



Often the figures, as in this case, hide more than they reveal. Explain that in the span of 18 months hundreds of physicists, chemists and mathematicians, journalists and essayists, storytellers and poets, were torn from their beds in the middle of the night, dragged from the lobby of the cinematographers to the police (or military) cars to the stupor and silence of the crowds, or abandoned in wastelands and dead-end passages with 40 bullets in the body, it is to explain too little. In the same period, thousands of workers' leaders, strikers, students, and unnamed marginals suffered the same fate.

There are infinite forms of torment that also do not appear in the statistics, and testimonies of horror that will have been lost forever in the gags of the oppressed.

The death that the Argentine Military Junta has set in motion for two years now is of a more cunning and more insurmountable nature: it has managed to ensure that free thought (in a country where freedom was customary) is assumed by the community as a subversion that could well deserve the cadalso; it has managed to get men of clear conscience to fear keeping in their libraries the books that others (illiterate and barbaric) consider suspicious; it has erased the spirit of discussion from universities and lyceums, and has instead enthroned the spirit of assent.



Argentine Military Dictatorship 1976-1983: Emilio Eduardo Massera, Jorge Rafael Videla and Orlando Ramón Agosti

In April 1976, the spokesmen of the Military Junta warned the few neutral media outlets that no indifference was possible. Those who did not share the Board's policy were, in fact, against the Board; that is, they stood without further formalities on the edge of the insurrection. Not even silence could be tolerated: the government of Jorge Rafael Videla, Emilio Massera and Jorge Agosti demanded applause for an economic policy that placed money as the only valuable commodity and the misery of the masses as an ineluctable fatality; He also called for solidarity with a repressive game that culminated every day in dozens of death sentences disguised as escapes, extremist operations, "spontaneous actions" by armed gangs that "will be persecuted with the full weight of the law", without ever a single one of its members having been arrested or even identified.

The waters were divided once and for all in Argentina: on one side were the writers who, like [Jorge Luis Borges](#) or [Víctor Massuh](#) (a specialist in philosophy of religion to whom the Junta entrusted the Embassy to Unesco), maintained that the massacre was a crusade of knights and the national annihilation of culture, a necessary public health work; next to them was placed the choir of those who nodded in silence or walled themselves after the conviction that towers of uncontaminated literature are still possible in these disaster lands: [Manuel Mujica Láinez](#), [Eduardo Mallea](#), [Victoria Ocampo](#), [Sara Gallardo](#), [Silvina Bullrich](#). On the other side were falling the impure, those who believe that in literature or in life is not compromised only a part of the being: [David Viñas](#), [Daniel Moyano](#), [Antonio Di Benedetto](#), [Haroldo Conti](#).

All the suspects were expunged from the media. Those who remained were forced to add new chords to the glorification of the regime: there are many who underwent that exercise for six months and even a year, and then, disgusted with themselves, chose exile.

Science became a devastated field. Already a decade earlier, another military regime (that of Juan Carlos Onganía) had suppressed in a single fateful night, with the blows of stick, the technological infrastructure that Argentine universities had taken three decades to sediment. But the extermination was now more wordy: nuclear physics researchers fled en masse to Brazilian study centers, after the first casualties within their ranks: the [Bariloche Foundation](#) – a model of a scientific institution in Latin America – was dismantled; psychologists, psychoanalysts and psychiatrists, forced to betray their patients or serve as advisers in torture centres, had to disband.

The culture that survives in Argentina speaks to an audience of blind and mute servants or – as in the flagrant example of Borges – of unconditional worshippers of the sword. The documents that follow, insufficient as versions of history, are at least useful as a sign that the Latin American barbarians, far from being asleep, have managed to organize a power on whose altars they affirm that There is Life, while the bargaining chip in the streets is a multiple, insatiable Death.

Letter from Rodolfo Walsh

On Friday, March 25, 1977, when the Argentine Military Junta completed one year in power, Rodolfo Walsh distributed at the door of the Government House of Buenos Aires, in the U.S. Embassy, in the offices of the Ecclesiastical Curia and in international news agencies an Open Letter that is, since then, a classic text in the political literature of Latin America, and one of the most incontestable -at the same time as serene- documents of denunciation against the vesanías of the regime.

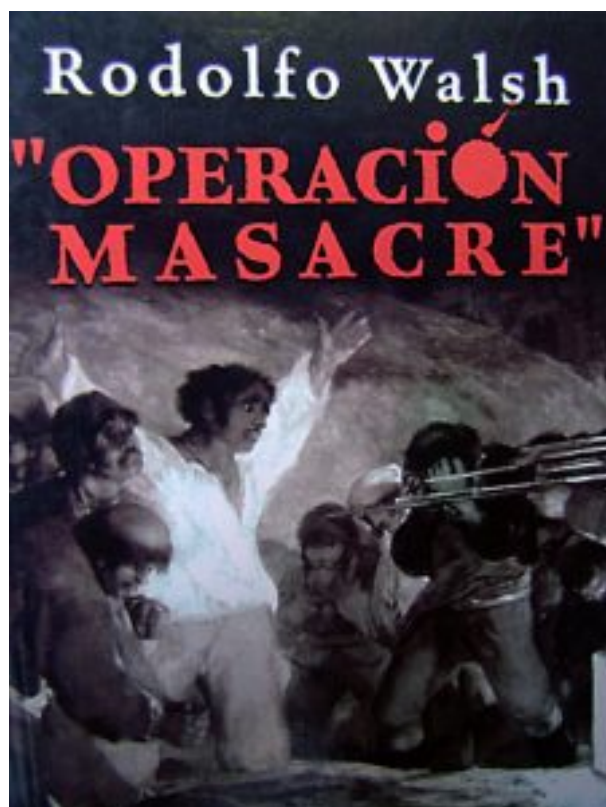


Walsh was kidnapped the same afternoon he delivered the letter, and reports about his imprisonment or death have been contradictory. In late 1977, a *habeas corpus* petition filed by his wife — and for which there was no response — led to the assumption that she had information about Walsh's survival in some regime dungeon. The truth is that both the letter and the character have been prolonging their destiny of myths for a year now.

Walsh was, until 1955, a writer of crime stories trained in Catholic nationalism.

The execution without trial of five men in the garbage dumps of José León Suárez (Buenos Aires), on June 10, 1956, after a frustrated rebellion against the regime of Pedro Eugenio Aramburu, prompted him to unmask the police responsible in a series of articles that he later gathered with the title of *Operation Massacre*. That changed his life. Walsh became the most lucid and courageous of the Argentine journalists who conceived literature as testimony and devoted themselves to exposing the complicities of the union bureaucrats, the tycoons of journalism and the great *lawyers* with a Military Power whose objective was the delivery of Argentine wealth to the capitalism of the multinationals.

[*Operation Massacre* full book PDF format](#)



Walsh's Letter, which was partially reproduced by the continent's newspapers, and whose full text was only disseminated in the form of a pamphlet by the Committees of Solidarity with the Argentine People, is now published as part, for the first time, in a far-reaching medium.

OPEN LETTER FROM A WRITER TO THE MILITARY JUNTA

1. The censorship of the press, the persecution, the raid on my house, the murder of dear friends and the loss of a daughter who died fighting them, are some of the facts that force me to this form of clandestine expression after having freely opined as a writer and journalist for almost thirty years.

The first anniversary of that Military Junta has motivated a balance of government action in official documents and speeches where what you call successes are mistakes, those you recognize as mistakes are crimes and those you omit are calamities.

On March 24, 1976, you overthrew a government of which you were a part, to whose discredit you contributed as executors of your repressive policy and whose end was marked by elections called for nine months later. In that perspective, what you liquidated was not the transitory mandate of Isabel Martínez but the possibility of a democratic process where the people remedied evils that you continued and aggravated.

Illegitimate in its origin, the government you exercise was able to legitimize itself in fact, recovering the program in which eighty percent of Argentines agreed in the 1973 elections and which still stands as an objective expression of the will of the people, the only possible meaning of that "national being" that you invoke so often.

By reversing this path, you have restored the flow of ideas and interests of defeated minorities that hinder the development of the productive forces, exploit the people and disintegrate the Nation. Such a policy can only be imposed temporarily by banning parties, intervening in trade unions, muzzling the press and implanting the deepest terror that Argentine society has ever known.

2. Fifteen thousand disappeared, ten thousand prisoners, four thousand dead, tens of thousands banished are the naked figure of that terror.

Filled with ordinary prisons, you created virtual concentration camps in the main garrisons of the country where no judge, lawyer, journalist, international observer enters. The military secrecy of the proceedings, invoked as a necessity of investigation, turns most detentions into kidnappings that allow for unlimited torture and execution without trial.¹

More than seven thousand *writs of habeas corpus* have been answered negatively this past year. In thousands of other cases of disappearance the appeal has not even been filed, because its uselessness is known in advance or because there is no lawyer who dares to present it after the fifty or sixty who did it were kidnapped in turn.

In this way you have stripped torture of its limit in time. As the detainee does not exist, there is no possibility of presenting him to the judge in ten days according to a law, which was respected even in the repressive peaks of previous dictatorships.

The lack of time limit has been complemented by the lack of limit in the methods going back to times when it was operated directly on the joints and viscera of the victims, now with surgical and pharmacological auxiliaries that the former executioners did not have. The foal, the lathe, the skinning, the saw of the medieval inquisitors reappear in the testimonies along with the picana, the "submarine", the torch of contemporary updates².

Through successive concessions to the assumption that the purpose of exterminating the guerrillas justifies the means they use, you have come to absolute, timeless, metaphysical torture to the extent that the original purpose of extracting information is lost in the disturbed minds that administer it to yield to the impulse to crush the human substance

until it breaks it and makes it lose the dignity that the executioner lost, that you yourselves have lost.

3. The refusal of this Board to publish the names of the prisoners is also the cover of a systematic execution of hostages in open places and in the early hours of the morning under the pretext of forged fighting and imaginary escape attempts.

Extremists who pamphlet the countryside, paint the ditches or pile up ten in vehicles that catch fire, are the stereotypes of a script that is not made to be believed but to circumvent the international reaction to executions in order while internally its character of reprisals unleashed in the same places and in immediate date to the guerrilla actions is underlined.

Seventy shot after the bomb in Federal Security, 55 in response to the blowing up of the Police Department of La Plata, 30 for the attack on the Ministry of Defense, 40 in the New Year's Massacre that followed the death of Colonel Castellanos, 19 after the explosion that destroyed the Ciudadela police station, are part of 1,200 executions in 300 alleged combats where the opponent had no injuries and the forces to his They had no deaths.

Depositories of a collective guilt abolished in the civilized norms of justice, unable to influence the policy that dictates the facts for which they are retaliated, many of these hostages are union delegates, intellectuals, relatives of guerrillas, unarmed opponents, simple suspects who are killed to balance the balance of casualties according to the foreign doctrine of "cashiers" used by the SS in the occupied countries and the invaders in Vietnam.

The auction of guerrillas wounded or captured in real combat is also evidence that emerges from the military communiqués that in a year attributed to the guerrillas 600 dead and only 10 or 15 wounded, an unknown proportion in the most bitter conflicts. This impression is confirmed by a journalistic sampling of clandestine circulation that reveals that between December 18, 1976 and February 3, 1977, in 40 real actions, the legal forces had 23 dead and 40 wounded, and the guerrillas 63 dead.³

More than a hundred defendants have also been killed in escape attempts, whose official account is not intended for anyone to believe, but to warn the guerrillas and the parties that even the recognized political prisoners are the strategic reserve of the reprisals available to the commanders of the Corps, according to the progress of the fighting, the didactic convenience or humor of the moment.

This is how General Benjamín Menéndez, head of the Third Army Corps, has won his laurels before March 24 with the murder of Marcos Osantinsky arrested in Córdoba, then with the death of Hugo Vaca Narvaja and fifty other prisoners in various applications of the law of escape executed without mercy and narrated without shame.⁴

The murder of Dardo Cabo, arrested in April 1975, shot on January 6, 1977 with seven other prisoners in the jurisdiction of the First Army Corps commanded by General Suárez Mason, reveals that these episodes are not overflows of some hallucinated centurions but the very policy that you plan in your general staff, they discuss in their cabinet meetings, impose as commanders-in-chief of the three arms and approve as members of the Governing Board.

4. Between fifteen hundred and three thousand more people have been massacred in secret after you forbade reporting on findings of corpses that in some cases have transcended, however, because they affect other countries, because of their genocidal magnitude or because of the fear provoked among their own forces.⁵

Twenty-five mutilated bodies emerged between March and October 1976 on the Uruguayan coast, perhaps a small part of the cargo of tortured to death at the Navy Mechanics School, anchored in the Río de La Plata by ships of that force, including the 15-year-old boy, Floreal Avellaneda, tied hands and feet "with injuries in the anal region and visible fractures" according to his autopsy.

A real lake cemetery discovered in August 1976 a neighbor who was diving in Lake Roque in Córdoba, went to the police station where they did not receive the complaint and wrote to the newspapers that did not publish it⁶.

Thirty-four corpses in Buenos Aires between April 3 and 9, 1976, eight in San Telmo on July 4, ten in the Luján River on October 9, serve as a framework for the massacres of August 20 that piled up 30 dead 15 kilometers from Campo de Mayo and 17 in Lomas de Zamora.

These statements exhaust the fiction of right-wing gangs alleged heirs of López Rega's 3 As, capable of crossing the largest garrison in the country in military trucks, carpeting the Río de La Plata with the dead or throwing prisoners into the sea from the transports of the First Air Brigade⁷, without the knowledge of General Videla, Admiral Massera, Brigadier Agosti. The 3 A are today the 3 Arms and the Board that you preside over is not the faithful of the balance between "violence of different signs" nor the fair arbiter between

"two terrorisms", but the very source of terror that has lost its way and can only babble the discourse of death⁸.

The same historical continuity links the assassination of General Carlos Prats, during the previous government, with the kidnapping and death of General Juan José Torres, Zelmar Michelini, Héctor Gutiérrez Ruiz and dozens of asylees in whom the possibility of democratic processes in Chile, Bolivia and Uruguay has been assassinated.⁹

The certain participation in these crimes of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Police, led by CIA scholarship officers through the AID, such as Commissioners Juan Gattei and Antonio Gettore, themselves subject to the authority of Mr. Gardener Hathaway, Station Chief of the CIA in Argentina, is a hotbed of future revelations such as those that today shake the international community, that they must not be exhausted even when the role of that agency and of high chiefs of the Army headed by General Menéndez in the creation of the Liberators of America Lodge is clarified, which replaced the 3 A until its global role was assumed by that Board on behalf of the 3 Arms.

This picture of extermination does not exclude even the personal settlement of accounts such as the murder of Captain Horacio Gandara, who for a decade had been investigating the negotiations of high-ranking Navy chiefs, or the journalist of *Prensa Libre*, Horacio Novillo, stabbed and burned after that newspaper denounced the connections of Minister Martínez de Hoz with international monopolies.

In the light of these episodes, the definition of war pronounced by one of its leaders takes on its final meaning: "The struggle we are waging does not recognize moral or natural limits, it is carried out beyond good and evil"¹⁰.

5. These facts, which shake the conscience of the civilized world, are not, however, the ones that have brought the greatest suffering to the Argentine people, nor the worst violations of human rights that you incur. In the economic policy of that government must be sought not only the explanation of its crimes but a greater atrocity that punishes millions of human beings with planned misery.

In one year you have reduced the real wage of workers to 40%, reduced their share of national income to 30%, raised from 6 to 18 hours the working day that a worker needs to pay for the family basket¹¹, thus resurrecting forms of forced labor that do not persist even in the last colonial strongholds.

Freezing salaries while prices rise at the tips of bayonets, abolishing all forms of collective demand, prohibiting internal assemblies and commissions, lengthening hours, raising unemployment to a record 9%¹² and promising to increase it with 300,000 new dismissals, they have taken back the relations of production to the beginning of the industrial era and when the workers have wanted to protest they have been described as subversives, kidnapping entire bodies of delegates who in some cases appeared dead, and in others did not appear¹³.

The results of that policy have been fulminating. In this first year of government, the consumption of food has decreased by 40%, that of clothing by more than 50%, that of medicines has practically disappeared in the popular layers. There are already areas of Greater Buenos Aires where infant mortality exceeds 30%, a figure that equals us with Rhodesia, Dahomey or the Guianas; diseases such as summer diarrhea, parasitosis and even rabies in which the figures climb towards world records or exceed them.

As if these were desired and sought goals, you have reduced the public health budget to less than a third of military expenditures, suppressing even free hospitals while hundreds of doctors, professionals and technicians join the exodus caused by terror, low wages or "rationalization".

It is enough to walk a few hours through Greater Buenos Aires to see how quickly such a policy makes it a slum of ten million inhabitants. Half-lit cities, entire neighborhoods without water because monopolistic industries plunder the underground layers, thousands of blocks turned into a single pothole because you only pave the military neighborhoods and only adorn the Plaza de Mayo, the largest river in the world polluted on all its beaches because the partners of Minister Martínez de Hoz throw their industrial waste into it and the only government measure you have taken is to prohibit to people who bathe.

Nor in the abstract goals of the economy, which you are often called "the country", have you been more fortunate. A decrease in gross product of 3%, an external debt that reaches 600 dollars per inhabitant, an annual inflation of 400%, an increase in working capital that in just one week of December reached 9%, a 13% drop in domestic investment are also world brands, rare fruit of cold deliberation and crude ineptia.

While all the creative and protective functions of the State atrophy until they dissolve into pure anemia, a single one grows and becomes autonomous. One thousand eight hundred million dollars equivalent to half of the Argentine exports budgeted for Security and

Defense in 1977, four thousand new positions of agents in the Federal Police, twelve thousand in the province of Buenos Aires with salaries that double that of an industrial worker and triple that of a school director, while secretly raising military salaries themselves by 120% from February, they prove that there is no freeze or unemployment in the kingdom of torture and death, the only field of Argentine activity where the product grows and where the price per guerrilla killed rises faster than the dollar.

6. Dictated by the International Monetary Fund according to a recipe that applies indistinctly to Zaire or Chile, Uruguay or Indonesia, the economic policy of that Board only recognizes as beneficiaries the old cattle oligarchy, the new speculative oligarchy and a select group of international monopolies headed by the ITT, the Esso, the automakers, the US Steel, the Siemens, to which Minister Martínez de Hoz and all the members of his cabinet are personally linked.

A 722% increase in the prices of animal production in 1976 defines the magnitude of the oligarchic restoration undertaken by Martínez de Hoz in line with the creed of the Rural Society expounded by its president Celedonio Pereda: "Full of amazement that certain small but active groups continue to insist that food should be cheap"¹⁴.

The spectacle of a Stock Exchange where in a week it has been possible for some to earn without working one hundred and two hundred percent, where there are companies that overnight doubled their capital without producing more than before, the crazy wheel of speculation in dollars, bills, adjustable values, simple usury that already calculates the interest per hour, they are very curious facts under a government that came to end "the feast of the corrupt".

Denationalizing banks puts national savings and credit in the hands of foreign banks, compensating ITT and Siemens rewards companies that defrauded the State, returning the outlets increases the profits of Shell and Esso, lowering customs tariffs create jobs in Hong Kong or Singapore and unemployment in Argentina. Faced with all these facts, it is worth asking who are the stateless people in the official communiqués, where are the mercenaries at the service of foreign interests, what is the ideology that threatens to be national.

If an overwhelming propaganda, a distorted reflection of evil facts, did not pretend that this Junta seeks peace, that General Videla defends human rights or that Admiral Massera loves life, it would still be possible to ask the commanders in chief of the 3 Arms to

meditate on the abyss to which they lead the country after the illusion of winning a war that even if they killed the last guerrilla, it would only begin in new ways, because the causes that have moved the resistance of the Argentine people for more than twenty years would not be disappeared but aggravated by the memory of the havoc caused and the revelation of the atrocities committed.

These are the reflections that on the first anniversary of your infamous government I wanted to convey to the members of that Board, without hope of being heard, with the certainty of being persecuted, but faithful to the commitment I assumed long ago to bear witness in difficult times.

Notes:

- 1. Since January 1977, the Board has begun to publish incomplete lists of new detainees and "released persons", most of whom are not such but defendants who are no longer at their disposal but remain imprisoned. The names of thousands of prisoners are still military secret and the conditions for their torture and subsequent execution remain intact.
- 2. The Peronist leader Jorge Lizaso was skinned in life, the former radical deputy Mario Amaya was killed by sticks, the ex-deputy Muñiz Barreto stripped naked in a coup. Survivor's testimony: "He stung in his arms, hands, thighs, near his mouth every time he cried or prayed... Every 20 minutes they opened the door and told me that they were going to make me cold cuts with the saw machine that was heard."
- 3. 'Information channel', message No. 4, February 1977.
- 4. An exact version appears in this letter from the prisoners in the Prison of Encausados to the Bishop of Córdoba, Monsignor Primatesta: "On May 17, six companions are removed with the deception of going to the infirmary who are then shot. They are Miguel Angel Mosse, José Svagusa, Diana Fidelman, Luis Verón, Ricardo Yung, Eduardo Hernández, whose death in an escape attempt reported the Third Army Corps. On May 29, José Pucheta and Carlos Sgadurra were retired. The latter had been punished to the point that he could not stand, suffering several fractures of limbs. Then they are also shot in an escape attempt."
- 5. In the first 15 days of military rule, 63 bodies were found, according to the newspapers. An annual projection gives the figure of 1,500. The presumption that

it can double is based on the fact that since January 1976 journalistic information was incomplete and on the overall increase in repression after the coup. A plausible global estimate of the deaths produced by the Junta is as follows: 600 combat deaths. Shot: 1,300. Executed: secretly 2,000. Miscellaneous: 100. Total: 4,000.

- 6. Letter from Isaías Zanotti, disseminated by ANCLA, Agencia Clandestina de Noticias.
- 7. "Programme" directed between July and December 1976 by Brigadier Mariani, head of the First Palomar Air Brigade. Fokker F-27 transports were used.
- 8. Vice Admiral Guzetti in the report published by *La Opinión* on 3.10.76 admitted that "right-wing terrorism is not such" but an "antibody".
- 9. General Prats, President Allende's last army minister, killed by a bomb in September 1974. Former Uruguayan parliamentarians Michelini and Gutiérrez Ruiz were gunned down on 2.5.76. The body of General Torres, former president of Bolivia, appeared on 2.6.76, after the Minister of the Interior and former chief of police of Isabel Martínez, General Harguindeguy, accused him of "simulating" his kidnapping.
- 10. Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Ildebrando Pascarelli, according to *La Razón* of 12.6.76. Head of The Citadel Artillery Group I, Pascarelli is allegedly responsible for 33 shootings between January 5 and February 3, 1977.
- 11. Union of Swiss Banks, data for June 1976. Then the situation worsened even more.
- 12. *Clarín* Newspaper.
- 13. Among the national leaders kidnapped are Mario Aguirre of ATE, Jorge Di Pasquale of Pharmacy, and Oscar Smith of Luz y Fuerza. Kidnappings and murders of delegates have been particularly severe in metallurgists and naval companies.
- 14. *Free Press*, 16.12.76.

Rodolfo Walsh, C.I. 2845022

This article is a faithful copy of the one published in the magazine [Nueva Sociedad 35](#), [March – April 1978](#), ISSN: 0251-3552

Documents NUSO N° 35 / March – April 1978

Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)

Source: [New Society \(NUSO\)](#)

La Pluma. Net 26.03.2022