

the making of Tupamaro lore from the outside, a lore integrated and adapted into Uruguayan legend. Ironically, this lore phenomenon could be brought to cyclical conclusion should the Tupamaros themselves come to accept this legend as fact.

In sum, once we begin to examine the realms of cinemalope, we can see that such films as *State of Siege* have value mainly in relation to their capacity for formulating and transmitting lore, a value not to be denied but to be studied.

The Uruguay That Never Was: A Historian Looks at Costa-Gavras's *State of Siege*

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The French writer Paul Nizan once remarked that the diplomatic correspondent was the historian of the present. Perhaps a generation or so ago that was still true; in the contemporary period the honor has passed in the industrial countries to television, and in Latin America, to the novel and especially to motion pictures. The cinema is a late-blooming Latin American art form and bears all of the marks of its recent emergence. Since in many cases it follows rather than precedes the advent of television—in marked contrast to Europe and the United States—it has rapidly developed a style which might be called “documentary”: to speak here of a “social” or “political” cinema is nearly redundant, for clearly all important Latin American films are about politics. For one thing, in many of the republics there is simply nothing else for intellectuals to talk about; for another, no single aspect of life capsulizes the tensions generated by underdevelopment so much as the political scene; for yet another, almost no other kind of film stands a chance in a highly competitive export market.

The same rules apply to outsiders when they approach the region with a motion picture camera. Since for the inhabitants of the North Atlantic countries the abstractions “Latin America,” “unrest,” and “revolution” are all one and the same thing, many foreign filmmakers find it difficult to imagine

nonpolitical themes for productions set south of the U.S. border.¹ And when the cineast in question is a European, particularly one with leftist leanings and intellectual pretensions, the film habitually depicts the grim reality of U.S. imperialism, not only because it is good box office in Paris and Milan (and now, in New York and Iowa City), but also because, for an extraordinary number of Europeans (and a growing host of Americans), "Latin America" has no internal life of its own, a life rich in contradictions and conflict, but rather survives as a kind of picturesque extension of the U.S. Department of State, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the United Fruit Company. Such, at any rate, is the Latin America—and specifically the Uruguay—which provides the setting for Costa-Gavras's most recent political thriller, *State of Siege* (1973).

Created by the director of *Z* and *The Confession* and scripted by Franco Solinas (*The Battle of Algiers*, *Burn!*), *State of Siege* has enjoyed an international success. Although banned in Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile (by both Allende and the junta), it broke all records for a first-week run when it opened in Buenos Aires in August, 1973. Although its commercial success in the United States has been somewhat limited (owing in part to the barbarously dubbed English version), it continues to enjoy wide and continuous exhibition on American university campuses; in Europe, especially in France, where it requires no subtitles, it has become a contemporary film classic.

This is so—let it be said immediately—not merely because Costa-Gavras and Solinas have successfully exploited so many misconceptions and prejudices about Latin America: *State of Siege* is excellent entertainment. Filmed in Chile with an international cast, marvelously photographed and edited, it utilizes authentic settings and human types to the point that it can be said that here, practically for the first time, southern South America appears on the screen as it really "is." At the same time, *State of Siege* fully exploits the rich dramatic possibilities inherent in a crime of international consequence, the kidnapping by leftist guerrillas of an American police expert on loan to a South American government. The structure of the film calls for the parallel development of two themes: the frantic search by the local government—unpopular, and under strong harassment from both left and right—for the victim, hopefully unharmed; and the simultaneous attempt by the guerrillas to

¹Of course, there are scenarists who are attracted to Latin American themes primarily because they like to write about politics. For example, Franco Solinas, who in addition to writing film scripts is an active member of the Italian Communist Party, has declared that "I write scenarios which generally deal with political themes because in my opinion politics is a fundamental matter. I'm not interested in psychological stories; I have no use for literature in the traditional sense, the continual repetition of the same old patterns turned out with varying degrees of taste and intelligence, and presenting problems that are always personal and in the end uninteresting. This sort of story can only serve to shock and confuse the audience and cannot give it a key for understanding reality." "Interview with Costa-Gavras and Solinas," in Constantin Costa-Gavras and Franco Solinas, *State of Siege* (New York, 1973), p. 141.

negotiate the release of all political prisoners through an exchange. These two lines are periodically interrupted by flashbacks on the life of the American agent, which in their totality provide not only a background to the kidnapping itself, but a moral justification for the execution which follows. Although Costa-Gavras and Solinas reveal the "ending" in the first few minutes, it is a tribute to their cinematic skill that they are nonetheless capable of generating the kind of tension normally associated with the conventional suspense film. Finally, and perhaps here one merely expresses a personal preference, *State of Siege* affords the irresistible fascination of witnessing history close up: at the U.S. Embassy and in the Ministry of Interior; at the University and in the Chamber of Deputies; in the State Department and the National Palace—and in the eye of the storm, the "people's prison," where the sole object of a national dragnet is being held. Above all, there is the sense of traveling to a far country, underscored by the wonderfully gothic quality of the physical settings, particularly the National Palace and the University. There, archaic windows and doors, illuminated by a dull, gray backlight, flank Second Empire furniture and draperies, whose musty textures depict, in an apparently uncontrived but unmistakable manner, the decadence not only of a government, but of an entire way of life.

Had the creators of so fascinating a motion picture been willing to recognize a clear boundary between art and life, there would be little reason to quibble over the actual historical details upon which it is based. But since they have so unambiguously claimed for their film all of the prerogatives of a documentary, they must allow their work to be judged by the canons which normally apply to that genre.² What follows, then, are a series of caveats which occurred to the writer after a third viewing of *State of Siege* and subsequent study of the script and the accompanying published materials. They are inspired, and I hope informed, by a long acquaintance with Uruguay and by residence in both Montevideo and Buenos Aires during the entire period depicted in the motion picture. These observations do not, of course, qualify as film criticism except in the broadest sense of the term. They are, rather, an attempt at intelligent commentary by an observer and student of the "reality" which *State of Siege* pretends to replicate.

²This contradiction is apparently resolved for some by calling films such as *State of Siege* a "fictional documentary." (See Joan Mellen, "Film and Style: The Fictional Documentary," *The Antioch Review*, 32:3 (1973), 403-425.) Unfortunately this category could be meaningful only to professional filmmakers, critics, and political intellectuals—if even to them. The general public has but slight grasp of the concept of cinematic fiction, and normally regards even highly stylized political films such as *Joe* (1969) as "real." When the film in question has all of the rough edges of a television news film and rigorously replicates the setting and texture of an actual event, it is regarded as a "documentary" by the viewing public, and probably rightly so. Such concepts as "fictional documentary" strike me as casuistic devices intended to relieve the filmmaker of the full responsibility for the accuracy of his material.

Before we begin, however, it might be useful to review some of the actual events which form the background of the film. On July 31, 1970, partisans of the Uruguayan Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN), also known as Tupamaros, simultaneously abducted from their homes in Montevideo American police advisor Dan Mitrione and Brazilian Consul Aloysio Mares Dias Gomide. Two other intended targets, Michael Jones, second secretary of the U.S. Embassy, and Nathan Rosenfeld, U.S. Cultural Attaché, managed to evade their captors and escape. As was customary, the purpose of the kidnappings was eminently political—to secure the release of a number of leftist and trade union leaders jailed by the government. When President Jorge Pacheco Areco vehemently refused to bargain with the kidnappers, on August 7 they abducted American AID agronomist Claude Fly. And at almost the same time a manhunt virtually without precedent in Uruguayan history yielded some sixty suspected Tupamaros, including lawyer Raúl Sendic, generally believed to be the founder of the group. On August 9, their sense of urgency increased, the MLN announced that unless all political prisoners were set free, Mitrione would be executed. After hurried consultation with Washington, the Uruguayan government reiterated its refusal, and a few hours thereafter the corpse of Mitrione was found stuffed into a 1948 Chevrolet convertible parked in a suburb of Montevideo. Dias Gomide and Fly were released unharmed some months later.

Except for the return of Dias Gomide and Fly, all of the events enumerated above are depicted in the film more or less in the order in which they occurred. Only the names are changed—or omitted altogether. Mitrione becomes Philip M. Santore (pronounced, in the American manner, San-tor); Claude Fly becomes Mr. Snow; Dias Gomide becomes Fernando Campos B.; and Jones and Rosenfeld are metamorphosed into Anthony Lee, second secretary of the U.S. Embassy. One figure is apparently fictitious—Carlos Ducas, an elderly journalist whose inexhaustible energy and tenacious curiosity eventually unearth the true nature of Santore and his mission within the country. We say “apparently fictitious,” because Ducas is obviously modeled closely on Carlos Quijano, publisher of the left-wing intellectual weekly *Marcha*.

Alas, to faithfully depict events “as they happened” does not amount to explaining or interpreting them properly. This is preeminently the case in the miscast portrayal of Mitrione/Santore by the distinguished French actor Yves Montand. The script calls for something more than a transplanted Indiana cop; at all events, Santore resembles no American policeman this writer has ever met or heard about. To start with, Santore possesses a kind of Satanic elegance: as the script indicates, he is “dressed in a dark, well-cut suit”; his face “shows little emotion; he is obviously in control of himself.”³ He lives

³*State of Siege*, p. 29. Subsequent quotations from *State of Siege* are from the edition cited. The page reference follows the quotation in the text.

in a house in Montevideo which “resembles a home in any American town” (p. 44), which is conceivable provided the town in question is Bel-Air, California or Palm Beach, Florida. Above all, he is endowed with a kind of dialectical skill which is at least the equal, and at times the superior, of that possessed by his captors, who after all are supposed to be Marxists.

SANTORE. I don't meddle in politics. . . . I'm a technician. . . . There might appear to be some contradictions. But . . . I'm a traffic and communications technician, and the problems are the same whether you're dealing with a democracy or a dictatorship. . . . [p. 46]

HUGO (Tupamaro interrogator). And the Brazilian bishops who denounced the tortures, are they Communists too?

SANTORE. Who knows? . . . [p. 47]

SANTORE. Our task [in the Dominican Republic, 1965-66] was to reorganize the police force and to restore order.

HUGO. What type of order, Mr. Santore?

SANTORE. Civil order! Which is the opposite of chaos, theft, and looting.

HUGO. You must mean the order of the United Fruit Co., don't you? And the role of the other Yankee companies in Latin America? [p. 62]

On one hand, Santore is a kind of police ideologist, a worthy companion of Victor Hugo's Javert. “Governments come and go,” he declares in one of the pithier statements in the film, “the police remain” (p. 73).

HUGO. You belong to a special breed?

SANTORE. You might say so, yes. . . . We're cut out for law and order, which means we don't care much for change. We're conservatives.

HUGO. Here a lot of people turn cop because they're hungry, not because they're cut out for it.

SANTORE. Yes, but they join the police force. While others, if they're hungry, turn into thieves.

HUGO. You think hunger leaves a man a choice?

SANTORE. I think a man, a *real* man, always chooses. [p. 74]

On the other hand, he is a highly polished Cold War dialectician, who sounds as if he spent most of his spare time reading Gerhart Niemeyer, Stefan Possony and Robert Strausz-Hupé, and perhaps (strictly for methodological purposes) Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

HUGO. You say you're defending freedom and democracy. . . . Your methods are war, fascism, and torture. . . . Surely you agree with me, Mr. Santore?

SANTORE. You are subversives, Communists. You want to destroy the foundations of our society, the fundamental values of Christian civilization, the very existence of the free world. You are an enemy who must be fought in every possible way.

HUGO. I don't think we have anything more to say to each other.

SANTORE. I don't either. . . . [p. 100]

SANTORE (to ESTE, another Tupamaro interrogator). As for you, you have no choice. If you kill me, it will be an act of cruelty and impotence. If you don't kill me, it will be a proof of weakness, thus of impotence. [p. 124]

Anything being possible, one cannot say that such a policeman, even such an American policeman, might not exist; although it requires an enormous stretch of the imagination, perhaps he might find his way into the overseas operations of the Agency for International Development. And pushing the matter to its ultimate extreme, perhaps he might even land in Uruguay. But he would not resemble the real Dan Mitrione in the slightest. This we know because the Tupamaros published their interrogations of Mitrione after his death, and those dialogues were fully available to Costa-Gavras and Solinas, who claim that they recast them for dramatic purposes, but that they remain "faithful to the spirit of his character and [that] of the Tupamaros" (p. 154). Here are some selections; let the reader decide.

MITRIONE. . . . let me say this, I hope you get the problems solved before you have to kill any more on either side. That doesn't accomplish anything, really.

TUPAMARO. Ah, we hope it too, but we don't see it very soon.

MITRIONE. I hope so. Miracles have happened before. The thing I say is that the Tupamaros . . . are not people from Mars. You are all Uruguayans . . . that want to see your government do things, what you consider better, because it isn't a case like in the United States, where we do have a very definite separation between the black and the white.

TUPAMARO. That's a pretty rough problem, isn't it?

MITRIONE. Oh yes, my goodness, it is a rough problem. But here you don't have that. Everybody is an Uruguayan, but the philosophy and the ideology is different, that's all.

TUPAMARO. Yes, and it's pretty hard to do it without violence, you know. I've been trying for long before I decided to work with violence, you know. I didn't care about my life, I cared about hunger and exploitation.

MITRIONE. I'm strictly at your mercy, really. And I understand that. . . . Well, the only thing I regret about all this: I don't like one thing and that is that too many innocent people suffer. My wife and children, there is no reason for them to be suffering.

TUPAMARO. I have a wife and children too, but you know, you do it for money and I don't. You choose your work and the States choose a political way to do things and you are engaged with your country and so you are under your own law.

MITRIONE. Yeah.

TUPAMARO. I am sorry about them too. I am sorry about other families of all friends who are in prison being tortured or killed. There are many really, many innocent people have to suffer. But do you know about one million boys and girls under five years die every year in Latin America?

MITRIONE. Of hunger?

TUPAMARO. Yes sir, and that is not a way of control, birth control, you know. And how do you feel about other guerrilla movements. You know that we don't work all the same way. You have seen that.

MITRIONE. Well, every one of them has to work according to his surroundings. What everyone can work best. From what I have read, I think that the Tupamaros are a little bit smarter than some of the others, because Tupamaros don't kill unless they have to. I think the others indiscriminately kill. I think they shoot and ask questions later. . . .

TUPAMARO. What do you think is going to happen with all Latin America?

MITRIONE. Well, Latin America is going to be all right. I don't care, I don't know how long it is going to take, but there are people who love life, there are people in every country who love life. Governments have problems, but some day it's going to be solved, you mark my words.

TUPAMARO. Yes.

MITRIONE. It's going to be solved. All these buildings and all these stores and all these schools and all these football fields are not accidents. They were built by intelligent people. They are not going to be destroyed overnight.

TUPAMARO. No, we hope not.

MITRIONE. No, I know they are not. It's just going to be a case of how long it is going to take. Some countries will take longer than others.⁴

Now, there is no point in claiming that Mitrione was a political innocent. Attached to the published version of the script is a summary of his activities provided by "Police Inspector X," which claims that while "advising" the Uruguayan security forces his innovations included the establishment of a spy underground in high schools to assemble dossiers on rebellious student leaders, the placing of hidden cameras at Carrasco International Airport to photograph persons leaving for socialist countries, the use of agents provocateurs to discredit and confuse left-wing movements, the introduction of explosives for political purposes, and so on. Since "Inspector X" remains anonymous, there is no way of establishing the veracity of his allegations. But at the very least, we might hazard the judgment that Mitrione was a man engaged in dangerous, highly paid work which, whatever its official cover, amounted to espionage. He was not a humanitarian and he was not engaged in the reestablishment of "law and order" in the conventional sense (although that fact was determined as much as anything else by preexisting Uruguayan conditions). But neither was he the elegant police ideologist-cum-Cold War intellectual represented by Philip M. Santore. Rather, he was something more and less than this: he was, at least insofar as the published documentation allows us to

⁴From *Dialogue before Death* (Washington, 1971), quoted in Nathan A. Haverstock and Richard C. Schroeder, eds., *Dateline Latin America: A Review of Trends and Events of 1970* (Washington, 1971), pp. 14-15. To judge by the rather curious syntax of the interrogator, these dialogues took place in English.

infer, a brutal and ruthless American policeman whose authoritarian impulses simply got out of control in an environment in which he was subject to few restrictions, in which the "enemy" professed the (to him) supreme heresy of Marxism and appeared capable of effectively subverting the government, perhaps of bringing it down altogether. The difference is important: Montand conceives the character he plays in terms of "a perfectly respectable man . . . [sharing] certain parallel[s] with a convinced Stalinist . . . a man on the Right who is equally convinced of his own righteousness" (p. 139). But this merely makes Santore a tragic, possibly even a heroic, figure, depending merely on the ideological predisposition of the audience.⁵ The real Mitrione lacked Santore's precise if amoral calculus of means and ends; and he filtered the world around him through an ideological prism which was extraordinarily distorted in its refractions. In the "people's prison" he was by turns frightened, cowardly, and morose, and at all times obsequious to his captors. But Costa-Gavras and Solinas cannot allow that his was the banality of evil, for that would amount to admitting that Americans are not ten feet tall, that their operatives can be contemptible rather than fearsome, and above all, that their intelligence and espionage apparatus is not the omnipotent force in Latin America (and elsewhere) which their conspiratorial imagination requires.⁶

This last point is important as well, for in order to explain the nature, origins, and purpose of Mitrione's activities, Costa-Gavras and Solinas find it necessary to explore the larger relationship between the United States and Uruguay. Here too, the result is something less than successful. As defined early in the film, the motive force of U.S. policy is economic.

DUCAS (to the representative of the AID). Whether it's by drinking beer, swallowing aspirin, brushing his teeth, cooking in an aluminum pan, using a refrigerator, or

⁵This apparently was the reason why the Allende government chose not to buy the film, after extending full facilities to the company when it was working in Chile (evidence to me of a Santiago-based West German journalist).

⁶This imagination excuses not even Claude Fly, the AID agronomist, represented as Mr. Snow in the film. As Costa-Gavras explains, Fly was an "intelligent, witty man," but "with all his sincerity" his report on the country's agriculture "could help bring about certain changes, but also—and above all—provide the United States with information on the country's agricultural situation." And what would the U.S. do with this information? Solinas suggests that Fly's report "would give a particular direction to the country's economy, indeed the direction most useful to the United States and the American economy. If Fly thought that a collective economy in agriculture would be more useful to the country's necessities, his plan would never be put into practice because it cannot be reconciled with the pattern and interests of the United States, or the interests of the bourgeoisie and national oligarchies allied to the United States" (p. 155). It is unclear whether Mr. Fly is a one-man barrier between latifundia and agrarian reform in Uruguay, or whether his (presumably good) advice would be ignored by the government which dispatched him. It seems strange to those of us more familiar with the day-to-day operations of the U.S. government that at no point is it suggested that Mr. Fly's activities might lead nowhere—for good or for ill.

heating a room . . . every day, each citizen of my country contributes to the development of your economy. This contribution takes on full significance when we enter the military sphere. [p. 41] [From gunshot to cannonshot, from mere jeep to tank or plane, our economy contributes to maintaining your armaments monopoly.]⁷

As members of the cabinet pass from their limousines to the Presidential Palace, Ducas reviews their extensive economic connections, especially with American firms. Thus, we are told that the Minister of Economy is president of four corporations, two of them American; the Minister of Foreign Affairs represents the Rockefeller group in Uruguay; the influential Clan Herbert heads seven corporations, three of them American. The evidence is clear: the United States, possessing a strong economic stake in Uruguay, cannot afford to be indifferent to its political life.

Unfortunately such crude economic determinism generates far more heat than light. In the first place, Uruguay has not for many years been a particularly golden field of investment for U.S. overseas capital, or for investment from any other foreign or domestic source.⁸ This is due not to the instability of its political life, which is a relatively recent development, but rather to a series of reforms dating back to the First World War which established a mixed economy. As one U.S. government publication characterized that economy in 1970, "most sectors [are] effectively controlled by the State, either directly or through public agencies. [The] State [is] also engaged in industrial and commercial activities, in some cases as a monopoly and in others in partnership with private companies."⁹ We infer here not that Uruguay possesses a socialist economic system in the full sense of the term, but rather, that at the time of the Mitrione affair it was a South American welfare state, possessing a correspondingly large administrative structure and an oversized bureaucracy which frequently made the principal companies (such as PLUNA, the state airline, or the Frigorífico Nacional, the state meat-packing house) unprofitable from a strictly economic point of view.

Accurate and up-to-date figures on investment in Uruguay by the United States (or any other country, for that matter) are extraordinarily hard to come by, but we do know that most of the major American concerns in southern South America have preferred to base their operations in either Argentina or

⁷The comment in brackets is not spoken in the film; whether it was excised for technical or for political reasons is not clear.

⁸The total fixed investment in Uruguay declined from 17.2 percent of the gross national product in 1955 to 11 percent in 1964, "at which level the net capital formation would be virtually nil." (Anon.), "Uruguay: The Difficulties of Economic Reform," *Bank of London and South America Review*, II, 22 (1968), p. 559. U.S. investment in Uruguay actually dropped from \$55M in 1950 to \$47M ten years later. See Hugh Holly, "External Finance," in Claudio Véliz, ed., *Latin America and the Caribbean: A Handbook* (New York, 1968), p. 531.

⁹Thomas E. Weil et al., *Area Handbook for Uruguay*, Department of the Army Pamphlet 550-597 (Washington, 1971), p. viii.

Brazil, except for IBM, SUDAMTEX, and a General Motors distributorship. This is not surprising, given Uruguay's economic geography. Its population of about three million is too small to support a large domestic market for finished goods, and it lives largely through the export of agricultural staples (which earn 97 percent of the country's foreign exchange). Wool accounts for approximately half of these staples; beef and arable crops comprise the remainder. The principal production units for export agriculture are sheep and cattle estancias, owned and operated by Uruguayans, and in a few cases by Argentines and Brazilians (such as former Brazilian President João Goulart). Such American concerns as the King Ranch, which recently bought land in the Argentine province of Corrientes to develop a new breed of cattle, are conspicuously absent from Uruguay. Nor is the pattern of her foreign trade one which would lead one to suppose a crushing dependence on the United States. The figures in Table 1 reveal a pattern of foreign trade relationships remarkably diverse for a Latin American country.

TABLE 1. Pattern of Uruguay's Foreign Trade, 1968

Sources of Imports		Destination of Exports	
Country or Area	Percentage of total	Country or Area	Percentage of total
USA	22.5	USA	12.1
Latin America	30.4	Latin America	11.1
EUROCOM	17.4	EUROCOM	26.7
Great Britain	4.6	Great Britain	21.1
Rest of AELC ^a	6.6	Rest of AELC	4.2
Rest of W. Europe	— ^b	Rest of W. Europe	13.3
Eastern Europe	— ^b	Eastern Europe	4.0
Asia	13.4 ^c	Asia	7.0
Oceania	— ^b	Oceania	— ^b
Africa	2.5	Africa	— ^b

^aAsociación Europea de Libre Comercio.

^bPercentages too negligible to be included.

^cIncludes Kuwait, from which Uruguay bought considerable amounts of petroleum.

SOURCE: Adapted from Instituto de Economía (FCEA), Universidad de la República, *Uruguay, estadísticas básicas* (Montevideo, 1969), pp. 72 and 76.

These figures do not, of course, tell the entire story. Uruguay is bound to the United States in a variety of ways which are not reflected in trade statistics and is a party to U.S.-sponsored hemispheric defense treaties; it receives from the United States military missions, technical aid, surplus foods, Fulbright

professors and students, Peace Corps volunteers, Walt Disney films, and the Spanish version of *Reader's Digest*. Probably many of the replacement parts for its industrial machinery, much of its new technology, and some vital raw materials are of North American origin. And it would be naïve indeed to suppose that because of a lack of direct U.S. investment or a predominantly European orientation to foreign trade, that the United States is without influence in Uruguay. But following the logic at least partly outlined in *State of Siege*, Mitrione might as well have been a German, an Englishman—possibly even a Kuwaiti! Yet of course we know this is unlikely. The reason is cleverly glossed over by the film: namely, that the principal motives of U.S. policy in Uruguay are ideological and strategic. (There can be no mistaking the scenarist's intention, since he makes the same error when referring to the Dominican Republic and the United Fruit Company.) Yet nothing else so successfully explains the intransigence of the U.S. government on this issue as the lack of a major economic referent. Had there been a significant American investment community in Uruguay, its leaders might well have urged a conciliatory policy upon Washington, judging by the way such other communities have acted in the past toward Latin American regimes fundamentally friendly to their interests.¹⁰ In such a case, the U.S. might well have acted just as Ducas (erroneously) predicts in the film that it will act, namely, to "compel the President [of Uruguay] and the government . . . to accept the exchange and release of all the political prisoners."¹¹ Instead, the U.S. opted to fight the matter out to the bitter end, conscious of the irreparable damage it would inflict upon the fabric of Uruguayan political life and mindful of the inevitable sentence of death it would visit upon one of its valued and trusted agents. The reason, we repeat, was fundamentally ideological. On one hand, the kidnapping of Mitrione threatened to reveal how easily a handful of determined partisans could humiliate the security forces of a Latin American government and render it utterly incapable of protecting foreign residents. On the other, it presented Washington with the specter of an entirely new (and possibly successful) revolutionary strategy—urban guerrilla warfare. Given Latin America's vast and rapidly growing urban population, this strategy seemed to offer far greater opportunities for social rebellion (if not revolution) than those afforded by the Castro model of a peasant-based insurgency, a model which had been tried throughout the 1960s in many countries and was found wanting.

¹⁰Two historical precedents come immediately to mind: the cases of Cuban dictators Gerardo Machado (1924-1933) and Fulgencio Batista (1952-1959). Where the local opposition poses no serious threat to the regime, the rule is obviously inoperative. Nor is it valid if the government in power is believed irreconcilably hostile to the interests of the U.S. investment community, as in the cases of Ramón Grau San Martín in Cuba (1933), Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala (1954), or Salvador Allende in Chile (1970-1973).

¹¹*State of Siege*, p. 80.

Finally, as in much of its history, Uruguay may have been a victim of geography. Sandwiched between the two colossuses of the south, Argentina and Brazil, it could not be allowed (from Washington's point of view) to degenerate into chaos or revolution, for fear of the contagion spreading to contiguous areas where the U.S. (and other investing countries) really do possess important economic as well as political interests.

Doubtless some would rush to defend the film on the grounds that this critique has been too literal, contending that whatever the facts may be, Uruguay has merely been used as a convenient allegory for Latin America. Thus Franco Solinas declared in an interview that "for us, the general theme of the processes of imperialism was more important than the history of a single country." To which Costa-Gavras added, "Of course, Uruguay is not the main character. It is the background, the environment to which our 'character' comes and in which he plays his part and dies" (p. 153). The problem is that the filmmakers go out of their way to establish a purely Uruguayan locale. Portraits of Artigas grace every government office; the seal of the republic appears on the ministries and on the desk of the President as he addresses the nation on television; the police are dispatched to Pocitos, Plaza Garibaldi, El Cerro, La Rambla—actual districts of Montevideo; the airport is clearly identified as Carrasco. Had the makers of *State of Siege* wished to enhance its "Latin American" setting, they certainly could have omitted these and other details, all the more so since the film was actually made in Chile. Instead, they wished to "document" Uruguay and have it stand at the same time for Latin America as a whole. The result is a distortion of two realities instead of one.

Just how Costa-Gavras and Solinas might have depicted "Latin America" if they had set out to do so is difficult to say, for in their view the sinister hand of the United States determines virtually every aspect of the region's political, economic, and cultural life. In the most revealing statement of the interview previously cited, Solinas frankly avows that "from a political point of view, the basic problem of our epoch is actually the role of the policeman which the United States plays in the entire world." Concretely, in the case of his native Italy, we are told that "each time there is an attempt to stop the advance of the broad masses of the people, it is always supported by the U.S. through the usual diplomatic channels, through NATO, the secret services, the machinations and provocations organized directly or through intermediaries." Costa-Gavras chimes in that "to take apart and explain this mechanism in Latin America, Vietnam, or Europe is in effect the same thing" (p. 146). Anyone who can believe that the intervention of the United States is the major reason why Italy does not now have a Marxist government can surely convince himself that the same holds true for Latin America. For if the industrialists of Milan, the urban bourgeoisie, the Catholic Church, the conservative (if benighted) peasantry, and the Mafia can all be ignored by an Italian, how much

easier it must be for him to pretend that in the case of Latin America there are virtually no authentic national interests favoring the preservation of the status quo!

Curiously enough, this interpretation is sometimes regarded as convenient by certain kinds of Latin American conservatives, particularly those charged with the unlovely task of shoring up the established order through force and violence. Costa-Gavras tells us that a few days after Mitrione's kidnapping, Alejandro Otero, the police commissioner in charge of the information bureau, told a Brazilian journalist that "it was Mitrione who introduced systematic torture into Uruguay" (p. 149). We have no way of knowing whether the good commissioner winked at the newsman when he said this, or whether the latter wrote up the matter tongue in cheek. Nor can we properly evaluate the claim by an "unidentified police commissioner" (what a passion for anonymity these men have!) that Mitrione brought an "electrode torture device" to Uruguay in his diplomatic bags. Nor can we know what relationship exists—if any—between the arrival of Mitrione in Montevideo and the report of an investigative commission of the Uruguayan parliament that "in the last several months [of 1969-70], with political prisoners, the use of torture had become systematic" (p. 151). On such shaky and inconclusive evidence, Costa-Gavras and Solinas rush in to make the electrode torture story the *pièce de résistance* of their case against Mitrione. First, in a horrifying sequence set somewhere in Brazil, Santore's policemen-students are "instructed" in the use of the device—on a live subject, of course. Then, in rapid succession we see him arrive to take up his post in the Dominican Republic, then Uruguay. On both occasions he steps off the plane with his wife, his children, and his macabre cargo marked "diplomatic baggage." Then, just to make sure we get the point, we see him bring the bags into a restricted section of police headquarters in Montevideo. In the presence of his highest ranking colleagues, they are opened; the contents provoke the same response as that of a child receiving a long dreamed-of toy for Christmas. In the end, even Santore alludes indirectly to his guilt, for when left alone with his fellow captive, Consul Campos, the following dialogue takes place.

CAMPOS. What could they possibly have against me?

SANTORE. Maybe not against you.

CAMPOS. Against whom, then?

SANTORE. Your government.

CAMPOS (silent for a moment, incredulous). Hold what against my government?

SANTORE. The tortures, for instance. [p. 56]

Now the International Police Academy is not precisely a training school for liberalism, but it is extremely doubtful that the use of electrode torture devices (or the techniques of torture in general) figure in the curriculum, either in Washington or in Latin America. And the reason is singularly depressing: the

use of torture in political interrogations is today a regrettably international practice, recognizing no ideological boundaries, and requiring a minimum of technology and practically no instruction whatever. In some countries it assumes a more violent or harmful aspect than others, depending on the degree of political stability, the traditions of democratic government (or absence of them), civilian control of the police, and so on.¹² One supposes, in other words, that policemen possess an innate desire to use, shall we say, forceful methods of interrogation, a drive which under normal circumstances and in the context of democratic government can be kept adequately (though one imagines, never completely) under control. But when a civilian government is humiliated by terrorists and faced with a national and international crisis of confidence (not to mention a serious economic slump), it can assert but little control over the conduct of its own security forces. This was pre-eminently the case in Uruguay, where in 1970 a long-established constitutional order notable for its commitment to the rule of law was in crisis. That crisis had its origins in a drastic drop in the world price of wool, in a generalized economic stagnation, in the exhaustion of political ideas and the decadence of established political parties—but also in the promiscuous use of violence by the “romantic” left. (Just how far the Tupamaros advanced the cause of sadism at police headquarters by abducting Mitrione and Dias Gomide will never be known.)

Our intent here is not to deny the existence of tortures, nor to absolve Mitrione from personal blame for whatever activities he might have become involved in, still less to excuse the United States government for fishing—however much or little—in the troubled waters of Uruguayan politics. But how ironic it is that two European filmmakers—and left-wing ones at that!—should come to pardon the Uruguayan establishment for its failures in the economic field by blaming U.S. “imperialism,” or (even indirectly) to exempt from blame the Uruguayan police by accepting (even partly) its whining alibis when caught (literally) red-handed in the torture chambers. For clearly, to believe that they knew only occasionally the arts of “forceful interrogation” before Dan Mitrione got off the plane at Carrasco airport is to ask for a monumental—one might say almost biblical—suspension of doubt.¹³

¹²See the discussion of Alec Mellor, *La torture: son histoire, son abolition, sa réapparition au XX^e siècle* (Paris, 1949), pp. 193-247.

¹³The recent report of Amnesty International on this somber subject should give Costa-Gavras, Solinas, and other Europeans who idealize the peoples (and indirectly, the police) of “Third World” countries some cause for reflection. In Latin America, this document points out, “police brutality and harsh prison conditions have long been a traditional and largely accepted part of the social structure.” In such countries as Paraguay, for example, “the system of torture and repression is far less sophisticated than that of neighboring Brazil; yet it is extremely effective in a country like Paraguay with its history of dictatorship, low educational levels, and small town atmosphere.” It takes due note of the assertion that Latin America is suffering from the “internationalization” of torture, ranging from “claims that Brazilian and U.S. personnel are present

In part, of course, the problem is that Costa-Gavras and Solinas are not interested in Uruguay as such, as we have seen. Yet there must have been some second thoughts after the production was complete, for Solinas suggests rather wistfully that “it is perhaps regrettable that the 1968 period, this moment of the evolution of the country’s traditional order, does not appear in the film” (p. 153). Regrettable indeed, for it might explain a great deal, although not necessarily from the desired ideological perspective.

Once again, let us refer to some aspects of recent Uruguayan history. For all but nine of the last 114 years, Uruguay has been ruled by the Colorado Party, whose traditional base of power has been (at least in recent times) the middle and working classes of Montevideo. It was this party, through its most significant historic personality, President José Battle y Ordóñez (1903-1907; 1911-1915), which established during the first two decades of this century the apparatus of a secular, democratic welfare state. By 1958 a worsening economic situation encouraged a mood favorable to political change, and the voters returned the Blanco or Nationalist Party to power. Traditional spokesmen for the Church, the landed class, and the rural proletariat, as well as the principal entrepreneurial interests, the Blancos quickly disillusioned many voters, and in 1967 the Colorado candidate General Oscar Gestido was elected to the Presidency. When he died of a heart attack shortly after assuming office, he was succeeded by Jorge Pacheco Areco, a young lawyer and professor generally considered to be a political lightweight.

Pacheco Areco’s presidency was troubled from the very start. As the U.S.

at torture sessions” in Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay, to allegations that there are special “torture schools” in Brazil attended by “security personnel from other Latin American countries, and claims that torture equipment is imported directly from other countries.” It goes on to say, however, “owing to the very general nature of such allegations, and the lack of specific evidence, Amnesty International is unable to make any definitive comment upon them. It has, however, been frequently reported that the U.S.A. has financed and organized anti-subversive training courses for Latin American police units in Panama. It is also known that . . . the U.S. government has never publicly condemned the use of torture in Brazil and Uruguay. In financing and equipping the police and armies that have used torture, *it can be argued* that the U.S.A. bears a contributory responsibility for the methods used by those governments.” In the case of Paraguay, for example, the U.S. government is taken to task for “never [having] officially acknowledged or taken steps to prevent the use of torture by a government which appears to be very much within its sphere of influence.” Amnesty International, *Report on Torture* (London, 1973), pp. 178, 179-80, 196. Emphasis added.

This is not the place to discuss the morality of U.S. foreign policy in a general sense, least of all during the age of Kissinger. We cannot fail to emphasize, however, the distinction between the participation of overachievers like Mitrione in the interrogation of political prisoners and the systematic export of torture devices and techniques. Further, although U.S. support for Latin American dictatorships may well be reprehensible, it is difficult to imagine how, once having seen the light, Washington could successfully persuade its Latin American friends to abandon their repressive and inhumane practices. For this and other difficulties inherent in the problem, see the searching discussion by William S. Toll, “Human Nature and Moral Choice,” in *Peace and Change* 3:1 (1975), 61-64. I am grateful to Professor Toll for making available a prepublication copy of his essay, and also for calling my attention to the report of Amnesty International.

government publication previously cited explains, "When the Colorados returned to power in 1967, there was evidence of social unrest, especially in the ranks of organized labor and among pensioners whose real incomes were steadily declining and whose checks were often late in arriving." It was in this climate that the Tupamaros made their appearance, first as a kind of collective Robin Hood, "noted for robbing banks and casinos and distributing portions of the take among the poor."

In June, 1968, Pacheco chose to impose a series of extraordinary security measures which included price and wage controls and the prohibition of strikes and demonstrations; the most distasteful aspect of his rule, at least to civil libertarians, was his perpetuation of rule by decree and the freewheeling use of press censorship. The result was polarization of public opinion, in which the opposition Blancos lined up behind the President, while his own party made common cause with the radical left. Above all, this publication continues, "the police and the armed forces, as a result of their role in enforcing the security measures and their increasing outspokenness on policies, had somewhat diminished their reputation for being apolitical."¹⁴ (This last is surely a remarkable understatement.)

Now this is by all means a melancholy picture, and there is no point in defending the Pacheco government as a model of constitutional probity. Whatever casuistry the Uruguayan Supreme Court might employ to represent it as operating within the sphere of its legal powers, it is clear that in choosing to rule by decree and by breaking the link of accountability, it divested itself of a good measure of its legitimacy. But whether this qualifies it for the rubric of "fascist" is another matter.

Part of the problem here is an ambivalence on the part of Costa-Gavras (and a lot of other people, including myself) in classifying governments which are politically and socially conservative and are willing to use extraconstitutional measures against their legitimate opponents. On one hand, Costa-Gavras seems to suggest (to judge by *State of Siege*, and also *Z*), that in virtually *all* bourgeois governments it is the police who secretly rule, and when the civilian politicians try to control them, the police and military take power directly. ("Governments come and go; the police remain.") On the other hand, he intimates that the difference between bourgeois and fascist governments is really negligible, especially when viewed from the receiving end of a policeman's truncheon. This is an arresting thesis, to be sure, but it begs several crucial questions. Perhaps the Tupamaros were justified in using violence against a government which, though legally elected, had abandoned its commitment to constitutionalism. But since they were already engaged in their hit-and-run revolutionism prior to Pacheco's declaration of a state of

¹⁴Area Handbook for Uruguay, p. 269.

siege, is it not possible that they are at least partly responsible for it?¹⁵ Secondly, what did the intensification of violence yield from the point of view of the Tupamaros? Did it lead to the release of political prisoners? Did it persuade Pacheco to lift the state of siege? Did it strengthen the hand of those within his government and party (they *did* exist) who argued that it was time to engage in a dialogue with the opposition? Of course it did none of these things. But for Solinas and Costa-Gavras the Mitrione affair was a highly positive event in the history of Uruguay. To be sure, they conceded, "beginning in April, 1972, the National Liberation Movement suffered some reverses and the movement was badly hurt: underestimation on their part of the enemy's strength, a qualitative change in the repression, army and police applying an officially approved system of torture."

But [Costa-Gavras continues] the Tupamaros opened a path which has gotten results on the politico-military terrain of armed struggle. They also had a decisive influence on the coming together of the various forces of the Left, which, for the first time in Uruguayan history, opposed a united front to the traditional party. In fact, there has been a profound change in the people's political consciousness. [p. 147]

One wishes that Costa-Gavras had clearly specified what he considered the "results" obtained "on the politico-military terrain of armed struggle." As of this writing, the semimilitary regime of Juan Bordaberry has discarded all pretensions to legality, closed *Marcha* (and nearly a dozen more publications), jailed the country's most distinguished novelist on a charge of "pornography,"¹⁶ placed Uruguay in the Brazilian orbit, and seriously compromised its independence for the first time in more than a hundred years. Recent visitors to Montevideo (including myself in June, 1973) find in it a troubling resemblance to the Vienna of *The Third Man*: a defeated city, a shell of its former self, whose total expiration is but a matter of time. In Bordaberry's Uruguay—unlike that of Pacheco Areco—there are no investigative commissions of parliament (in fact, there is no parliament at all!), no inquiring journalists, no Tupamaros—and if things continue as they are now—there will be no Uruguayans.

¹⁵As Thomas Perry Thornton points out, "While in some cases the refusal of the incumbents [in any political system] to make constitutional provision for the transfer of power compels the insurgents to resort to extranormal means, at least equally often the insurgents utilize terror because they lack the political strength to make use of constitutional procedures that may be objectively adequate and just. They attempt to provoke the incumbents into repressive measures, in order then to claim that the incumbents have made constitutional machinery unavailable." "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation," in Harry Eckstein, ed., *Internal War: Problems and Approaches* (New York, 1964), p. 76. The Uruguayan case seems to fall somewhere between these two poles.

¹⁶Claude Fell, "Uruguay: la grande offensive policière contre la liberté culturelle," *Le monde diplomatique* (Paris), June, 1974, p. 14.

According to a report published in the Argentine press, an increasing number of Uruguayans are expressing their "profoundly changed political consciousness," not by going over to the revolutionary left, but by leaving the country altogether. Between 1968 and 1972, some 250,000 people emigrated—technicians, doctors, skilled workers, students, mostly between the ages of twenty and forty, many with small children. They are going wherever they can—many to Argentina, some to Brazil, others to Australia, Canada, or the United States. At the end of 1974 Uruguay probably had lost 400,000 people since 1968, about 15 percent of its total population and a far larger percentage of its economically active population.¹⁷ How those too old to leave will fare is not a pleasant subject for contemplation, but it is not to be supposed that they will provide the shock troops of a future "armed struggle."

To be sure, one cannot blame the Tupamaros alone for what is really a vast national tragedy, but neither can they evade the partial responsibility that is theirs. In the final scene of *State of Siege* Santore's replacement arrives at the airport, and as his family is packed into the waiting car on the tarmac, one of the maintenance men gives him a piercing glance. We recognize him from before: he was there when Santore arrived; presumably he is a Tupamaro operative. The message is clear—the struggle continues. But only for the audience, which goes home after enjoying a thrilling evening at the cinema. For Costa-Gavras's Tupamaros live in an Uruguay that does not really exist.

¹⁷Julio César Villaverde, "De mantenerse el éxodo actual, Uruguay perderá a 15 de cada cien habitantes," *La Opinión* (Buenos Aires), March 30, 1974, p. 4.

A State of Siege That Never Was

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In his lively essay "The Uruguay That Never Was: A Historian Looks at Costa-Gavras's *State of Siege*," (pp. 239-256, above) Professor Mark Falcoff repeatedly regrets that the film's distinguished director infused fact with fancy. Yet readers need not finish the first paragraph of the essay before they are awash in a mythology of Latin American film affirmed as fact. The Latin American cinema is by no means a late bloomer as Mr. Falcoff asserts. On the contrary, Latin Americans were making films within a few months after the Lumière brothers had projected their first films in Paris. The Argentine, Brazilian, and Mexican film industries witnessed some of their busiest years during the reign of the silent screen. Also, the Latin Americans' interest in documentary-style film long antedates the television era despite Mr. Falcoff's statements. In fact, that was their first interest. The pioneer filmmakers initially sought to capture "natural events" on celluloid and their concern with the present soon expanded to include curiosity about the past. They devoted much of their efforts to reconstructing history on film, and the past has provided a constant source of thematic material explored by successive generations of filmmakers. A remarkable early example of the efforts to fuse contemporary documentary with historical reconstruction was the unusual *El Último Malón* filmed in Argentina in 1917 by Alcides Greca. The film focused on an uprising of the Mocovi Indians in Santa Fé in April of 1904. The first part was purely documentary, using techniques which did not come into vogue until nearly half a century later. It showed the conditions of the