

# Uruguay resists George Bush's 'democratic new order'

by Silvia Palacios and Lorenzo Carrasco

In Uruguay, considered for a long time the "Switzerland" of Ibero-America because of its longstanding stability, its high living standards, and its heavy dependency on international financial speculation, a group of patriots has begun to resist the designs of George Bush's "new world order," especially in its manifest intention to dismantle the Armed Forces and maintain Uruguay as a buffer state in the Anglo-American geopolitical "balance of power" in the Southern Cone. In fact, this was precisely the role assigned to Uruguay by the Scottish Rite Freemasons so predominant in 19th-century British diplomacy in the Rio de la Plata region, a diplomacy openly adopted by Washington throughout the current century.

The most relevant aspect of Uruguay's nationalist resistance was reflected in the statements of Army Commander-in-Chief Gen. Juan Rebollo who, in bidding farewell last June 11 to the battalion that would be participating in the United Nations peacekeeping force in Cambodia, said that "two great powers have parted the world, and aligned allies to defend their concepts even in the most remote confines of the planet."

But, warned Rebollo, to the disgust of the U. S. embassy in the capital of Uruguay, Montevideo, "the bipolarity, as it manifested itself yesterday, no longer exists; currents of opinion have formed around world centers of power which seek to reduce the role of Third World armed forces to functions more appropriate to a national guard, with responsibilities for such matters as drug trafficking, ecological control, and circumstantial support for the police, to the detriment of their true mission, which is maintaining the peace and defending sovereignty."

According to the Uruguayan press, Defense Minister Mariano Brito declared, during testimony before the defense committee of the Uruguayan Congress' lower house, that he "disagreed with the solution proposed by the United States" with regard to the drug trade. Further provoking the concerns of the U. S. State Department, minister Brito told the defense committee that Air Force Commander-in-Chief Carlos Pache, speaking before a meeting in Honduras of air force officials concerned with continental defense, had taken a position against the formation of a military contingent to "defend democracy" on the continent.

The latter is a direct criticism of the position taken by

U.S. Ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS) Luigi Einaudi, following the civil-military uprising in Venezuela on Feb. 4 of this year against a corrupt "democracy" based on defending the free trade policies of the Enterprise for the Americas initiative. Einaudi at the time had insisted that an OAS military force should be deployed into Venezuela in the event of a coup there, to "defend democracy."

## Political system pilloried

Military resistance to President Bush's new world order could rapidly intersect the growing discontent against the Uruguayan political system today being expressed in the rural sector, the basis of Uruguay's real economy. Despite the fact that the agricultural sector has been traditionally sympathetic to free trade, the continued application of these "neo-liberal" policies has provoked a violent reaction by that sector against the increasing impoverishment and depopulation of the nation.

It is in this sense that the president of the powerful Rural Association of Uruguay, Carlos Enrique Gaspari, gave a speech last August at the cattlemen's exposition—in front of Uruguayan President Luis Alberto Lacalle, one of the Ibero-American standard-bearers of Bush's "democratic order"—in which he vehemently attacked the political system for its incapacity to offer solutions to the country's increasingly urgent needs. Gaspari emphasized that principal concerns include "the dysfunction of the entire political system, the lobbies and sectors' pressures against the state . . . the adaptation to the general framework of Mercosur [the free trade pact of the Southern Cone], and the opening and inter-relatedness with the rest of the world."

He specifically referred to the fact that if the policy of integration continues in the free trade mold, the crisis of the agricultural sector will worsen: "National agriculture," declared Gaspari, "has lost 32,000 producers in the past 30 years. If coordination in integrating with the regional market is not adequately carried out, that number will significantly increase."

The Uruguayan agricultural leader summed up his indignation: We are "tired of waiting for the take-off to progress; tired of impotently seeing our children leave in search of other horizons; tired of high-sounding speeches which promise brilliant futures, and then evaporate like drops of water in

the desert; tired of being postponed and ignored. We must act urgently. We issue a national call and demand of the government and of all the political and social sectors that they awaken and respond to the responsibilities of the hour.”

### The collapse of liberal democracy

The crisis in Uruguay, as in the rest of Ibero-America, is not limited to the momentary conditions and circumstances of government, but has spread to the institutional foundations of these nations, especially those derived from the liberal democratic system coming out of the French Revolution. On this theme, one lucid voice has been that of former Uruguayan President Juan María Bordaberry, also a rural businessman, who after two decades of political silence, granted a July 2 interview to the daily *El Observador Económico*, which caused such an immense impact that the entire political class pretended to ignore it in an effort to silence it. Shortly before giving the interview, Bordaberry commented on the April 5 action of Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori in shutting down that nation’s Congress, with the laconic comment that “democracy does not always coincide with the Common Good.”

In the above-mentioned interview, of which we publish excerpts below, Bordaberry justifies his 1973 actions in dissolving Uruguay’s Congress and attempting to put an end to the country’s “partocracy” which, as in the rest of Ibero-America, serves as a key source of the moral and political corruption upon which the so-called “democracies” of the continent sustain themselves today. Bordaberry charges that liberal democracy abandoned the principles of natural law which should guide any constitutional system. “Democracy has sought to appropriate institutions which stem from natural law. And it has presented itself as if it were something natural, which it is not; it is the opposite of the natural; it is a construct of man’s reason, it is a fiction fashioned by man.”

It would appear that the generalized crisis of the Ibero-American “democracies,” which are collapsing under the most outrageous corruption scandals, is proving the Uruguayan President right.

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## Documentation

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### Liberal democracy not synonymous with law

*The following are excerpts of the interview granted by former President of Uruguay Juan María Bordaberry to the Montevideo daily El Observador Económico, on July 2, 1992.*

**Q:** How would you evaluate the 1973 coup d’état, two decades later?

**Bordaberry:** First of all, I would like to make a few clarifications, and one of these concerns the expression *coup d’état*. This is undoubtedly a successful expression, but it is not a neutral or objective one because at the same time that it applies the label, it condemns. Therefore, I cannot accept it, because it was not the Uruguayan state which was changed by the decree of June 27, 1973, but rather the representative political institution of liberal democracy, the Congress, and with it the idea of representation through the parties as the only possible manifestation of the people’s will. I also think it is wrong, and I think I should clarify this before answering your question, to suggest that when the institution of Congress falls, so too does the state of law, and that what follows is a so-called de facto regime. This attempt to confuse democracy with a state of law is historically unacceptable, because it purports to claim that before the democratic systems of the 20th century existed, there was no law. Not even Roman law. When a regime enters into a state of chaos, as happened for example in Argentina during Alfonsín’s last months, no one can deny that there was democracy, but a state of law was clearly not in force. Between ourselves, not to go any further, one cannot say today that there is full exercise of certain fundamental rights of the individual, such as the right to property and security, and yet it has not occurred to anyone to say that we do not live under a democratic regime.

**Q:** But don’t you think that the Congress is an essential element of the state of law?

**Bordaberry:** Not for the enforcement of law. The Congress was dissolved, but enforcement of law was maintained; what did not continue was the democratic congressional political institution.

**Q:** But can there be a state of law when one of the three essential powers, which is the legislative, is not functioning?

**Bordaberry:** You continue to confuse law with democracy, and so it is worth a further clarification. At that time, and particularly after the departure of the military regime, from ’76 until ’85, the idea that democracy is defined as the full exercise of individual rights was made known. This is what has been called democracy as a way of living: a situation in which people can live in peace, in order, and free of all arbitrariness. But that is not democracy, that is a natural situation in any society independent of the political system that guides it. Democracy is not that; it is a political system. And when I speak of democracy, I am referring to a political system, to parliamentarianism, to the parties, to the idea of representation, to the concept of the periodic delegation of the authority to rule, to the political form of liberal thought. Democracy has sought to appropriate institutions of natural law. And it has presented itself as if it were something natural, which it is not; it is the

opposite of the natural; it is a construct of man's reason, it is a fiction fashioned by man.

What is mistakenly called democracy as a way of life, the situation in which we all have the right to live in peace, in order, and free of arbitrariness, that is what all Uruguayans practice. I also practice it. That is what I rescued on June 27, 1973, that right to live in a society in peace and order. When I attack democracy, I attack it as a political system, not as what is mistakenly called a way of life.

**Q:** But human rights violations, for example, are extreme expressions of arbitrariness. During the de facto government, there were multiple denunciations of this.

**Bordaberry:** As with other questions you have asked, I would first like to make a clarification: I believe that one should speak of the rights of the human person, and not human rights.

This is a matter that I don't like to address, because the Uruguayan Armed Forces have been the object of a very harsh and unjust campaign on this question. . . . But you have asked the question, and I cannot avoid making some comments. André Malraux, in a small book in which he describes the horrors of the war of '14 which he saw, writes the moving phrase: "God wants victory to go to those who went to war without loving it." I can assure you that the Uruguayan Armed Forces did not go to war because they loved it, but in compliance with their duty and, above all, because they loved their fatherland which was under attack. . . . Neither did the Armed Forces choose the battlefield that the enemy chose. Surely it is a much nicer war when one can throw a bomb from an invisible airplane at 20,000 feet, than to throw it through a window into a shelter where thousands of people are burned alive. And up there, in a pressurized cabin, one doesn't smell the burning flesh nor the screams of the people. In such a case, it doesn't occur to anyone to say that there has been an aggression against the rights of the human being, but it is a war, it is horribly equal. It doesn't occur to anyone to be horrified by these tragedies that have been experienced; on the contrary, they are admired for the technological display.

**Q:** After the coup d'état in Peru, Vargas Llosa said that [Peruvian President Alberto] Fujimori was undergoing a process of "bordaberry-ization." Do you share this view?

**Bordaberry:** I think that it is a simplification—such a term would reflect great immodesty on my part. It is an attempt to unify military and civil power without the parties, around solutions of natural law.

**Q:** You have spoken of the need to rule by natural law, and not by liberal democracy. Can you explain this?

**Bordaberry:** Although the concept I am going to offer you might clash with liberal and agnostic Uruguayan thinking, it is necessary to say that behind every formulation of a political

nature, there is a prior theological definition. First, one must ask the question why man exists in the world, from whence did he come and where is he going? And how one responds to this will define the ideological framework in which the political institutions are based.

If man comes from nothing and goes to nothing, if for him everything is reduced to this passage on Earth, then he cannot be denied the right to live his life intensely and with the greatest possible freedom; it is his only opportunity. Therefore he has reason, with which to try to order his life in society during that time, his only time. From this viewpoint, democratic institutions based on liberal ideology are born. Thus, one can explain and justify that there is no authority possible, neither from God nor from any man, to affect his interior mental processes. Neither can his acts be affected, because he is also free to determine his own moral and behavior code. This should be the basis of permissiveness in democratic societies.

Of course, the inevitable fact of social coexistence defines a diffuse limit, which is that of respecting the same rights of others. This explains the democratic institutions, and their failures. Thus is born authority, which must weaken because it knows it cannot go very far; thus is founded the idea of unrestricted freedom; thus is established the neutrality of the state, which in reality is no such thing. When one says that the state is separated from the church, this is not in fact true; the state abandoned one faith and embraced another, which is nothing but the freeing of man from God, of man constructing his own God for himself, instead of God having created man.

**Q:** But, what does natural law mean in political terms?

**Bordaberry:** It would be different if we thought that man has been created by God, and is the bearer of eternal values and has received the world as an inheritance, but is not the lord of good and evil nor the autonomous arbiter of his own. Thus, he does not resort to creating a political order but to guiding himself simply by natural law. I would dare say that natural law does not constitute a political system, but rather the source of principles that should shape such a system. And by virtue of their being natural . . . these principles are eternal. Man will more or less respect them according to the times, but they are always there, ready to flourish.

**Q:** Is the Christian view compatible with an authoritarian government in which deeds of violence, including human rights violations, inevitably occur?

**Bordaberry:** It is not only compatible, but it is Christian thought itself. [Pope] Leo XIII reminds us that all human society needs an authority to guide it. To the extent that that authority is derived from arbitrariness and injustice, I have already said that that is an error. On the other hand, authority exercised righteously prevents injustice and defends against arbitrariness.