Brazil: Terror and Torture

When Gen. Emilio Gerrastazú Médici was named President of Brazil last October he said he hoped by the end of his term to "leave democracy definitely installed in our country," along with the bases for economic and social development.

Instead, Brazil under President Médici has continued a steady descent into censorship, repression and police-state tyranny unknown even in the worst period of the Getulio Vargas dictatorship. The round-up of 140 persons in São Paulo state for "preventive detention" as suspected subversives is only the latest and most extreme in a long series of repressive police actions. It is clear that the hard-liners in the military command have won every round over more moderate elements. The military leaders clearly intend to remain in power indefinitely and to meet any challenge by further tightening their grip on the country.

There is something distinctly un-Brazilian about the regime's systematic and widespread employment of sadistic torture and terror against its opponents. Officials say such tactics, reminiscent of those followed by the present rulers of Greece, are necessary to combat growing Communist subversion; and the regime evidently has been able to destroy or immobilize several guerrilla bands in Brazil's largest cities.

It is no longer possible, however, to discount the accumulating evidence that a great many innocents—including wives and even children of suspected subversives—have suffered horribly, along with the Communists. Pope Paul VI found the evidence impressive enough to make what he described as a "duty-bound intervention" in behalf of political prisoners. Brazil's bar association has publicly accused the police of beating and torturing a lawyer who had defended a man accused of subversion. There is no surer way for the regime to swell its opposition and even to make subversives and revolutionaries out of ordinary citizens than to make terror and torture virtually a way of life in Brazil.