

## Physics in Argentina

Four scientific societies pooled resources to bring an Argentine physicist to Washington last month.

The physicist, Maximo Pedro Victoria, described a nightmare of torture and imprisonment which began when he was arrested one day at his office and ended 7 months later without any reason being given or any charges being made against him.

Released on 11 October last year, Victoria left with his family for Belgium, where he is senior research adviser at the Belgian Institute of Welding in Ghent.

Victoria was invited to Washington by the Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility of the AAAS, which arranged for him to give testimony to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States.

In an unusual cooperative venture, the cost of Victoria's trip was shared between the AAAS, the National Academy of Sciences, the American Physical Society, and the Federation of American Scientists. His testimony to the OAS commission was part of an effort by the AAAS committee to interest the OAS commission in investigating reported human rights violations in Argentina, in particular those of 11 scientists who have disappeared or been arrested.

Victoria's story is a chillingly Kafkaesque account of an individual at the mercy of unreasoning forces. Before his arrest he was the director of the National Institute of Industrial Technology in Buenos Aires. Asked to resign after the military coup in March last year, he returned to the Atomic Energy Commission where he used to work. There, on 1 April, he was told that he was under arrest, but no reason was given. He was taken at gunpoint through the entrance hall to a police car, where he was blindfolded and taken to a prison boat.

In the boat he was constantly harassed by his guardians, who came to knock and kick at the cabin door at all times of day, while shouting that he was next in line to be shot or thrown into the sea.

After 2 weeks Victoria was transferred to another prison boat, where he was constantly hooded, chained to his bedposts so that he had to remain in a rigidly seated position, and given no food or water. Hearing the names of other prisoners being called, he realized that nine other members of the Atomic Energy Commission were undergoing the same experience.

After 2 days of interrogation about his political and religious beliefs, he was taken to Devoto prison. Though he was not tortured, some of his fellow prisoners were. In September he and others were transferred to another prison, Sierra Chica. During the flight they were beaten, walked over by guards, and forced to shout "Long live the military." On arrival they were stripped naked and forced through a double file of guards for another beating, apparently a standard procedure for new arrivals. Conditions at Sierra Chica were even harsher than at Devoto. Some of the thousand or so political prisoners were entire families who had been detained because the arresting agents had failed to find the person they sought and took everyone else in the house instead. At least two prisoners, Victoria reports, were psychologically disturbed as a result of torture, and one had lost the use of an arm because of electric shocks; none had received medical attention.

On 11 October, Victoria was released. Having been informed that his life and that of his family would be in danger, he left Argentina the same day.

At a press conference in Washington last week he said that neither he nor the other Atomic Energy Commission scientists in prison with him were ever officially accused or told the reasons for their detention. His only involvement in politics, Victoria declared, was when, as director of the National Institute of Industrial Technology, he had had to make policy and political decisions. Of the thousand or so scientists and technicians at the Atomic Energy Commission, about 150 have already left the country, and the whole reprocessing group has disappeared. Why should the government wish to destroy an important national resource, especially one with military potential? "Very few of them have any feeling for what this technology means to our country," Victoria replies.—N.W.

more attention paid, for example, to NASA's \$175 million aeronautics program. Aeronautics is less glamorous than space shuttles or moon landings—but nonetheless can make real contributions to commercial air engine technology and to the development of vertical short takeoff and landing craft (VSTOL). Frosch says that he plans to work closely with his alma mater, the Navy, on VSTOL because of the Navy's plans to emphasize smaller aircraft carriers that could have STOL and VSTOL planes aboard.

Similarly, Frosch sounds excited by the potential of the space shuttle for putting large structures in space, such as orbiting solar power stations, or new, larger antennas for people-to-people communications in less-populated areas or for better earthquake monitoring.

An irony of Frosch's interest in NASA as a research agency, however, is that he takes office at a time when one of the agency's major science initiatives, the Jupiter Orbiter Probe (JOP), is in serious jeopardy. On 3 May, a House Appropriations Committee subcommittee, chaired by Edward Boland (D-Mass.), suddenly killed the appropriation request for \$20.7 million to start the probe, which is designed to give high resolution pictures of Jupiter and four of its moons and send a probe into Jupiter's atmosphere in the early 1980's. It is regarded by most NASA scientists as the logical next step in interplanetary exploration.

Apparently, the Boland committee action was not an expression of enmity toward the planet Jupiter, but was in exchange for approving a \$36 million request for the LST which will also be initiated in fiscal year 1978 but which was the subject of a critical General Accounting Office report earlier in the year. The Jupiter probe is the principal activity of scientists of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California. The cut took both JPL and NASA headquarters completely by surprise.

Frosch has already given scientists at JPL assurances that he seeks a strong future planetary program, and will do his best, if confirmed before the Senate takes action on the NASA appropriation, to get the money restored. But he may have problems achieving this. Prior to the Senate reorganization of this year, NASA enjoyed smooth sailing in the Senate, largely because two friendly Senators, the chairman and ranking minority member of NASA's authorizing committee, also sat on the appropriations committee as ex officio members. But that arrangement has ended now; the old authorizing committee has been dismantled; and NASA authorizations are