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Torture in Brazil claim

by TIMOTHY ROSS

THE death of a student leader, Lincoln Bicalho Roque, 'while resisting arrest' in Rio de Janeiro, has been announced by the Brazilian military authorities.

According to the Communist Party of Brazil, he had been captured three months earlier and tortured to death. At least 17 other alleged subversives have died in similar circumstances this year, two political prisoners are claimed to have committed suicide, and four others were killed while trying to escape. The Communist spokesman says they have been eliminated as part of the 'final solution to the leftist problem in Brazil.'

Many other deaths reported by the police as due to natural causes were, it is suspected, the deliberate results of torture. In the case of journalist Rui Oswaldo Pfutzenreuter, whose parents were told a month after his arrest last year that he had died of 'acute traumatic anaemia,' a request for an investigation has been made to Minister of Justice, Alfredo Buzaid, by the International Federation of Journalists and Amnesty International. The Minister has not replied.

Machine-gun raid

It is also feared that many more are yet to die in the prisons and on the streets of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Recife. In particular, fears have been expressed for the lives of a number of students, intellectuals and trade unionists now imprisoned.

Latix Basilio Rossi, head of the Department of Social Sciences and Professor of Economics at Penapolis University, was at home with a friend on the evening of 13 February. The house was surrounded by soldiers and police with machine-guns. They forced their way in and removed various books and documents from the library. Professor Rossi was arrested and despite a writ of habeas corpus and the intervention of the Bishop of the diocese, has been held.

5 MV DW, DH, DHI 22

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In the State of Maranhão, the president, secretary and several members of the Pindaré Valley Agricultural Workers' Union were arrested at the beginning of last year. The president, Manuel da Conceição Santos, smuggled out a letter describing his treatment and saying that he did not expect to survive.

For four months I was severely tortured by the Army and then in the Navy Intelligence Centre, he writes. My body turned into a single enormous bruise. They pulled out all my finger nails. They pierced my sexual organ with a needle. They dragged me into the yard by the testicles and hung me upside down.

Then they suspended me from a bar between my handcuffed wrists, pulled off my artificial leg [his leg was amputated after he had been shot in a previous arrest] and tied my penis up to prevent me from urinating. They left me there three days on my one leg without food or water. They have given me so many drugs that I have lost my hearing and am feeble.

'Tied up like a pig'

They threw me into a trough, tied up like a pig, and I nearly drowned. They put me into a pitch-black cell for 30 days, then into a rubber box fitted with a loudspeaker, where I could not eat or sleep for three days and nearly went mad. They threatened to drag confessions out through the anus by a stick with three rows of teeth like a saw.

They deny that I am Manuel da Conceição, as I have no document to prove it, and after 12 months in prison, the people having forgotten me, they promise to throw me into the sea from a helicopter.

Also at risk is the life of César de Queiroz Benjamin. According to Brazilian law, criminal responsibility begins at the age of 18, but César was 17 when arrested in late 1971. He is accused of participating in urban guerrilla actions from the age of 15. Although by law he should have been released for trial by a juvenile court, the question of his legal status has been debated in a series of military court hearings that have kept him in prison without trial for the last 18 months.

The authorities' decision was based on the thesis that the National Security Law is independent of general principles and must override them. The verdict of the Supreme Military Tribunal quotes as the theoretical authority for its decision, in the original Italian, Mussolini's legislation on Caetano's death.

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