

# PEN American Center

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## URUGUAY: DOES DEMOCRACY INCLUDE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS?

A report issued by the Committee to Protect Journalists  
and PEN American Center -- June 8, 1983

Uruguay's long-anticipated transition to democracy from a military dictatorship promises to be an uneven experience for all sectors of Uruguayan society. But, as the report issued today by the Committee to Protect Journalists and PEN American Center makes clear, the transition is proving to be especially harsh for the press, which has seen increased repression during the past 18 months since the "apertura," or opening to democracy began.

The report, Uruguay: Does Democracy Include Freedom of the Press?, is the product of an investigative mission to Uruguay in April 1983 sponsored by the Committee to Protect Journalists and PEN's Freedom to Write Committee. The investigative team was headed by Mercedes Lynn de Uriarte, an Alicia Patterson Fellow on professional leave from The Los Angeles Times, and included Lucy Komisar, a freelance journalist specializing in international affairs (and an executive board member of PEN). Two representatives from the Canadian Centre for Investigative Journalism, Susan Ruth Perly of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Kathryn Leger of Canadian Press, were also in the team.

Editors and reporters in this tiny South American nation of almost three million continue to be proscribed, detained, interrogated and, often, physically mistreated. More than 16 newspaper closings were ordered during the past year-and-a-half, while five publications were shut permanently. Economic weapons are also liberally used by the Uruguayan government, creating high levels of indebtedness for many of those publications that remain in business.

Uruguay, which once had a model democracy, has suffered under one of the most brutal regimes in the Western Hemisphere since 1973. At one point, the nation had 5000 political prisoners, more per capita than any other Latin American country; about 1000 remain in

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