suppressed, Parliament is helpless. Hundreds of detainees fill the prisons and the military barracks. Men are dismissed in great numbers from their jobs by government decree, causing hundreds of families to be thrown on the bread line. The unions and the right to strike have been trampled underfoot. Torture and beatings are inflicted with complicity of the Judiciary. People are tried and imprisoned without proof of guilt. The incomes of the great majority are frozen whilst an increase in affluence of a small minority is encouraged. Corruption is rampant in the Government.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 31 – 32; Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla*, 54.

⁵⁶ Michael Freeman, "Uruguay and the Tupamaros," In *Freedom or Security: The Consequences for Democracies Using Emergency Powers to Fight Terror*, (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 92.

⁵⁷ Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas*, 123 – 124.

Considering the climate of Uruguay, the Tupamaros strengthened their preparations for the coming offensive. In 1968, eighteen members underwent training in Cuba.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the Tupamaros continued robbing banks and stealing arms and explosives. In the year of 1968, the Tupamaros successfully held up five banks and one casino, stealing about twenty-six million pesos or over six million dollars today.⁵⁹ However, the Tupamaros were moving to bigger and better things. “By 1968, the Tupamaros escalated their pressure, moving from ‘Robin Hood’ stage of self-publicity and exposing the regime to a more aggressive phase of direct challenges to government authority.”⁶⁰ The Tupamaros had moved to the next stage of the revolution.

On August 7th, 1968, the Tupamaros commenced Operación Pajarito to force President Pacheco to support strikers’ demands. Four Tupamaros kidnapped Ulysses Pereira Reverbel, the infamous strikebreaker and president of UTE, a power and telecommunications company. He was a close friend and political ally of President Pacheco and also held the title of the most hated man in all of Uruguay. He was released after five days once President Pacheco agreed to the strikers’ demands. The Tupamaros threatened that the future safety of public officials would depend “on the behavior of the repressive forces and the fascist groups at service.”⁶¹ Operación Pajarito marked the beginning of people’s support of the Tupamaros. In fact, poor Uruguayans would joke, “Attention, Tupamaros, kidnap me,” since Pereira was several pounds heavier when he was released.⁶²

⁵⁸ Malcolm W. Browne, “A Small Elite Rebel Band Harasses Uruguayan Regime,” *New York Times*, January 23, 1969.

⁵⁹ “Evocación de la Memoria del Pasado Reciente,” *Pasado Reciente*, accessed on April 21, 2017, <http://www.pasadoreciente.com/>

⁶⁰ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 99.

⁶¹ Browne, “A Small Elite Rebel Band Harasses Uruguayan Regime.”

⁶² Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 32.

In early 1969, the Tupamaros began their most important attack yet. The Tupamaros had received intelligence from an employee at Monty's, an investment bank that had been involved in illegal dealings in foreign currency for several clients. The robbery went smoothly; the Tupamaros found Monty's accounting ledgers which revealed its illegal business. After the robbery on February 15th, the Tupamaros themselves notified both the police and the press of their crime, before they provided the state prosecutor with the ledgers and their analysis of the bank's crimes. "The press releases exposed tax evasion, massive fraud and corruption reaching to the highest levels of the government...that had the full blessing of the United States."⁶³ As a result of the investigation, several businessmen and politicians were arrested for illegal dealings, revealing rampant the corruption at the highest spheres of power.

The Tupamaros had just garnered the support of the working class, while portraying the failings of the government. As one man explained:

I saw when Monty's was held up. Who were the real villains, I'd like to know? Those who went in with a machine-gun or those inside lining their pockets? The Tupamaros don't frighten me. What's more if they *are* Communists that doesn't scare me either. You know what *does* scare me? Those people who go and play roulette and gamble three or four million.⁶⁴

The Tupamaros followed the success at Monty four days later by robbing the San Rafael Casino in Punta del Este, a resort town for Uruguay's elite. Two Tupamaros dressed as policemen informed the manager that he would need to accompany them to San Rafael, as it had just been robbed. The Tupamaros then used the manager's keys to empty the casino's entire vault, which amounted to over fifty million pesos or about twelve million dollars today. However, upon

⁶³ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 33.

⁶⁴ Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas*, 77.

learning that the Tupamaros had also stolen the casino workers' paychecks and tips, Sendic offered to return the money, stating that the Tupamaros would only steal from the oligarchies.⁶⁵

During these operations, the government was working to fight the lawlessness in Uruguay. However, the source of their problems was not the Tupamaros, but the persistent strikes and protests that were crippling Montevideo. On June 24th of 1969, the government initiated a limited state of siege in response to major demonstrations in Montevideo. "It was, of course, a one-sided battle; on the one side, the police were armed with tear gas and newly-imported American guns, and on the other side, students were armed with stones, marbles and pent-up frustrations."⁶⁶ The Tupamaros were not the government's concern, for their operations were considered "police matters." With little resistance from the state, the Tupamaros continued their campaign.

Then in October, the Tupamaros initiated their greatest operation yet to commemorate the anniversary of Che Guevara's death in Bolivia. The Tupamaros would take control of Pando, a small city outside of Montevideo as a show of strength to both the public and the state. The Tupamaros would arrive under the guise of a funerary procession with six hearses and a procession of mourners. Roughly twenty Tupamaros marched solemnly into the city carrying the coffin of the "deceased," which hid the Tupamaros weapons.⁶⁷ Other Tupamaros joined the procession along the march or met their comrades in Pando, coming by bus with their weapons hidden amongst normal possessions such as briefcases or fishing poles. Altogether, the force in Pando was roughly fifty strong. They were distinguished by white handkerchiefs tied around their arms.

⁶⁵ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 89.

⁶⁶ Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 40.

⁶⁷ Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas*, 103 – 104.

The Tupamaros arrived into the city at roughly noon; the operation began at one o'clock. The Tupamaros had six targets in Pando. They intended to rob three banks and subdue the police station, the fire station and cut communications off so the city wouldn't receive reinforcements from Montevideo, which was less than an hour away. The operation began with the police station, which was occupied with disguised Tupamaros. A police officer recounted, "I found myself looking into their guns. They were telling me to put my hands up. I laughed because I thought it must be a joke, but I saw several chaps in Air Force uniforms, one with a sub-machine-gun, and heard one of them say 'Hands up! You're all covered.'"⁶⁸ The Tupamaros proceeded to force the police officers present into the jail cells.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, another team of Tupamaros subdued the fire station, where "five or six men were having a *siesta*. When they saw us come in armed they remained paralyzed on their beds, more I think from the sheer surprise than from fear."⁷⁰ Another team cut the communication lines to prevent anybody reporting the situation to Montevideo. Three other teams worked to rob the banks, taking forty million pesos or nearly ten million dollars, while other Tupamaros discussed their politics and handed out leaflets.

Things went relatively smoothly and the Tupamaros met no resistance; all six operations took roughly fifteen minutes, but problems arose during their escape. Pando was in chaos as "more and more people, anxious not to miss anything, crowded the pavements, stood on doorsteps, hung over balconies... We needed the streets to be clear, not packed with inquisitive spectators who would get in the way of our retreat."⁷¹ Some Tupamaros attempted to herd civilians and direct traffic to aid their escape, but the streets were too chaotic. In their escape, the

⁶⁸ Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas*, 110.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 111 – 112.

⁷¹ Ibid, 112 – 113.

Tupamaros were fragmented. “We lost our identity as a group. We got into several different cars. We didn’t know anybody.”⁷² Most of the Tupamaros made it to the rendezvous at the graveyard, but some were left behind and quickly apprehended. One car had to be abandoned, as it had been destroyed from a shootout with a lone police officer. After a short regrouping, the Tupamaros continued on their way to Montevideo.

By now, the National Police had learned of the attack on Pando. A police patrol met the Tupamaros at the city boundary of Montevideo, but the Tupamaros were being driven by official uniformed chauffeurs with Tupamaros dressed as police officers, allowing them to pass through the police barrier without incident. Afterwards, the Tupamaros split into two groups. Those that took a more roundabout route made it safely to the city, while those that took the direct route met the elite combat force of Metropolitan and Republican Guards. On the outskirts of Montevideo’s suburbs, behind a sharp bend, patrol cars blocked the road. Some Tupamaros stayed to fight, engaging in a shootout with police. Others ran into the surrounding fields. However, the police had the advantage of helicopters, armored cars, army trucks and patrol cars. The police cordoned the area, taking out Tupamaros one by one. “They arrested a lot of people who were completely innocent and had nothing to do with the taking of Pando, and they treated them just the same. Beating and pushing them around until they got to the prison van and then more beatings to get them to get in.”⁷³ In total, sixteen Tupamaros were captured and three were shot dead. In the following weeks, the police used the networks of the captured Tupamaros to arrest others.⁷⁴

This show of violence was unusual in Uruguay, making Pando a shocking and frightening event to the average Uruguayan. Initially, many police officers and leading officials, including

⁷² Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas*, 117.

⁷³ Ibid, 147 – 148.

⁷⁴ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 108.

OPS officers, viewed the events of Pando as a success; some even believed that Pando would be the downfall of the Tupamaros.⁷⁵ However, the operation in Pando was a brilliant display of the Tupamaro's wit and strength, despite its unfortunate end. The Tupamaros had successfully made themselves known, especially when considered alongside the Monty scandal and the San Rafael robbery. The government soon recognized the Tupamaros' effect on the Uruguayan public. "The demonstration of guerrilla power [at Pando] was a sobering challenge to governmental authority."⁷⁶ The government reacted by imposing further censorship, banning the terms, "cell, commandos, extremists, terrorists, subversive, political delinquent or ideological delinquent."⁷⁷ However, the damage was already done. The Tupamaros were gaining admiration and support from Uruguayans.

The Tupamaros continued their assault. They were so prolific that it seemed as if every day, the Uruguayans were shocked by a new operation. By the end of 1969, the Tupamaros had executed over one hundred operations, seventy-seven of which they considered successful.⁷⁸ Their operations were having a strong effect. The Tupamaros had garnered a sizeable sum of money and new weapons, along with a number of safe houses throughout Montevideo. By 1969, the Tupamaros were roughly one thousand strong with a substantial support network that seemed to grow exponentially.⁷⁹ As one Tupamara recalled, "It seemed like the flame of the revolution was lighting up Uruguayan society, judging by the number of volunteers knocking on the doors of the organization."⁸⁰ The Tupamaros even boasted supporters within the government, military, police, and large corporations. They also had access to medical clinics with surgery and

⁷⁵ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 107.

⁷⁶ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 99.

⁷⁷ Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas*, 125.

⁷⁸ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 113.

⁷⁹ Browne, "A Small Elite Rebel Band Harasses Uruguayan Regime."

⁸⁰ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 109.

ambulance capabilities, therapy services and plastic surgery services.⁸¹ Altogether, it was their most prosperous year.

The Tupamaros boasted the highest acceptance rate of any American insurgency operating at the time.⁸² In this manner, the Tupamaros were becoming both an enemy and a threat to the Uruguayan state. More importantly, the Tupamaros were becoming a potential alternative to the state.

We too can imprison those responsible for this situation such as Gaetano Pellegrini. We raid the homes of the compliant politicians just as they raid the workers' homes. We snatch the arms we need from the enemy. We do not turn to foreigners to ask them to finance the revolution. We take the funds we need to mount the revolutionary apparatus from the enemy. Although they try to muzzle us our voice will continue to be heard.⁸³

As the Tupamaros engaged in more operations, garnering support from various demographics, including those in power, the Tupamaros could be seen as a “parallel government” or a “shadow government” by forcing Uruguayans to choose a side – the Tupamaros or the Uruguayan state.⁸⁴ It had become clear that there would soon be a power struggle between the two adversaries in the ideological war for the country.

⁸¹ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 108 – 109.

⁸² Ibid, 114.

⁸³ Gaetano Pellegrini was the Tupamaros' second kidnapping victim. He was an Italian-born fascist and the son of Mussolini's Finance Minister. Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas*, 124 – 125.

⁸⁴ Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla*, 17.

Plan Satán: The Fall from Grace

With significant support from the masses, the Tupamaros felt they were ready to stage an uprising. They intended to demoralize and discredit the armed forces and police, as well as destroy forces of government coercion. By 1969, the Tupamaros had moved to a more aggressive stage of the revolution. “Years of intense preparatory work went by before the guerrillas launched full-scale war on the government.”⁸⁵ In the new year, the Tupamaros would begin their brutal offensive.

The Tupamaros began the year with a campaign to humiliate and discredit the state. They began with Línea Hostigamiento, a group dedicated to harassing the police. Tupamaros would disarm police officers on the street or even in their homes to prove that they had the information to strike at any time and any place.⁸⁶ Then, on March 8th, the Tupamaros initiated Operación Paloma, freeing thirty-eight Tupamaras from prison on International Women’s Day. It was a great embarrassment for the government, considering that the women were only guarded by nuns.⁸⁷ Then, a naval cadet provided enough information for the Tupamaros to lead an assault on the national naval training center. Late at night, about twenty Tupamaros disguised as navy officers entered the premises, forcing the navy cadets out of bed. The Tupamaros made off with over seven hundred weapons, many of which were military grade American weapons, as well as a plethora of ammunition to go along with them. The Tupamaros now had an arsenal at their disposal, including machine guns, semi-automatic rifles, handguns and grenade launchers.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla*, 96.

⁸⁶ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas* 109.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 118.

⁸⁸ “Guerrillas Seize Arms in Uruguay: Band Raids Naval Training Center in Montevideo,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1970.

Their campaign to demoralize and demean the police was taking effect, but with adverse consequences, as the police became more dedicated in their fight against the Tupamaros. The police had developed a new tactic that was proving extremely effective: the ratonera. Once the police discovered a Tupamaro safe house, they would wait and arrest the members that returned, just like a mousetrap. The Tupamaros also upped their ante with a series of cop killings. Some had been accidents, while others were targeted assassinations. The police sought retribution for the attacks against their own, leading to more aggressive interrogation styles, while the Tupamaros retaliated against officers suspected of torturing detainees.

In Uruguay, torture was rare before 1970. Yet prisoner abuse was not unheard of, especially amongst the Metropolitan Guard, an elite paramilitary police squad.⁸⁹ The torture was unsophisticated but brutal.

We had to run the gauntlet, except that we couldn't run. They made us go dreadfully slowly, and all the while we were being kicked and punched and beaten. The men shouted insults at us and some howled like wolves. I felt I was going through a tunnel and that I'd die before I got to the end. Everybody tried to get in as many blows as possible, never mind where they landed.⁹⁰

At times, other techniques were used. "They kept pushing my head under and pulling it out again. Each time I swallowed more water. Finally I couldn't hear what they were asking. Then they took me out and started to burn my arms with cigarettes."⁹¹ Police also administered electric shocks during interrogations, but the equipment was outdated. The police's methods were rudimentary in comparison to the torture that would later be implemented by the military.

⁸⁹ Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla*, 55.

⁹⁰ Gilio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas*, 155.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 158.

Reports of torture within the police became common knowledge, leading to public outcry. The Senate conducted a six month investigation into the matter with disturbing results. “The use of torture by Montevideo’s police had become “habitual,” “frequent,” and even “normal”; that it was being applied to innocent people, nonpolitical prisoners, women, students, and labor leaders; and that torture had become a routine application of electric shock, beatings, burns, starvation, and other cruel interrogation methods.”⁹² As a result of this study, the Senate and House of Representatives voted to lift Pacheco’s security measures in July of 1970. However, President Pacheco quickly reinstated them, allowing the continued assault against Uruguay’s subversives.

Plan Satán

With an exceeding number of Tupamaros being held in the Punta Carretas prison, the Tupamaros decided it was time to take action; they would commit a series of political kidnappings and ransom the hostages in exchange for the release of their comrades. The Tupamaros took their inspiration from their Brazilian counterparts, the Movimento Revolucionário 8 de Outubro (MR-8), who had kidnapped American Ambassador Charles Burke Elbrick in exchange for the release of fifteen prisoners in 1969.⁹³ The Tupamaros had already proven their capability with the kidnapping of Gaetano Pellegrini Gimpieto in 1969, who was held from late September through November. Now they planned to up the ante with the commencement of Plan Satán, which expanded the idea of a political kidnapping into a full campaign. They planned to kidnap multiple victims, both native and foreign. The victims had to be both important and influential to demand a strong response from the government, while also

⁹² Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla*, 55 – 56.

⁹³ The Revolutionary Movement of October 8th was a Marxist-Leninist urban guerrilla group dedicated to an armed resistance against the military dictatorship.

being morally suspect so the kidnappings would inspire solidarity from the average Uruguayan. Diplomats were preferable, considering that the kidnapping would lead to international pressure on the Uruguayan government.

In this manner, the Tupamaros chose their victims. Native victims chosen included Judge Daniel Pereira Manelli, who sentenced Tupamaros; Julio Cesar Mamelli, a union official and Walter Pintos Risso, the Minister of Works. The foreigners chosen were Dan Mitrione, the Chief Public Safety Advisor of the American Embassy; Aloysio Mares Dias Gomide, the Brazilian Consul; Gordon Jones, the US Embassy's Second Secretary and British Ambassador Geoffrey Jackson. It's notable that the countries represented were only the United States, Brazil and the United Kingdom; the Tupamaros considered these countries to be the most heinous. All were condemned for their interference in Uruguay, which Tupamaros saw as the plight of their country for "although officially Uruguay has existed as an independent nation for almost 150 years, politically, militarily, economically and even culturally, Uruguay depends heavily on the axes Brazil-Argentina and Great Britain-United States."⁹⁴ The Tupamaros also expected that these nations would have the most influence on the Uruguayan government and would pressure its leaders tenaciously, which would work in the Tupamaros' favor.

For their safe return, the Tupamaros demanded the release of all of their imprisoned or detained comrades, which amounted to one hundred fifty, "the largest prisoner ransom ever demanded for kidnapped diplomats."⁹⁵ The Tupamaros expected that between the three nations' demands, the Uruguayan government would be pressured enough that they would be forced to succumb to the Tupamaros' demands or would collapse entirely. This internal and external pressure would work in the Tupamaros' favor to weaken the government. "The Tupamaros

⁹⁴ Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla*, 7.

⁹⁵ David Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay* (RAND and DARPA, 1987), v.

sought to provoke a ministerial crisis and foreign intervention, to lead ultimately to the downfall of the Uruguayan government.”⁹⁶

By their calculation, there were three courses of events for Plan Satán. The first was that the President would concede with their demands and release the Tupamaros. Yet considering the fact that the executive branch had no jurisdiction over prisoners held by the judicial branch, this would effectively be a move towards a dictatorial state, strengthening the Tupamaros’ position in Uruguay as the government’s image faltered both nationally and internationally. Another possibility was that faced with increasing pressure, the President would resign, leading to either a weaker leader or one more favorable to the Tupamaros.⁹⁷ Finally, the Tupamaros considered the possibility of a foreign intervention, especially by Brazil or Argentina, which would inspire Uruguayans throughout the country to rise against the invaders in “a mass revolution.”⁹⁸ The Tupamaros believed that in the event of any, the Uruguayan government would be weakened and discredited, while the Tupamaros would triumph, either in popular support, image or numbers. Their goals for the campaign showed the scope of Plan Satán and their intentions as the revolution reached its climax.

Everything was in place for the kidnappings. The Tupamaros had learned a lot during the kidnapping of Ulises Pereira Reverbel in 1968 and the kidnapping of Gaetano Pellegrini Gimpieto the following year, when the Italian was held for over a month in what became known as “the People’s Court.” Now the Tupamaros were preparing to initiate their most ambitious plan yet. The campaign started on July 28th, 1970 with the kidnapping of the criminal-courts judge, Daniel Pereira Manelli. On the same day, the Tupamaros also attempted to kidnap a union

⁹⁶ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, v.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 22.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 1.

official named Julio Cesar Mamelli, but he fired his pistol, scaring away his kidnappers.⁹⁹ While Mamelli's kidnapping was a failure, they successfully abducted Judge Daniel Pereira Manelli from his home. In typical Tupamaro fashion, his kidnappers made sure to assure his wife that they only wanted to "have a lengthy talk" and that he would be released within forty-eight hours. Daniel Pereira Manelli was chosen as a victim of Plan Satán for "his alleged cover-up for police brutality and prejudice against the Tupamaros" according to communiques published by the Tupamaros.¹⁰⁰ However, the Tupamaros soon decided he would be held longer for further interrogation regarding detention and trial procedures. Meanwhile, rumors started circulating that in exchange for the release of the judge, the Tupamaros would demand the release of prisoners. Shortly afterwards, the Tupamaros captured their next victims.

On the morning of July 31st, the Tupamaros made their next move with the kidnapping of the Brazilian consul, Aloysio Mares Dias Gomide from his home in the Carrasco neighborhood of Montevideo. The Tupamaros gained entry by presenting themselves as repairmen from a light and power company, there to repair Dias' telephone, which had been broken for the last day.¹⁰¹ About nine Tupamaros entered the house with weapons drawn, leading to Dias surrendering himself as his wife and children watched on.¹⁰² Dias was taken in his own car, which was later abandoned when the Tupamaros switched vehicles to drive Dias to the People's Court.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, an unsuccessful kidnapping attempt was made against the Uruguayan Minister of Public Works, Walter Pintos Risso, as he left his apartment building. However, there is

⁹⁹ "Judge in Guerrilla Cases Is Kidnapped in Uruguay," *New York Times*, July 29, 1970.

¹⁰⁰ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 3.

¹⁰¹ Department of State, "Kidnapping of Dan Mitrione," *National Security Archives*, published July 31, 1970, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB324/>.

¹⁰² Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 140; Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 6.

¹⁰³ Department of State, "Kidnapping of Dan Mitrione."

speculation that the Tupamaros' real target was an Uruguayan Army officer that lived in the same building and reportedly resembled Pintos.¹⁰⁴

In the neighborhood of Pocitos, Montevideo, another cell targeted an apartment building that was home to two American diplomats, Gordon Jones and Nathan Rosenfeld. That morning when Nathan Rosenfeld, the United States Cultural Attaché, went downstairs to the garage, he was met with two young Tupamaros who mistook him for their intended target, Gordon Jones, the Second Secretary and Economic Officer. Realizing that Rosenberg was too old to be their target, the Tupamaros hit him over the head to knock him out, but failed to check if he was still conscious. When Gordon Jones arrived and spotted his friend, he rushed to Rosenfeld's side, who he presumed to be dead, when he was jumped by the Tupamaros. The two young men then proceeded to tie up Jones and roll him up in blankets before lying his body in the bed of a pickup truck, leaving Rosenfeld in the garage. As they were driving away, Jones managed to roll out of the truck at a stoplight while screaming for help; the Tupamaros drove away without him.¹⁰⁵

What would become the most consequential abduction of Plan Satán was the kidnapping of Daniel Anthony Mitrione, the Chief Public Safety Adviser in the American Embassy. Dan Mitrione was a particularly coveted victim of the Tupamaros, considering the rumors of torture that surrounded him. On the same morning as the other kidnappings, at about 8:15 a.m., Dan Mitrione was being picked up at his home in Malvín by his driver, a police sergeant named González. While Mitrione had been "warned to take security precautions," he was not armed; González, however, was armed with a .38 caliber revolver.¹⁰⁶ The car was heading towards the *rambla*, but had only gone about a block and a half when their car was cut off by a pickup truck.

¹⁰⁴ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 254 – 256.

¹⁰⁶ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 6.

Four or five men exited the two stolen trucks and worked to abduct Mitrione. “While one man quickly covered the police driver, the others forced Mitrione into the second pickup truck, cursing, beating, and accidentally shooting him near the shoulder in the process.”¹⁰⁷ The whole event apparently happened so quickly that eyewitnesses couldn’t offer police investigators a description of any of the kidnappers.¹⁰⁸

Early Responses to the Kidnappings

Much of my knowledge of the kidnapping comes from a study of the Mitrione Kidnapping, organized by the RAND Corporation for the Department of State and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). The study was completed in 1977, but was not released to the public until 1987. The other sources I have used are files from the Department of State, many of which have only been declassified in 2005 and published by the National Security Archives under the Freedom of Information Act. With this in mind, I will recount the response to the kidnapping of Dan Mitrione.

The authorities were immediately made aware of the kidnappings and attempts. Sergeant González had called the police headquarters shortly after Mitrione was taken, while Rosenberg and Jones reported the attempted kidnappings directly to the US embassy.¹⁰⁹ Police investigations began immediately. The Uruguayan government “immediately responded by branding the kidnappings as ‘police matters,’ despite the international weight of the kidnapping campaign.”¹¹⁰ Initial reports from the US embassy suggested that the kidnappings were made by

¹⁰⁷ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 256.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 8.

“terrorists, presumably MLN or FARO.”¹¹¹ Sweeping searches and roadblocks were immediately set up by the police, but were ineffective, considering the lack of manpower. For this reason, police officers were brought in from the interior and several military units were incorporated into the police force to aid in the effort, but a lack of coordination was hampering the efficiency of the joint search.¹¹²

By 1:15 p.m. on July 31st, the kidnappings were announced to the public on the radio.¹¹³ Then, in the late afternoon, the Tupamaros issued their first communique regarding the fresh batch of kidnappings. Communique #3 described Mitrione’s condition and the treatment he was receiving for his gunshot wound. While early reports had suggested that they would only request a ransom of several prisoners, Communique #3 clarified that the Tupamaros would demand “the liberation of all ‘political prisoners’ then being held by the police, in exchange for Mitrione and Dias Gomide.”¹¹⁴ They also included Mitrione’s personal card and described two of his personal effects as proof of the communique’s authenticity.¹¹⁵

Shortly after receiving the communique, Ambassador Charles Adair began regular meetings with Foreign Minister Peirano Facio. The Foreign Minister expressed the Uruguayan government’s doubt of the authenticity of the note, which led to the decision to wait for further word from the Tupamaros. Moreover, the Uruguayan government was reluctant to respond to the Tupamaros due to their confusion over the Tupamaros’ message. Communique #3 did not

¹¹¹ FARO, or Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Orientales was an armed branch of the Movimiento Revolucionario Oriental (MRO), which was a Socialist movement with an emphasis on national liberation. Department of State, “Kidnapping of Dan Mitrione.”

¹¹² Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 8.

¹¹³ Department of State, “Kidnapping of Dan Mitrione.”

¹¹⁴ Communique #1 and #2 regarded Judge Daniel Pereira Manelli’s kidnapping. Malcolm W. Browne, “Uruguay Presses Guerrilla Drive: Arrests 50 in Effort to Free U.S. and Brazilian Aides,” *New York Times*, August 2, 1970; Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 7.

¹¹⁵ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 7.

demand a specific ransom and the Uruguayan government “did not believe that it could respond until it knew what it was responding to.”¹¹⁶ The Uruguayan response was worrying to Ambassador Adair, who thought that this tactic could waste time and lead to a stalemate in communication. However, the Uruguayan government was in a precarious situation. On the one hand, their actions would directly affect the treatment and fate of the kidnapping victims. If things went sour and it was believed that the Uruguayan government had made an error in judgement, Uruguay could face a poor international image and a deterioration in diplomatic relations with the United States or Brazil. For this reason, the Uruguayan government chose to wait until they had more information through police investigation and the Tupamaros’ communiques.

Meanwhile, the three remaining Public Safety Division officers worked to advise the police, improving the police’s efficiency. “During the first twenty-four hours, Uruguayan police detained numerous suspects, while police and military checkpoints throughout Montevideo and its environs halted and examined tens of thousands of vehicles and pedestrians.”¹¹⁷ More than fifty were arrested in that time, including a Tupamaro who participated in the Mitrione kidnapping.¹¹⁸ The police also discovered the stolen vehicles that had been used in the kidnappings.¹¹⁹

By August 2nd, the two requested Office of Public Safety agents arrived from Washington. With the help of the OPS officers, police operations were strengthened, now aided by the Army, Air Force, Navy and fire departments, amounting to a force of several thousand.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 33.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 8.

¹¹⁸ Browne, “Uruguay Presses Guerrilla Drive”; Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 8.

¹¹⁹ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 8.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 9.

The police led “broad, sweeping searches of entire areas, sealing them off beforehand, then checking house-to-house.”¹²¹ Over one thousand raids were conducted in a single day, as police searched the homes of ordinary citizens in search of the kidnapping victims.¹²² Medical clinics received great attention, considering Mitrione’s gunshot wound.¹²³ They also continued to check everybody leaving the city of Montevideo, as well as those leaving the country by air, water or car. Meanwhile, the Tupamaros were conducting operations as if nothing was out of the ordinary, including two bank robberies. The Tupamaros imprisoned at the Puntas Carretas prison also reinstated drills and training in the prison’s courtyard in preparation for their liberation and renewed campaign.¹²⁴

At 3:30 p.m. on August 2nd, the Tupamaros issued their next communique. Communique #4 assured that the prisoners were in good health and Mitrione was recovering well from his gunshot wound, likely in response to the United States’ effort to make a humanitarian plea for the release of Mitrione. The Tupamaros then demanded the release of “all prisoners judged or condemned for political crimes anywhere in the country, except those individuals who chose to stay and serve their sentence.”¹²⁵ All freed prisoners were to be sent to Mexico, Peru or Algeria. However, no deadline was set and no consequences were stated should their demands be ignored.¹²⁶

The next morning, Ambassador Adair met with President Pacheco. Now that the Tupamaros had demanded a specific ransom, Adair sought to determine what the Uruguayan government’s course of action would be. However,

¹²¹ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 9.

¹²² Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 145.

¹²³ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 9.

¹²⁴ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 145.

¹²⁵ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 10.

¹²⁶ “Uruguay Guerrillas Ask Release of 100,” *New York Times*, August 3, 1970.

The President observed that the MLN messages had not been directed to any state institution or office, but rather were aimed at Uruguayan society as a whole. Thus the demands amounted to a blackmail effort against the entire Uruguayan nation. Moreover, the demands were so unreasonable that the MLN appeared to be deliberately seeking the impossible.¹²⁷

The President resolved to have “a concrete and direct communique [from the Tupamaros] before revealing their hand” and were unwilling to make concessions or negotiate with terrorists.¹²⁸

Despite this seeming lack of response, President Pacheco sent a message to President Nixon the same day, vowing to use “all means at our disposal to secure Mitrione’s liberation.”¹²⁹ The Uruguayan government expected to respond in the next forty-eight hours, as President Pacheco believed that the Tupamaros would soon issue another note with more reasonable requests.¹³⁰

Until then the Uruguayan government would stand resolute in its stance.

Following this line of thinking, the President asked General Antonio Francese, the Minister of Interior, to address the public. On August 3rd, at noon, the Ministry of Interior published its communique, which questioned the legitimacy of the Tupamaros and rejected their demands altogether. The communique stated that the police would continue their efforts to recover the kidnapped victims, despite the danger and casualties they faced “defending society against delinquency.”¹³¹ They also reaffirmed their rejection of the Tupamaros’ legitimacy, stating that the term “political prisoners” did not apply to the more than one hundred Tupamaros imprisoned, for the Tupamaros were merely “common criminals,” as opposed to a political

¹²⁷ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 35.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹³⁰ “Uruguay Delays Reply to Kidnappers,” *New York Times*, August 4, 1970.

¹³¹ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 11.

force.¹³² Finally, the communique frankly informed the Uruguayan public that “there was no guarantee that the kidnappers would subsequently halt their activities, let alone repent and return stolen arms,” noting that the Tupamaros had made no sign of conciliation.¹³³ The government’s communique sent a strong message to the public and the Tupamaros, garnering a strong response from each in the coming days.

The following day, the Tupamaros released Judge Daniel Pereira from the People’s Prison at 9:30 p.m. along with a new communique, rejecting the Ministry of the Interior’s statement altogether. Communique #5 stated that the Tupamaros had stayed true to their word, releasing Pereira as promised (although a few days late), despite his crimes: “incorrect processing of captured Tupamaros, malfeasance, the holding of arrested Tupamaros for more than 48 hours without due process, and torture.”¹³⁴ This act of good faith reassured the government that the Tupamaros would release their prisoners after having sufficiently interrogated their victims and published the damning confessions. Also, police captured four relatively notable Tupamaros that day. For a short period, it seemed like things were looking up.

Uruguay’s Divided Opinions

The government’s response was becoming increasingly fragmented. The police represented the face of Uruguay’s response to the Tupamaro kidnappings and they continued to conduct quasi-legal raids on the public in hope of securing the kidnapped victims. The President maintained his support of the police force, reasserting that the whole thing was “police matters.” Legally, he could not capitulate to the Tupamaros’ demands for the release of over one hundred prisoners under the Uruguayan Constitution. Moreover, President Pacheco stubbornly

¹³² “Uruguay Delays Reply to Kidnappers.”

¹³³ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 11 – 12.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 13.

maintained a strong stance against any form of negotiation with the criminals, even if that meant communicating with them. The military strongly supported this position, as they opposed any concessions and did not want the government to show any “hint of weakness or willingness to capitulate.”¹³⁵

Much of the hardline policies of the Executive Branch and the military stemmed from their vow to respect the Uruguayan Constitution and maintain democratic principles.

Uruguayans in general had placed a high value on their country’s historic image and performance as one of Latin America’s successful liberal democracies. They had enjoyed a long tradition of stable civilian rule alongside an essentially apolitical military, in a continent where military dictatorships had flourished on all sides for many years. In addition, Uruguayan leaders took great care to abide by the constitutional and legal precepts for institutional behavior.¹³⁶

Moreover, the President could not legally free the Tupamaros demanded for the ransom. “The Judicial branch held jurisdiction over most of the imprisoned MLN members, and any unilateral move by the Executive branch to release them would be considered dictatorial by both the Judicial and Legislative branches.”¹³⁷

Constitutionally, the President had no right to release the prisoners and the Judicial Branch had already privately agreed to reject any notion of freeing the prisoners for the aforementioned rationale. While, the president did have the authority to pardon the prisoners under Uruguayan law, President Pacheco was too stubborn to consider it.¹³⁸ The President’s strong message was a reassurance to his own government, the public and the international

¹³⁵ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 35.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 4.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 258.

community that Uruguay would remain democratic and would not fall into dictatorial means. For this reason, the President remained distant from the kidnappings.

The Foreign Minister and Vice President supported a more lenient approach and advocated for negotiations or at minimum, communications with the Tupamaros, which of course would not threaten legality under the Constitution. This method was supported by Ambassador. Numerous avenues were taken to attempt to communicate with the Tupamaros outside of communiques. The Foreign Minister reportedly met privately with lawyers who had defended the Tupamaros in hope of opening a line of communication on August 5th and 6th, which was likely supported by the President, despite his firm public stance.¹³⁹

Alternatives to the Tupamaros' demands were also being considered at this time, including amnesty, exile or deportation. While the Executive Branch focused on police operations and the Judicial Branch opposed a prisoner release, some members of the Legislative Branch increasingly supported "negotiations or some formula that might lead to some prisoner release."¹⁴⁰ A bill for the amnesty of the Tupamaros was submitted on August 4th. Despite the fact that amnesty had to be authorized by the Legislative Branch, many congressmen felt that they could not vote in favor of amnesty unless they had the approval of the Executive Branch so the bill did not pass.¹⁴¹

The People's Prison

Meanwhile, Dan Mitrione and the other prisoners were being interrogated by Tupamaros in the People's Prison, which was actually a collection of safe houses throughout Montevideo. Mitrione and Dias were held in the compound in the northern outskirts of the city, ironically just

¹³⁹ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 13.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 12.

fifteen blocks outside of the police's perimeter.¹⁴² Reportedly, Mitrione was being held in "a house apparently located in the urban area, judging from noises audible outside. He was confined in a tent within a room, on the lower half of a wooden bunk bed, with a bucket for a toilet."¹⁴³ From the beginning of his captivity, Mitrione was being interrogated as much as his condition allowed.

The first priority for the Tupamaros was the organizations he worked for, since "the Tupamaros found three identification cards in his pocket. One was from the Department of State, Agency for International Development...There was also a card from the Montevideo Police Department, and one identifying Mitrione as a member of the FBI National Academy, Associates of Indiana."¹⁴⁴ The Tupamaros wanted to know about a multitude of subjects, including his advisory work in Uruguay and Brazil, the names of Americans and Uruguayans Mitrione had contact with, security conditions in the Embassy where Mitrione worked and CIA operations in Latin America.¹⁴⁵ They also hoped to gather some evidence of Mitrione's knowledge of more sinister practices, such as the death squads operating in Brazil and torture.¹⁴⁶

Having gathered enough evidence against their prisoners, the Tupamaros published *Communique #6* at 1:05 a.m. on August 6th. The message was harrowing as it finally listed their victims' crimes. In *Communique #6*, the Tupamaros stated,

According to his own declarations, he has advised the Metropolitan Guard, the Republican Guard, and other repressive forces that in recent years have killed a dozen patriots in popular manifestations or in actions against revolutionary groups. Also,

¹⁴² Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 142; 146.

¹⁴³ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 48.

¹⁴⁴ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 270.

¹⁴⁵ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 48.

¹⁴⁶ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 264 – 266.

according to his declarations, deadly arms have been provided for the repression of the Uruguayan people under the cynical emblem of AID.¹⁴⁷

The Tupamaros furthered their accusations by stating that “he is representative of a power that has massacred entire populations in Vietnam, Santo Domingo and other places.”¹⁴⁸ The communique then presented the Uruguayan authorities with a deadline of midnight on August 7th to respond to the Tupamaros’ ransom demands. “In case there is no affirmative answer, we shall consider the case closed and will *do justice*. If the answer is favorable, we will wait until midnight on Tuesday the 11th for the conditions announced in previous notes to be put into effect.”¹⁴⁹ The threat was clear; if the Uruguayan government did not agree to the terms, the victims would be executed.

Shortly following this announcement, Gallup published the results of a survey conducted between August 2nd and August 6th regarding the Uruguayan public’s opinions on the Tupamaros and the kidnappings. Their findings were that

33 percent of Uruguayans considered the kidnappings an act of vandalism; 35 percent believed it was a legitimate revolutionary method...Moreover, 37 percent believed the government should provide ransom by releasing imprisoned terrorists; 37 percent believed the government should not...Finally, 60 percent believed that if kidnap victims were not ransomed, the terrorists would nevertheless return them safe and sound; 30 percent believed the victims would not be returned.¹⁵⁰

In this sense, the public was becoming increasingly cynical towards the Tupamaros. It is also important to note that sixty percent believed that the Tupamaros would release their victims without harm. This opinion was widespread and shared by most of the Uruguayan government.

¹⁴⁷ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 14 – 15.

¹⁴⁸ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 23.

¹⁴⁹ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 15.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 14.

The Tupamaros had never killed a hostage before and Judge Daniel Pereira had been released after extensive interrogation. Most believed that the Tupamaros planned to “extract all information possible from the victims and then to publish as much derogatory information as possible. This would constitute the victims’ sentence.”¹⁵¹ Despite the Tupamaros’ threat in *Communique #6*, the large majority of Uruguay full-heartedly believed there was no way that they would kill their hostages even if the government did not meet the Tupamaros’ demands, especially considering the fact that the Tupamaros would lose public support in such an event.

Also, under the advisement of the US government, the Uruguayan government announced that they would offer a reward of one million pesos for any good information that would lead to the safe return of the hostages. The Ministry of Interior and Foreign Ministry developed an independent Citizens’ Information Center to anonymously take any tips, suggestions or other information that the public provided. The public increasingly volunteered information, which greatly aided police investigations.

On the evening of August 6th, the president repeated his commitment to upholding the Uruguayan Constitution, maintaining his stance of non-negotiation; the Uruguayan government let the deadline pass. The Tupamaros responded by kidnapping another victim the following morning to increase pressure on the Uruguayan government. The victim was a sixty-five year old American agricultural specialist named Dr. Claude L. Fly who had a history of health problems. At 9:15 a.m. on August 7th, three Tupamaros seized the soil expert from his laboratory. Facing increasing pressure, President Pacheco considering resigning from his post. This had been the Tupamaros’ goal, meaning that the Tupamaros had nearly won. Things seemed to be going their

¹⁵¹ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 40.

way. In one Tupamaro's words: "We had reached the most favorable stage in the crisis from our point of view, and the release or amnesty of our comrades seemed near."¹⁵²

Almería

However, the Uruguayan police made a break in the case. Several high-ranking Tupamaro members had been reported in Malvín, the same neighborhood that Mitrione had been kidnapped from. At 8:00 in the morning, two police officers dressed as civilians forced their way into a ground-level apartment on Almería Street, subduing the Tupamaros guarding the place.¹⁵³ The police were in luck, because the Tupamaros were hosting a meeting that morning following the kidnapping of Dr. Fly, likely to discuss the next course of action and Mitrione's fate. Police officers proceeded to conduct a typical *ratonera*, using the two captured Tupamaros to greet the unsuspecting Tupamaros, who would be arrested as soon as they entered. Nine Tupamaros were arrested, including three holding the hostages' personal effects (Fly's passport, Dias' ring and Mitrione's passport) and several high-ranking and coveted members of the Tupamaros, including founders, Efraín Martínez Platero and Raúl Sendic.¹⁵⁴ In several hours, half of the existing Tupamaro leadership had been arrested. The devastating raid became known as Almería.

It was a big win for the Uruguayan effort, reinvigorating both the government and the police, who both believed they were nearing the liberation of the hostages. Moreover, the public's opinion of the police was at its height. President Pacheco decided against resignation and maintained his stance against negotiations. The Minister of the Interior "intended to undertake [the] most extreme police measures to locate [the] kidnap victims."¹⁵⁵ Interrogation

¹⁵² Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 23.

¹⁵³ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 151.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 151 – 152.

¹⁵⁵ Department of State, "Mitrione Kidnapping - Meeting at Foreign Ministry," *National Security Archives*, published August 9, 1970, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB324/>.

began immediately and the police intensified their searches, including a three hour search for Mitrione. The government believed that the police's efforts and interrogations would bring a favorable end to the crisis. However, many worried that the arrests could threaten the hostages' lives if the Tupamaros acted irrationally due to retaliation or lack of direction without their leaders.

Concerned about the wellbeing of their comrades, the Tupamaros sent Communique #7 directly to the police. The Tupamaros warned that "any inflicting of death or torture or any filing of accusations against the captured leaders would lead to severe reprisals."¹⁵⁶ The government took this threat seriously for all of the following "interrogations were monitored by judges of the Superior Court, and the terrorists were examined by physicians before and after questioning, to assure that no torture took place."¹⁵⁷ The same message was repeated on August 8th, when the Tupamaros threatened that the diplomats "will receive the same physical treatment as our arrested comrades" in Communique #8.¹⁵⁸ However, the interrogators received no useful information. Raúl Sendic stated, "I am a prisoner of war. I will say nothing about the movement of which I am a part."¹⁵⁹

Finding themselves at an impasse, the Uruguayan government made an unprecedented move. On August 7th, the government received permission from the Judicial Branch to use Sodium Pentothal, known as "truth serum" on the captured Tupamaros. The government then requested Argentinian police experts to help conduct the interrogation with this technology. The Argentinians arrived on the morning of August 8th to interrogate Raúl Sendic. However, they

¹⁵⁶ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 17.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 18.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 19.

¹⁵⁹ Malcolm Browne, "Uruguay Resists Rebels' Demands: Guerrillas Threaten to Kill U.S. Hostage Today," *New York Times*, August 9, 1970.

were not informed of the conditions that they were required to work under, considering the Uruguayan commitment to the Constitution.

Upon arriving, the Argentinians were surprised to read a disclosure of their mission in the Sunday newspapers, and to learn about the judicial monitoring. Since they had come under the condition of secrecy, they refused to proceed and returned to Argentina after witnessing an interrogation of Sendic. In their opinion, he was treated too gently, with interrogation conditions made extremely difficult by the presence of outside legal and medical assistance.¹⁶⁰

Reportedly, the closest the interrogators came to torture was splashing the naked prisoners with freezing cold water.¹⁶¹ However, in truth, most of the prisoners knew nothing at all, considering their commitment to compartmentalization. Apparently, only one of the captured Tupamaros knew where Mitrione was and it wasn't Raúl Sendic, the reported "leader" of the Tupamaros. In actuality, Alberto Candán, a member of Column 15, the Tupamaro's most active, held the knowledge that interrogators sought; he had interrogated Mitrione in the People's Prison.

After Almería, new leaders had to be chosen, who had just lost some of their best. Raúl Sendic explained that "From the moment we go to jail we are incapable of doing anything at all, because we have a pre-existing protocol that says imprisoned Tupamaros lose all decision-making authority."¹⁶² There were slim pickings, considering the nearly one hundred fifty Tupamaros that were already imprisoned in the Punta Carretas prison. With few options left, the Tupamaros were forced to choose three new leaders for the executive committee from their ranks. All of the new leaders chosen came from the newer generation of Tupamaros; they were young, radical and inexperienced, but were active in operations.

¹⁶⁰ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 18.

¹⁶¹ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 153.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 158.

The Death Sentence

On the morning of August 8th, President Pacheco received a letter from Mitrione, directed to his wife. In a shaky hand, indicating emotional distress, Mitrione wrote: “Please advise the Ambassador to do all in his power to get me liberated *because my life depends on it.*”¹⁶³ He wasn’t wrong. On the same afternoon, Communique #9 clearly stated the Tupamaros’ intent: “in view of the government’s refusal to exchange prisoners, the MLN had decided to execute Mitrione at noon the next day.”¹⁶⁴ It had been decided amongst the Tupamaros. The majority of the Tupamaros supported Mitrione’s death. Some even wanted to murder Mitrione, Dias and Fly together for the greatest effect.¹⁶⁵ The hostages were completely at the mercy of these new radical leaders. While the imprisoned Tupamaros maintained good communication with those outside, they had no impact on decision-making, meaning that the young violent radicals were entirely in charge of the operation.

The government remained steadfast in their approach, even though the situation had deteriorated. They promised publicly that they were doing all that was possible to secure the releases of the Tupamaros’ hostages. The police continued raiding in a last effort and asked the public for their continued aid to find the kidnapped diplomats. Still, the government doubted that the Tupamaros would execute their captives.

The United States became more persistent. While the American Ambassador had been actively involved in conversations regarding the best methods to secure the release of the hostages before, the United States respected the Uruguayan’s methods and competence. Before, Ambassador Adair had advocated, “For safe delivery Mitrione offer [the Tupamaros] amnesty or

¹⁶³ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 19.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 19.

¹⁶⁵ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 156.

amnesty plus an award 15 million pesos. Offer amnesty to key persons now being held in return for information leading to release of the three men.”¹⁶⁶ However, by August 9th, the noon deadline was weighing on everybody’s minds. The United States increasingly advocated for reprisals against the Tupamaros.

In an exclusive message to Ambassador Adair, the Secretary of State wrote just a half hour before the Mitrione’s deadline: “We have assumed that GOU has considered use of threat to kill Sendic and others key MLN prisoners if Mitrione is killed. If this has not been considered, you should raise it with GOU at once.”¹⁶⁷ This was clearly a violation of Uruguayan law and would be a risky move within the government considering earlier concerns regarding dictatorial acts. When the Ambassador brought up the issue with the Foreign Minister in a last minute meeting, he stated that “his type of government did not permit such action.”¹⁶⁸ In more blunt terms, President Pacheco reportedly told the Foreign Minister, “This guy is either drunk or off his rocker! What does he think Uruguay is? Viet Nam?”¹⁶⁹ However, this didn’t mean the Uruguayan government was beyond extralegal methods either.

During the same meeting, the Foreign Minister discussed another possibility in the case that Mitrione did not survive. Ambassador Adair informed the Secretary of State that “the GOU intends take what [redacted] called “severe measures” which he did not describe.”¹⁷⁰ He later reported that the Foreign Minister “understood that through indirect means, a threat was made to

¹⁶⁶ Department of State, “Mitrione Kidnapping - Meeting at Foreign Ministry.”

¹⁶⁷ GOU is an abbreviation for “Government of Uruguay.” Department of State, “Ambassador from the Secretary,” *National Security Archives*, published August 9, 1970, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB324/>.

¹⁶⁸ Department of State, “For Secretary from Ambassador,” *National Security Archives*, published August 9, 1970, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB324/>.

¹⁶⁹ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 157.

¹⁷⁰ Department of State, “Mitrione/Fly Kidnapping - Last Minute Meeting with Foreign Minister,” *National Security Archives*, published August 9, 1970, accessed April 11, 2017, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB324/>.

these prisoners that members of the “Escuadron de Muerte” (Illegal, Private Death Squad) would take action against the prisoners’ relatives if Mitrione werz [sic] killed.”¹⁷¹ This exchange came right before the noon deadline; if the Tupamaros carried through with their threat, Mitrione would soon be dead. However, many in the Uruguayan government believed that Mitrione was already dead as a result of his gunshot wound. Anonymous calls to the Uruguayan government had been announcing Mitrione’s death all day and rumors had been circulating throughout the city, making this threat very concerning.¹⁷²

The Tupamaros faced another blow to their organization. The newly appointed leadership was arrested after less than twenty-four hours in command. Now the Tupamaros were down nine more members. To make matters worse, it became clear that the Tupamaros had lost much of their public support, considering that “during several raiding operations, people filled the street, cheering and applauding the policemen as they placed suspects under suspension.”¹⁷³ The Tupamaros were coming to the end of the line.

Now the Tupamaros no longer had any leadership. There wasn’t even anybody to appoint new leaders. With nobody left to guide them, the remaining Tupamaros of Column 15 decided to execute Dan Mitrione, the prisoner in their custody. The self-appointed leader of the group recalled, “We saw it with the rigidity of young and inexperienced people. A certain day and time had been given as the deadline, and if the exchange was not accepted he was going to be executed. When we were left leaderless, we stuck to the wording of our press release.”¹⁷⁴

At 9:00 p.m., Mitrione was informed by his captors that he would be moved to a different location. His captors drugged him with valium before he was bound, blindfolded and placed in a

¹⁷¹ Department of State, “For Secretary from Ambassador.”

¹⁷² Department of State, “Mitrione/Fly Kidnapping - Last Minute Meeting with Foreign Minister.”

¹⁷³ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 20 – 21.

¹⁷⁴ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 159.

stolen car. They drove around for a while before switching cars and driving to a desolate location. In the early hours of the morning, the two shooters stopped the car and shot Dan Mitrione multiple times at close range. At 4:25 a.m., shortly after Mitrione was shot, a police patrol discovered the abandoned car. “Dan Mitrione’s body was found on the back seat of a stolen 1948 Buick convertible. He had been bound and gagged and shot twice in the head.”¹⁷⁵ During the autopsy, “examination of his body showed no signs of torture, binding, or other mistreatment. His earlier wound was clean and healing well.”¹⁷⁶ It was official: Dan Mitrione was dead.

It immediately became clear to the Tupamaros that Mitrione’s assassination had severely damaged both their organization and their reputation. The popular response to the murder was one of disgust and revulsion; internationally and within Uruguay, the Tupamaros’ actions were condemned. August 11th marked a day of mourning in Uruguay for Dan Mitrione. Over five thousand Uruguayans visited the American embassy to pay their respects.¹⁷⁷ Much of the public continued to inform the police of Tupamaro activity, seeing them now as more of a criminal element than a revolutionary group. Moreover, the public sympathized with Dan Mitrione, the slain father of nine. Originally, “the Tupamaros [had] expected that when Mitrione’s activities with the police were exposed, even apolitical Uruguayans would concede that he was a natural target.”¹⁷⁸ Yet the Tupamaros were not able to expose him as a CIA agent involved in torture or provide any other damaging material.¹⁷⁹ However, Sendic later stated that the Tupamaros had

¹⁷⁵ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 285.

¹⁷⁶ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 49.

¹⁷⁷ “Slain Aide’s Body on the Way to the U.S.: Police Adviser Was Victim of Terrorists Still Holding 2,” *New York Times*, August 12, 1970.

¹⁷⁸ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 257.

¹⁷⁹ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 55.

targeted for teaching riot control procedures to the Uruguayan police that led to the deaths of protesters.¹⁸⁰

Allegations Against Mitrione

The questions that still linger with Mitrione is whether he was a CIA officer and whether he was involved in torture during his time with OPS. To this day, this is still a controversial question. It's a complicated history and everybody has a stake in the answers. Dan Mitrione was stationed in Uruguay in 1969. Previously, he had worked as an advisor in Brazil for seven years. Officially, Dan Mitrione's position as a Public Safety Advisor entailed making requisitions for weapons and supplies and training officers to improve investigations with the tools that the AID program provided. He also worked to improve communications between police, traveling throughout Uruguay to inspect police stations. Lastly, Mitrione was tasked with choosing officers for further training in the United States. Of course, the real purpose of OPS was to fight communism within Latin America which involved more dubious practices.

As Chief Police Advisor, Dan Mitrione was stationed within the American Embassy, alongside other OPS advisors. It's well established that CIA officers were often imbedded within the Embassy, especially in the OPS program. This allowed them close access to important figures and supplies, considering that illicit equipment was often brought in through the embassy's diplomatic pouch.¹⁸¹ In fact, when Mitrione took his position, he replaced a CIA officer, William Cantrell. Some astute policers suspected Mitrione of being a CIA officer because he was well-equipped and well-connected. However, that was his job as Chief Police Advisor in Montevideo. Despite this, leftists declared that "his AID credentials fooled no one.

¹⁸⁰ Ronfeldt, *The Mitrione Kidnapping in Uruguay*, 60.

¹⁸¹ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 251.

Mr. Mitrione was a well-known CIA agent.”¹⁸² This rumor was established as far away as East Germany, when a publisher listed Mitrione in a book entitled *Who’s Who in CIA*.¹⁸³ Of course, the CIA denied the allegations that Mitrione was one of theirs. Others believe that Mitrione was merely ambitious and cooperated with the CIA officers that worked within Uruguay.¹⁸⁴

Naturally, interrogation is an integral part of any police institution and would be the focus of training any good detective. However, it is clear that the United States actively taught police and military officers enhanced interrogation techniques through the International Police Academy and the School of the Americas. Throughout Latin America, American influence and torture seemed to go hand in hand. During Mitrione’s time in Brazil, prisoners “attributed the new Brazilian efficiency to United States training. Before the US advisers helped to centralize information, it had taken days to discover whether a new prisoner was a leader in the rebel movement. Now it took hours.”¹⁸⁵ Reportedly, police officers attended forty minute classes on torture that used political prisoners to illustrate the techniques.¹⁸⁶ However, this does not necessarily mean that Dan Mitrione was behind the new techniques. When discussing what Mitrione would do if he witnessed Brazilian police abusing a prisoner, a Brazilian police officer replied that he would merely leave the room.¹⁸⁷

The accusations that Dan Mitrione taught torture techniques or led interrogations in Uruguay came from three men, representing very different interests. There was Alejandro Otero, an Uruguayan police officer, who had been trained in counterintelligence by both the Argentinian Information Service and AID’s International Police Academy, before being

¹⁸² Wilson, *The Tupamaros*, 53.

¹⁸³ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 138 – 139.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 139.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 200.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 216 – 222.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 140.

recruited by the CIA.¹⁸⁸ There was also Miguel Angel Benítez Segovia, who was a Tupamaro working undercover as a police officer.¹⁸⁹ Finally, the most bizarre accuser was “Manuel the Cuban.” Manuel Hevia was a Cuban who was studying in the US when he was recruited by the CIA. Manuel accepted the position and was sent to work undercover in the Uruguayan embassy. However, in reality, he was a Cuban double agent.¹⁹⁰

Alejandro Otero was an ambitious detective and a well-known figure in Uruguay, due to his frequent press releases on police activity and the Tupamaros. In 1969, he spoke openly about police brutality when he was interviewed by an Argentine reporter.¹⁹¹ He talked about his friend, a Tupamaro supporter, who had been interrogated by the police. She told him that Mitrione had watched and assisted in her torture. When he confronted Dan Mitrione, he listened “impassively.” Afterwards, Otero was “put on ice” before losing his job over the interview.¹⁹² Otero repeated the same story to a Brazilian journalist four days after Mitrione’s death.

US advisers, especially Mitrione, had introduced scientific methods of torture... The advisors advocated psychological torture, Otero told Aymoré [the journalist], to create despair. In the next room, they would play tapes of women and children screaming and tell the prisoner that it was his family being tortured. They used electrical shocks under fingernails, on the genitals. He told Aymoré about his friend, the woman who had been tortured, and about the way Mitrione ignored his protests. Mitrione had been very hard in his methods, Otero said.¹⁹³

Shortly afterwards, Alejandro Otero recanted his story. Considering the Brazilian police’s allegiance to Mitrione, it seems possible that he may have been threatened by the death squads.

¹⁸⁸ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 233.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 298.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 310.

¹⁹¹ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 116.

¹⁹² Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 253.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 286.

Working undercover in the Uruguayan police, Miguel Angel Benítez recorded information about the inner workings and key players, including Mitrione. In one report, he recorded a conversation he overheard where Mitrione offered advice to officers: “undress him completely and force him to stand facing the wall. Then have one of the youngest policemen goose him. Afterward, put him into a cell and hold him for three days with nothing to drink. On the third day, pass through to him a pot of water mixed with urine.”¹⁹⁴ The advice was meant as a joke, considering its sexual overtones. However, alongside Mitrione’s joking advice, “he had always emphasized finding out as much as possible about a prisoner before the interrogation began. Learn the suspect’s breaking point and reach it quickly, he told the interrogating officers.”¹⁹⁵ When teaching about torture, much of the information that Americans provided was hypothetical; while students were taught techniques, instructors would not directly advocate them, however the message was clear.

Benítez never saw Mitrione torture a prisoner, but he knew that he had directed several interrogations. He also credited the changes within the police station to Mitrione. “When Mitrione arrived in Montevideo, the police were torturing prisoners with a rudimentary electric needle that had come from Argentina. Mitrione arranged for the police to get newer electric needles of varying thickness. Some needles were so thin they could be slipped between the teeth.”¹⁹⁶ Like in Brazil, other Uruguayan officers recall Mitrione casually walking in on interrogations, where Tupamaros were being tortured.¹⁹⁷

The most damning information came from the Cuban agent. Hevia reported that he had been invited to Mitrione’s house, where he had built a soundproofed cellar to teach officers

¹⁹⁴ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 250.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 250 – 251.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 252 – 253.

torture techniques. Graduates of the International Police Academy would gather in his cellar, where Mitrione provided bichicones, or beggars to demonstrate the effects of electrical shock on various portions of the body. He goes on to describe a lengthy conversation the two shared, where Mitrione described his philosophy of interrogation. “After all that, the interrogation begins. Now the only pain should come from the instrument you’ve chosen to use. Mitrione said, “the precise pain, in the precise place, in the precise amount to achieve the effect.”¹⁹⁸ However, as a Cuban agent, he clearly had a strong motivation to discredit Yankee involvement in Latin America.

Even though all three accounts clearly accuse Dan Mitrione of involvement in torture, it is clear that his story is complicated. All three represent different allegiances, yet all have different stories. Otero was guided by his morals. Even if he was on the CIA’s payroll, he was arguably most affiliated with Uruguayan interests. For this reason, I find his account to be persuasive, since he was notably candid in his interviews and had little motivation to paint Mitrione in a negative light. Likewise, I believe Benítez is a credible source, considering the fact that the statements he sent to the Tupamaros were modest and unexaggerated. Both of their statements are consistent with police officers who had contact with Dan Mitrione in Brazil and Uruguay.

Based on the various testimonies, I am of the opinion that Daniel Mitrione was aware of the prisoner abuse and torture that occurred. At minimum, he facilitated the practice by sending officers to learn torture techniques at the International Police Academy and School of Americas. As a Public Safety Officer, he also acquired equipment, such as electric generators and needles for officers to use, knowing full well what they were intended for. Moreover, based on officers’

¹⁹⁸ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 311 – 312.

testimonies, Mitrione seemed comfortable with the practice, willingly walking into interrogation rooms and discussing the practice. I strongly believe that Mitrione kept his hands clean; while he may have advocated and instructed on methods of torture, he never partook. This sentiment is corroborated by the fact that the Tupamaros were never able to prove that Mitrione tortured prisoners, even with members imbedded in the police.

Uruguay's Moral Decline

Directly following the murder of Dan Mitrione, the Uruguayan government issued emergency security measures. At 5:15 p.m. on August 10th, the same day Mitrione had been killed, the General Assembly “voted to waive temporarily the rights guaranteed under Article 31 of Uruguay’s Constitution. Declaring a state of emergency, the assembly suspended for twenty days the rights of property, assembly, personal liberty and free expression,”¹⁹⁹ leading Uruguay in its path towards a dictatorship.

Meanwhile, the Tupamaros continued their campaign of violent operations as part of the next phase of the revolution. These new operations were increasingly terroristic, which was a clear divergence from their earlier philosophy. In September, the Tupamaros launched Plan Cacao, a campaign of bombings that targeted symbols of oligarchies and imperialism, even if they housed innocent civilians. Plan Satán continued on; hostages were gradually ransomed off and new victims were kidnapped, including the British Ambassador, Geoffrey Jackson, who was kidnapped in January of 1971. The Tupamaros also continued Línea Hostigamiento, killing police officers indiscriminately. By this time, the Tupamaros had lost much of the support from the Uruguayan public due to their reign of terror. However, the Tupamaros were certainly not dead, and they had no intention of stopping. In fact, their organization had reached peak recruitment, as angry radical youths joined the organization.²⁰⁰

In the summer of 1971, the Tupamaros worked to free their comrades. They planned to use the sewers, which they had been mapping meticulously since 1965.²⁰¹ After a few scrapped

¹⁹⁹ Langguth, *Hidden Terrors*, 285.

²⁰⁰ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 179.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 39.

plans, the Tupamaros settled on Operación Estrella. In the Tres Cruces neighborhood, the Tupamaros tunneled to the women's prison from the sewers. At about 8:30 p.m., the Tupamaros broke through the last of the floor, while the prisoners loudly danced to hide the noise. With that portion complete, the Tupamaros returned to their cells and prepared dummies to hide their escape. Then at 10:00 p.m., the Tupamaros returned to the hole and made their escape, where they were guided by their comrades through the sewers to a hijacked home.²⁰² In total, thirty-eight women escaped on July 17th, 1971.

The Tupamaros success was replicated three months later when one hundred eleven prisoners escaped from Puntas Carretas. Within the prison, Tupamaros tunneled between cells and from the first floor to the ground floor to reach their escape tunnel. On September 5th, they traveled through the forty foot tunnel that connected to a house across the street, which was held hostage by Tupamaros. There, the prisoners were provided with false papers and an escape route. In total, one hundred six Tupamaros escaped, leaving only seventy-four Tupamaros in prison. The Tupamaros had effectively freed all of their leaders, as well as their most skilled and talented members. However, as a result of the two prison escapes, the state lost faith in the police's ability to combat the Tupamaros. On September 9th, 1971, the military was given full control of the anti-terrorist campaign against the Tupamaros.

Immediately following the prison break, the Tupamaros called an unprecedented armistice for the coming election. A new party emerged that provided an alternative to Uruguay's conservative politicians. The Frente Amplio was a coalition of socialists, communists and Christian democrats campaigning on the premise of land redistribution, nationalizing banks and renegotiating Uruguay's immense foreign debt, which had reached five hundred million.²⁰³

²⁰² Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 207.

²⁰³ Joseph Novitski, "Left-Leaning Bloc in Uruguay Mounts Vote Drive," *New York Times*, July 11, 1971.

Inspired by Salvador Allende's recent success in Chile, the Tupamaros supported the Frente Amplio even though it was contrary to their philosophy.

The coalition was certainly controversial; they were considered either Uruguay's last chance to avoid a civil war or a revolutionary mobilization that would lead the country to communism.²⁰⁴ While many supported an alternative to the traditional corrupt politicians, they were alienated by the strong presence of the Communist Party. In the end, the traditional parties won with the triumph of the Colorado Party. Juan María Bordaberry, who was handpicked by President Pacheco, won the election. As a fervent anti-communist with an inclination towards fascism, Bordaberry planned to follow Pacheco's policies to eliminate the Tupamaros by using extraordinary presidential and police powers.²⁰⁵

With the new president inaugurated, the Tupamaros resumed their campaign against the state on April 14th, 1972 by assassinating four members of the death squad.²⁰⁶ The Tupamaros were not prepared for the state's response. While they had been on hiatus, the military had been preparing for a more effective anti-subversive campaign. And on April 15th, President Bordaberry acquired additional emergency powers, declaring a state of internal war. Under martial law, the military was empowered in their campaign against the Tupamaros, who were subject to military courts. Between April and June, over one thousand suspects were arrested.²⁰⁷ Moreover, it was clear that the military was torturing suspects to garner more information. On July 11th, Congress passed an anti-subversion law which subjected accused subversives to military courts and suspended individual rights, allowing searches without a warrant and

²⁰⁴ Novitski, "Left-Leaning Bloc in Uruguay Mounts Vote Drive."

²⁰⁵ Joseph Novitski, "Uruguay's Vote Still Undecided, But Suspense Is Gone," *New York Times*, December 11, 1971.

²⁰⁶ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 100.

²⁰⁷ Freeman, *Freedom or Security*, 98.

imprisonment on suspicion of subversion.²⁰⁸ The new anti-subversion law “gave juridical recognition to the suspension of individual liberties and the violent repression that had been conducted under the declaration.”²⁰⁹ By July 15th, the military announced that they had discovered seventy safe houses, captured over six hundred Tupamaros and killed one hundred.²¹⁰

The state of internal war allowed the military more leeway in their campaign against subversion. Their success came from a reliance on enhanced interrogation techniques.

Suspected Tupamaro collaborators were said to be subjected to a routine consisting of, perhaps, two days of planton (prolonged standing without food), a week of capucha (completely blindfolded imprisonment), and a few mornings of submarinos (immersion of the prisoner’s head in water, up to the point of asphyxiation, every half hour or so). During the interrogation proper, prisoners were supposedly beaten in ways that are hard to trace - for instance, by simultaneous blows against the ears. Forms of psychological torture (such as interruption of sleep, withholding of food or drink, and threats) and drug-induced confessions were also frequently reported.²¹¹

Like other guerrilla groups, the Tupamaros had a policy of enduring torture for twenty-four hours to provide the rest of the organization time to escape. However, the military’s campaign was too prolific to maintain this safeguard. Under duress, there was little choice but to talk. And considering the fact that many Tupamaros had been to prison, they would be able to identify more members. In this manner, the military was provided a plethora of information regarding members, associates and safe houses. By the end of 1972, about five thousand people had been arrested by the military and three thousand Tupamaros were being held.²¹² Roughly seven

²⁰⁸ “New Antisubversive Law Takes Effect in Uruguay,” *New York Times*, July 12, 1972.

²⁰⁹ Freeman, *Freedom or Security*, 93.

²¹⁰ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 101.

²¹¹ Porzecanski, *Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla*, 68.

²¹² Freeman, *Freedom or Security*, 95; 98.

hundred Tupamaros fled the country and three hundred Tupamaros remained at large.²¹³ The Tupamaros had come to an end; their organization was destroyed.

At this point, only four percent of the Uruguayans believed that the Tupamaros were motivated by social justice, compared to sixty percent the year before.²¹⁴ Despite this, the Tupamaros had a peculiar effect on the military, who were becoming increasingly politicized. “All of them, it appears, condemned the guerrilla movement for its lawless violence, but some were convinced of the rightness of the Tupamaros’ demands for radical reform by the capture of proofs they had assembled of extensive injustice and corruption in the existing regime.”²¹⁵ Now that the Tupamaros were in military custody, there was an exchange of political ideas that was not previously possible. As military officers became more familiar with their prisoners, the military gained an understanding of the reasoning behind the Tupamaros and the ways they had hoped to better Uruguayan society.²¹⁶ More importantly, the Tupamaros shared evidence of corruption in the highest spheres, from businessmen to politicians.²¹⁷ Uruguay’s political processes had been discredited, leading the military to demand a larger role in politics.

As a result of the Tupamaros’ accounts, the military demanded extensive reforms to address the economic problems and rampant corruption in February of 1973. It was clear that a revolt was brewing, but the military’s complaints rang true for most Uruguayans.²¹⁸ When their ultimatum was disregarded, the military demonstrated their force on February 12th, “when fourteen vintage tanks lumbered through the capital to Prado Park, near the Presidential

²¹³ “Uruguay Economy Falters,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1973.

²¹⁴ Freeman, *Freedom or Security*, 97.

²¹⁵ Whitaker, *The United States and the Southern Cone*, 276 – 277.

²¹⁶ Brum, *The Robin Hood Guerrillas*, 288.

²¹⁷ “Uruguay in Crisis with Military: Two Commanders Demand Defense Minister Quit,” *New York Times*, February 9, 1973.

²¹⁸ Jonathan Kandell, “Wide Reforms Sought,” *New York Times*, February 12, 1973.

residence;” the president was forced to surrender.²¹⁹ “Henceforth the armed forces would play a new role in public life with the mission to safeguard national developments.”²²⁰ The military would advise the president through the newly inaugurated National Security Commission, allowing the military to maintain a democratic façade. However, the reality was clear.

On June 27th, 1973, President Bordaberry illegally dissolved Congress under the military’s advisement. The Uruguayan public challenged this development with protests and demonstrations. Police reported that mobs of up to two thousand people gathered at the Plaza Independencia, where the president is located. Over two hundred people were arrested on one night for illegal assembly and activity, including firebombing vehicles and stoning or shooting military and police personnel.²²¹ Demonstrations were quelled after two weeks. Political activity was forbidden and censorship was imposed to stifle criticism.²²² “Widespread repression was then unleashed, with the arrest of leading political figures of all parties, trade unionists and members of the university.”²²³ After the successful elimination of civilian protests and the oppositional left, Uruguay was unable to prevent the end of democracy. Uruguay was at the mercy of the authoritarian civil – military dictatorship that had taken root.

The new regime defended the illegal measures taken, proclaiming that they were saving their country by “rooting out corruption of the past and drawing the line for a new morality and new approach to their country’s problems.”²²⁴ The main focus was the economy, which had deteriorated significantly in the last few years. In order to solve their country’s economic issues,

²¹⁹ “Nothing to Do with the People,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1973.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Office of Public Safety, “Public Safety Division: Police Report,” *National Security Archives*, July 25, 1973, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB309/>.

²²² Department of State, “Uruguay Four Months After Closing Congress,” *National Security Archives*, November 12, 1973, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB309/>.

²²³ Finch, “Uruguay Since 1930,” 219.

²²⁴ Department of State, “Uruguay Four Months After Closing Congress.”

the military knew that they needed “an experienced civilian leader who was better qualified” to implement the Brazilian-inspired development policy.²²⁵ When discussing the new regime in Uruguay, President Bordaberry told the American Ambassador that

It would be a great mistake if Americans were to interpret developments here in any way as the establishment of a military regime in Uruguay. If the military had wanted to take power, he said, there would have been nothing to prevent their doing so. The fact is, he said, that the military did not want to take power, but rather to develop a stronger level of participation in government by providing the civilian government [sic] with the necessary authority to have a chance of solving the obvious problems which had been plaguing the country for such along [sic] time... In the long run, he said, everything they have done has really been an effort to end the stagnation of more than two decades and to save Uruguay’s democratic traditions and institutions rather do violence to them.²²⁶

In this manner, President Bordaberry defended Uruguay’s loss of democracy and the new authoritarian regime. Uruguay would remain under a repressive military-led dictatorship for twelve years. During this time period, several thousand political prisoners, including a large number of Tupamaros, were held captive and tortured. Uruguay had the highest per capita ratio of political prisoners in the world, with one of every fifty-four Uruguayan citizens detained.²²⁷ The country remained under a military-led dictatorship until 1985, when the armed allowed the transfer of power to a civilian leader.

Conclusion

Ironically, the Tupamaros’ efforts to ignite a revolution and overthrow the government led to the collapse of democracy in Uruguay. Plan Satán had been intended to unseat President

²²⁵ Whitaker, *The United States and the Southern Cone*, 283.

²²⁶ Department of State, “Conversation with President Bordaberry,” *National Security Archives*, December 26, 1973. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB309/>.

²²⁷ Mauricio Rosencof, “On Suffering, Song, and White Horses,” in *Repression, Exile, and Democracy: Uruguayan Culture*, ed. Saúl Sosnowski and Louise B. Popkin (Philadelphia: Duke University Press, 1993), 120.

Pacheco, which was nearly successful. However, in a turn of events, several of the Tupamaros' leaders were captured. Reinvigorated, President Pacheco renewed his efforts pertinaciously, determined to bring an end to the guerrilla group that had threatened his rule. However, before he could triumph over the Tupamaros, Daniel Mitriane was killed. More determined than ever to prevent another death at the hands of the Tupamaros, President Pacheco proclaimed a state of emergency, enacting a number of security measures to bring an end to this affair. These measures allowed the police to continue their search with little hindrance. As the election neared, President Pacheco intended to run for another term, but he was prevented by the Constitution. He proceeded to choose his successor, Juan María Bordaberry, who successfully won the election. Bordaberry continued Pacheco's campaign, continuing the string of security measures. Finally in April of 1972, Bordaberry declared martial law and allowed the military to take control of operations against the Tupamaros. As a result, the military became more politicized and sought dominion over the government, leading to the military coup of 1973.

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