Impressions of a Journalist
"What's Doing in Sarmiento"

The day that you see a group of youths dressed in blue pants, grey shirts and black ties, meeting in a Catholic church or in Chacarita Cemetery, don't be impelled to ask what they are doing. Leave them to their own affairs. Don't bother them. The Tacuara comrades are allergic to interruptions of one of their most important rituals - the swearing in of new members. Nevertheless, there are few who know anything of the ceremony. I was never at a swearing-in myself, but I am able to tell you about it.

Usually, the initiation is held at the grave of Darwin Pasaponti, a 17-year-old Nationalist student who died in the shooting at the offices of the newspaper Crítica in 1945. Very few attend, and those by strictly controlled invitation. The members are uniformed as I have described, and those on guard wear a brassard with the Maltese Cross drawn on a red field with black borders. The Tacuara leader makes some impromptu remarks about the meaning of the oath. He then pronounces the formula which swears in the member: You do swear with your heart and with your arm signalling your testimony to God to defend with your life, with your death the enduring values of Christianity and of the Fatherland. You do swear to remain loyal to the principles of the movement, respecting its hierarchy and making it to be respected by friends and enemies.

After the formal consent, the impassioned member receives his credentials which is the form of the oath just taken. In the old type of credentials there were verses of Martin Fierro, poet laureate of the gaucho: "Cast me not by trailside; though they may come at me to slit my throat. With the soft shall I be soft; with the hard shall I be hard; and no one in trouble has ever seen me falter." Presently, small plastic cards are used, on which are deeply impressed paragraphs by Jose Hernandez.
The new comrade also gets at this ceremony the blessed insignia of the Maltese Cross in white and blue. This identification, which many wear in their jacket lapels, was adopted because it combines the symbol of the cross of Christianity, the colors of the national flag and the motto of the Knights of Malta: "We shall return, alive or dead!"

The history of the Tacuara movement, like that of the swearing-in ceremony, didn't start yesterday. It began in 1935. Two months ago it celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the Union Nacionalista Estudiantes Secondarios - UNES (Nationalist Union of High School Students). A year later, UNES was merged into the National Alliance of Liberation because the majority of the members were about to complete their secondary school education. Queralto continued to be the leader but today he is repudiated by the nationalists of almost all varieties and as an agent of the Paraguayan government.

In 1949 UNES left the Alliance because Queralto did not wish the movement to lose its independence as a nationalist force and they did not want to run the risk, then current, of converting itself into shock troops at the service of the government.

When Peron was deposed by the revolution of September 1955, UNES gave birth to Tacuara, as in years past was the case with the Alliance. The reason was the same: the necessity of opening a new channel for the members who had gone on to the university and at the same time, in order to permit workers who were not students to become members.

Tacuara continued its activities - the same as UNES - at 185 Matheu Street presently abandoned because of the two raids on the place in February and March of this year. The police detained a total of 50 people, among which were 34 minors who were immediately freed. The 16 others, all adults, were taken to police headquarters, then to the jail in Caseros Avenue and finally to Santa Rosa prison in La Pampa Province.
Fifty days later they regained their freedom. The proceeding was conducted by executive order by virtue of the state of siege. No formal charges were presented nor was any formal prosecution started.

I do not know if the police looked for the list with the names of the members of UNES and Tacuara. However, they would not find it because it was not there. It is a security measure which they adopted as a matter of practice. This concealment is paradoxical because at the same time the nationalists give assurances that they do nothing bad.

Tacuara, the word which today is in style and like a style few people know well, was the name which the publication of UNES bore when it was started as the students' group of the Otto Krause Industrial School, and which then became the official organ of the movement. Its founders gave it the name so that they could understand that in this way they were able to identify themselves with the arms used by Argentina's revolutionary hero, Guemes, and principally, by the leaders of the Rosas dictatorship in the early 19th Century. In order to join UNES or Tacuara the applicant should be Catholic and an Argentine, native born or naturalized. There are many members who are converted Jews. Acceptance of the applicants is somewhat more than automatic. For a long time they were looked upon as sympathizers. In order to ascend to the condition of member and associate of the Hierarchy, they must account for such qualities as ability, obedience, etc.

The chief of Tacuara is elected by the vote of the members who have taken the oath and who are in good standing. His term lasts two years but he can be reelected all the times that it is considered opportune for him to serve. The chief then designates members of the commando composed of five members of Tacuara and the chief of UNES, which would appear to be the juvenile branch of the movement. In order to maintain suspense, there is as yet no indication of the number of Tacuara's members, but I think I will publish it tomorrow. The percentage of Tacuara members, that is to say - without euphemism -
those who are all over the lot and do not miss anything. The members of UNES and of Tacuara do not promote functions in schools, publications, universities or unions, but they infiltrate into collateral groups as in 1959 in Sarmiento where they were listed as "independent" and succeeded in getting a post on the committee of representatives of the student center. It lost another by a small margin of votes.

The members of UNES and Tacuara are openly and unblushingly totalitarian. They are ideologically in the line of the founder of the Spanish Falange - Primo de Rivera and of Ramiro Ledesma Ramos, another totalitarian theorist. They don't want a free university, but rather a situation where the university is brought into an entirely Catholic state, just as Catholicism is the official religion under the Constitution. They ask that all instruction be based on Catholic principles, and that if any students do not conform, they must at least respect these Catholic principles as being official.

They don't believe in a liberal democratic government nor in the parliamentary system. They don't consider it representative. They envisage a "national syndicate" to end in "what is actually the country", integrated into a corporate scheme, but in the manner of the Spanish, not the Italian variety of fascism. They quote from Primo de Rivera (minimizing Jose Antonio for the initiates) in their critiques of the monolithic state as contrasted with the political parties of a democratic-liberal structure or of a class society such as that espoused by the Marxists. They maintain that these are divisive factors and they demand a single total state, spiritual, economic and intellectual interests. They get angry when reference is made to "Nazis", because the Germans conceive of the individual as a mere tool of the State, without God, and of the State as an end in itself. They believe that the State is not the final end, but that the ultimate end is God for Catholics. They will remember the
project of Carlos Ibarguren during the time the Constitution was being revised in 1949. The plan envisioned a corporative state in which were to be found representatives of five orders of vested power (or factors of power which are now explained) which cause the government to function: (1) The economic and productive forces; (2) the spiritual order - Catholic Church; (3) the order of trade-unions; (4) the order of intellectuals: the University; (5) the military order: the armed forces. They are not concerned with the manner of electing a president - that is a technicality, nor of his successor, if it is necessary to make changes.

For the movement, the pillars of nationality are the Army and the Church. But as to this, there are divergent views. The younger, more impulsive members say that they are "not with the Army as it is now. It is weak. It is not what it should be." On the other hand, with regard to the Church, "none of us think of it as an ineffectual thing. It is an institution that affects all mankind. It is impossible to think of its having fulfilled its function, much less are we disposed to assess it as an institution.


Members of Tacuara assert that they are not anti-Semites, but, rather, that they are sincere anti-Zionists. Then they add that they know very few Jews who are not Zionists, with which statement, without further problems they rationalize their position as anti-Semites - always with the statement that all Jews believe the same with reference to Zionism.

They say that a Jew is an Argentine to the extent that without renouncing his race, considers that his fatherland - his only fatherland - to be Argentina and not Israel. They don't consider admissible those Jewish youths who have journeyed to Israel to fulfil their military service, and then have done the same in the country. "They are traitors, men who
have two flags." They consider it an annoyance that people born in
Argentina think of themselves as citizens of a foreign state. "Because
of this we fight Judaism as an imperialist concept."

No one is surprised that a nationalist has a deep hatred of Jews.
Nor would the reverse be surprising. In spite of the anti-Zionist wares,
it can be said that the problem of Sarmiento is not a racial problem,
but rather one that is ideological and political. On the one side there
are the liberal, democratic reformists, Catholics, Jews and also communists.
They are a great majority. On the other side we have the more youthful,
aggressives of nationalism: anti-reformers, anti-democrats, anti-Zionists,
anti-Communists and also stubborn Catholic militants with spiritual-political-
moral concepts. As it appears there is something more than a supposed,
illogical, brutish orthodox anti-Semitism. There are obvious elements of
religious and racial antipathy, but these are insubordinate to an ideological
conflict. In this the two camps are in accord, as well as I myself. For
me more is being paid than the whistle is worth. And therefore, I shall
continue my discussion tomorrow, when I shall write about the incidents of
August 16 and 17, which concerned many people, and of the painful plight
of a Jewish student, wounded by a bullet in his lung.

Forwarded by Maximo Yagupsky
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