

# Jailed junta critics tell of death, torture

SAN SALVADOR, 19 March — The Santa Tecla jail for political prisoners is a grim place. From the outside all that is visible are the high walls, painted a light blue over chipped plaster.

The entrance to the prison is an armor-plated door with a small peep-hole. The door is eventually swung open after a study of identification papers.

Inside, several prison guards stand armed with rifles of unknown manufacture. Then it is through another armored door and into the office of the prison commandant. The prison is dark and the odor musty.

The commandant forbids cameras or tape recorders. He is even surprised that a reporter has been allowed to enter the prison, but on verifying the source of the permission (the Minister, Colonel Guillermo Garcia), he is reasonably helpful with facts and figures.

The prison records show that there are 125 prisoners here. All are political prisoners. They represent various sections of the community, including the media, the trade unions and the schools and universities. I am allowed through to see the prisoners. They live four or six to a cell and are allowed out to a common area during the day. The common area is cramped, the facilities for cooking and the personal hygiene area primitive, but the men here spend a lot of time trying to make their environment as habitable as possible.

## Intellectuals

As many of the prisoners here represent the intellectual strata of El Salvadoran society, they are allowed to be fairly self-governing, within the confines of the space allotted to them and the hours they are allowed out of their cells. They make use of this limited freedom to organise activities, to help each other and to continue to work, in a limited way, in their pre-prison professions. That is, of course, where they have not been outlawed.

The following interviews with the three main groups represented in the prison was through a chemical engineer who spoke several languages. He was the owner of a successful small business before being imprisoned.

**JOURNALISTS:** Francisco Ramirez Avelar of 'El Independiente' newspaper, which has been closed, and Guillermo Diaz Ramos of the International Press Agency, were charged with subversive activity.

Speaking through the interpreter they said: "The principal political crime that we were charged with was that of being middlemen between the media and the guerrillas. We deny that charge." They and three women reporters, including the owner of a newspaper, have yet to be brought before a court.

They said: "We were blindfolded and handcuffed and had guns poked into our chests when answering questions before a military judge. We are not criminals. We have not committed any political crimes. We do not know why we are here."

Questioned further, they said they believed they had been imprisoned because "we were working with the opposition media. We were being honest, we were telling the truth. In El Salvador

Melbourne reporter **DAMIEN KINGSBURY**, 25, has been inside the walls of San Salvador's Santa



Tecla jail to get this exclusive report of political prisoners' claims of torture and privation.

reporters cannot tell of the authorities killing people".

They said they did not consider telling the truth to be an adequate reason for being imprisoned.

The discussion turned to prison conditions. They said: "We are locked up at 6 pm and are made to sleep with the lights on. We are under constant surveillance. The guards abuse us, they insult us and beat us and aim their rifles through the bars of the cell doors."

A listener to the conversation went away and returned with a man in his mid-20s. He was a high school teacher before being arrested. He said most of the teachers were now dead. Then he showed what the authorities had done to him.

Across his arms, legs, body and face, large areas of flesh were laid bare where, he said, interrogators had thrown sulphuric acid on him in an attempt to get a confession. He had also been indecently assaulted and had acid poured on his testicles, he said.

Fortunately, one of the prisoners here was a lecturer in medicine at the university and, with the poor facilities available, helped to clean up his gaping wounds.

The journalists said they received electrical shocks and beatings (as does everyone at Santa Tecla from time to time) but most of the torture was psychological.

They said: "We were tied up and led outside and were told we would be shot. They fired blanks."

The interpreter then said: "They gave me hallucinogenic drugs for 48 hours. It sent me crazy for a week. You will help me to still be alive in two months if you can publish my name in the Press of other countries."

The journalists said the prisoners received little food or supplies from the Government. "If you see us healthy it is because our families give us food. The wealthy people help the poor in this jail."

Despite the reasonable well-being of most of the prisoners, many were suffering from ailments caused by the unhygienic conditions and inadequate diet.

"On visiting day the police park their cars outside the prisons and they treat our families badly so they get afraid and don't visit. This is to demoralise the prisoners," the journalists said.

"The only reason they treat us this well is because we went on a hunger strike and they were concerned that we would all die together."

"They have been more careful over the past two months because of the international Press. The whole world is watching."

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# Jailed Salvador critics tell

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The names of El Salvadoran martyrs are painted over cell doors. I was told they were put there by earlier political prisoners, most of whom were now dead.

The journalists said that before they were arrested, seven news people had been killed. They mentioned a production manager of the now extinct paper 'La Cronica' and a photographer who were found chopped into small pieces after being kidnapped last July.

The popular opinion in El Salvador is that the people who commit these types of crimes, the "paramilitary", are soldiers in civilian dress, but the two journalists would not say this. A sentence of death comes from such a statement.

They said that at about the same time that 'La Cronica' was closed, the offices of the 'Independent' newspaper and the Catholic Church radio station YSAX were blown up.

"All opposition newspapers are now closed," they said. Some of the prisoners held here were printers and secretaries at the newspapers before they were closed. "They had no responsibility for the content of the papers."

They said the "revolutionary junta" had tried to modify the agrarian sector and the banking sector but had failed.

In the agrarian sector the National Democratic Organisation, similar in style to the Nazis, is preferred by about 60 per cent of the big and middle farmers. "Violence and repression increased with this failure. They are mostly illiterate and those who can read are often ignorant of the injustice here."

The journalists made a final appeal. "We have only one means of salvation here — the international Press."

**UNIONISTS:** Most of the unionists in the prison were members of the Sindicato Trabajadores Empresa Comision Ejecutiva Hidroelectrica. This union represents the workers of the privately owned monopoly of the supply of electricity in El Salvador. Present were the general secretary of the union as well as four under-secretaries and other members.

They are in jail for a strike which disrupted electrical supplies in El Salvador for 24 hours.

They told me the linesmen had to work with 115,000 volts running through live wires. They were being paid about \$A65 a week for this very dangerous job. The union held discussions which resulted in 18 unionists being murdered in front of their families or workmates and a further 30 being dismissed.

Through an interpreter they said: "Then the Government declared the union unconstitutional. They also said, under decree 296, that we cannot talk about polit-

The prisoners are:

**DORMITORY ONE.** — Mario Marataya, Rodolfo Molina, Jesus Romeo Galdamez, Romero Moreira, Ricardo Martinez, Jesus Antonio Hernandez Morales, Carlos Alberto Hernandez Jilenez, Jose Salomon Hernandez Lopez.

**DORMITORY TWO.** — Francisco A. Quezada, Alfredo Hernandez Repra, Francisco Zamora, Edmundo Oliva, Mario Daniel Martinez, Orlando D. mas Triguera, Guillermo Antonio Bustillo, Carlos Corea, Alberto Montano Castellon, Jose Omar Ochoa, Rene Aparicio Palacios, Mauricio Hernandez, Mauricio Rivera Majaon, Jose Santos Hernandez Noto, Jaime Ernesto Castro Mejia, Salomon Ramirez Perez, Miguel Angel Hernandez Perez, Guillermo Diaz Ramos, Victor Daniel Sanchez Escobar, Hector Sebastian Rivera Amaya, Jose Mario Meniez Perez, Rafael Armando Landos Amartinez, Wenceslao Reyes Jovel, Rene Armando Flores, Daniel Hernandez, Douglas Rafael Cortez, Jose Humberto Urbina, Camilo Panameho Molina, Jorge Alberto Martinez, Jose Martin Perez, Jose Antonio Reynosa.

**DORMITORY THREE.** — Luis Alonso Cortez, Juan Cruz Hernandez, Hernan Texpan Carranza, Gustavo Flores Montano, Juan Antonio Perez, Carlos Giron, Miguelangela Ayala, Manuel de Jesus Andino, Julio Cesar Murray, Carlos Ramirez Velasquez, Marco Antonio Rivera Soto, Alfredo Campos Cruz, Alberto Aicantara, Mario Vilz, Rolando Ernest Morales, Julio Enrique Pecorne Molina, Herbert Enrique Amaya, Jose Noemias Guardado Melendez, Jose Lazaro Cubas Matamoros, Francisco Jose Ramirez Avelar, Jose Angel Henandez Lopez Vasquez, Porfirio Salvador Figueroa Henriquez, Henry Salvador Duran Ramirez, Rigoberto Montoya

Rodriguez, Oscar Edwin Bonilla, Roberto A. Bonilla Urban, Jaime David Pineda, Candelario Abarca Pineda.

**DORMITORY FOUR.** — Jorge Alberto Ventura Muncia, Hector Amilcar Alvarado, Herber Armando Flores, Alex Vicente Ruano, Orlando Dapovero Rodriguez Machuca, Jose Francisco Ortiz, Jose Arnulfo Valencia, Ovidio Jacinto-martir, Roger Blandino Nerio, Otto Jaime Porillo, Ovidio Antonio Lopez, Jorge Alberto del Cid, Jose Antonio Morales Carbonel, Reyes Guzman Ramirez, Eduardo Joaquin Lemus Cahas, Ruben Garcia Menjivar, Carlos Alberto Carrizo, Jose Luis Martinez Ceiso, Rafael Antonio Calzas.

**DORMITORY FIVE.** — Ricardo Ernesto Calderon, Manuel Adan Mejia Rodriguez, Carlos Humberto Henriquez, Jorge Ferrer Denis, Gilberto de Jesus Garcia, Miguel Angel Parada, Jorge Alberto Gomez, Arias Jose Eduardo Campos Reales.

**DORMITORY SIX.** — Santos Rivera Calzada, Hector Bernabe Recinos, Juan Santos Flores, Jorge Artiga, Oscar Garza, Cnedor Asencio, Aracadio Rauda Menjivar, Victor Manuel Monterrosa, Raul Escamilla, Jose Arnulfo Grande, Javier Alicia Aguilar, Guillermo Antonio Oliva Montoya, Jose Agustin Romero Vasquez, Jose Eduardo Morales Rodriguez, Jose Salomon Hernandez, Jorge Alberto Hernandez, Oscar Armanco Castillo, Gilbert Torres Solano.

**DORMITORY SEVEN.** — Juan Jose Caceres Hernandez, Jose Riquelme Mendez, Dide, Fidel Vizcarra Paacios, Jose Carmen Fabian Muñoz, Carlos Manuel Avilos Ayala, Jose Rafael Martinez Segura, Oscar Arnolfo Aguirre Porfido, Juan Antonio Cisneros, Douglas Anbal Moran Madrid, Calixto Galo Choto, Manuel de Jesus Menjivar Peha, Israel Trejos Castillo.

ical subjects in any way, which includes workers' rights and the deaths of workers. This also included newspapers. That is, when we went on strike."

The unionists were given the same sort of trial as the journalists but the disturbing thing about their case is that all documentation about it has been "lost" and that they no longer officially exist.

In El Salvador, such a situation has very ominous overtones. But, as they were "true to the cause of the workers", they did not hesitate to discuss the politics of the country.

"This Government does not represent the people. This Government does not exist according to the constitution of El Salvador," they said.

"Repression is the first quality of this Government because this Government is not able to resolve the problems of this country by peace. The liberty of forming unions is no longer present. Most of the leaders of other unions are now political prisoners at other centres.

"Many unionists at the present time are either missing or dead. Including the teachers' union, several thousand have disappeared. The teachers suffer a lot from the Government. Most of the people you will find killed in the streets and the countryside are teachers."

The unionists went on: "We feel that the Democratic Revolutionary Front is the only representative of the people and their interests. We would like you to send a message to all of the workers, unionists and people in your

country. We hope you sympathise with us in our situation."

Most of the unionists are not allowed to see their families on visiting day. All managed to smile and give me warm handshakes, although it is very likely that they will soon be dead.

**PROFESSORS:** Seven professors and a former employee of the university in San Salvador were the next group I spoke to. They were very suspicious that I might be a Government agent and questioned me closely before allowing me to question them. They included the director of the university, the head of the medical faculty, the head of the economics faculty and the head of the law faculty.

They said: "The real charge against us is that we belong to the consul of the university. This is the last action (by the Government) in regard to the university as it is now closed.

"The campaign against the university was begun with the second junta, that is, the present one."

There had been systematic persecution, kidnapping and assassination of professors and students of the university. Hundreds of students and many professors have been assassinated.

The university had been surrounded by soldiers, who fired on it, killing many people.

Explosives had been detonated against the wall of the auditorium while there were students in it and the library was destroyed in a bazooka attack.

There was then the final assault on 26 June last year when the university was totally occupied

by the troops. The result was 40 deaths. There had been no resistance to the troops by students or the faculty.

All of the equipment in the university had either been destroyed or stolen and then sold by the soldiers. A junta commission put the cost of the destruction and theft at about \$A7 million, but it is thought to have been more.

On 26 October last year the previous director of the university and president of the International University Service based in Geneva, Felix Antonio Ulla, was taken about 100 metres from the university and assassinated by the paramilitary.

A senior academic was arrested while attending a reunion to mark the beginning of a new semester.

They said: "We were not working in political activity, we were working on university business. No charge can be considered against us within the constitution of this country."

The professors claimed that after they were arrested soldiers went to their homes and intimidated their families and said they had found weapons there.

"There was no explanation for our arrest," they said. "We have not appeared before a court."

They said it had been decided that all employees of the university will not receive any further salaries. "But we are still working with the same responsibilities from inside the jail.

"This represents one more military action against the people by the Government," they said.

They said the Government had no legal status, that it was unpopular and was "like Chile and Argentina. They have no respect for any legal or human rights of the people."

"Economically, the country has hit rock bottom," they said. "It is a catastrophic situation and the \$300 million (President) Duarte is begging from Reagan would not be enough to alter anything because we don't have anything, any productivity in the country to invest the money into."

They said the Democratic Revolutionary Front was a broad umbrella group which represented many political views and was the only true popular representative of the majority of the people.

The professors then asked if they could thank the universities of the world for their support and the international Press for telling the story of the country.

The prisoners of the jail then elected a spokesman who came forward with a request: If the Press in other countries could print their names there would be a better chance that they might one day live to be free.

Large letters on a dormitory wall spelled out: "Liberdad o muerte — venceremos (death or freedom — we will win).