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POL-29
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HORTH

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Date: October 7, 1970

SUBJECT: Conditions in DEOPS Prison as Told by
Detained American Citizen

PARTICIPANTS: Robert H. Horth, Director of Statistics, AGROCERES
Peter Jon de Vos, Political Officer
Harold Rabinowitz, Agricultural Officer

DATE: September 30, 1970

PLACE: Rubayat Restaurant

DETAINED AT AIRPORT

Mr. Robert Henry Horth, a 30 year old American citizen, was detained by the Sao Paulo DEOPS authorities on September 8, 1970, and held incommunicado until his release to a consular officer three days later. Tall, clean cut, and fluent in Portuguese, he has been in Brazil slightly more than two years employed as Director of Statistics by AGROCERES, a Brazilian seed company in which IBEC has a large holding. His title of Director of Statistics is somewhat of a subterfuge, since his real function is that of "trouble-shooter" and "watchdog" for IBEC's interests.

Mr. Horth related that he had been apprehended while passing through the immigration formalities at Viracopos International Airport on his return to Brazil from attending a "Science for Survival" conference in Washington, D.C. While awaiting the return of his passport, he was approached by several Brazilian authorities who escorted him into a separate room where they began to question him politely but firmly regarding his identity and the purpose of his travelling to Brazil. His truthful explanations were to no avail and, although he asked repeatedly, he was not informed as to the reason for his detention. §

§ The Brazilian authorities had received a lookout list containing the names of a number of members of the extremist Weatherman group. The name of Robert Henry Roth, appeared on this list. The similarity of Horth's name to that of Roth apparently led to the former's arrest.

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Mr. Horth related that, following several hours at the airport, he was then transferred with his luggage to the DEOPS downtown prison in Sao Paulo. His requests for permission to contact his company were refused on the grounds that "political prisoners are not permitted telephone contacts". This was the first inkling he had of the motive for his arrest. He immediately surmised that perhaps a disgruntled employee of AGROCERES, harmed in some way by Horth's recently implemented reforms in the company, had fabricated some incriminating charge concerning his activities in Brazil and had denounced him to the security authorities. At the DEOPS prison he was registered, allowed to select a pair of his own shoes and underwear from his luggage, given prison garb and placed in a cell with six other inmates. His remaining possessions, itemized and placed in safekeeping, were returned to him upon his release.

CELLMATES TORTURED

Mr. Horth quickly became acquainted with his cellmates, all of whom were under thirty years of age. All of them were being detained as suspected political subversives and had already been in jail from six months to several weeks. None of them had been legally charged or given any explanation of why they were suspected as subversives. However, each of them said that he had been subjected to torture shortly after his admittance to the prison. After the initial interrogation, in an apparent attempt by the authorities to determine whether or not the prisoner was telling the truth, each had been brought to a special room located in the bowels of the DEOPS prison and subjected to a period of torture. The "pau de arara" was one method used. Another was subjecting the victim to electrical shocks at various places on the body, including the sexual organs. Still another torture was "The Telephone," whereby the prisoner is bound to a chair and an interrogator, standing behind, smashes his cupped hands over the victim's ears, in some cases bursting the eardrums by the resultant pressure. When satisfied that nothing further was to be gained from such treatment, the prisoner was then confined to his cell, normally holding six to eight individuals. In no case had a prisoner been retortured.

Mr. Horth emphasized that he himself had not been mistreated in any fashion, probably because of his foreign nationality. The worst part of the ordeal for him had been the inability to communicate with the outside and the uncertainty of why he was being held. As he had no fixed travel schedule, his company would not have missed him for some time.

PRISON CONDITIONS

Mr. Horth said that conditions in the DEOPS prison are generally considered by the inmates to be far superior to those existing in the military jails or in the Tiradentes Prison. In the DEOPS prison the inmates are able to communicate among themselves with a great deal of facility and often pass notes, food, cigarettes, etc. via the guards. Prisoners are exercised twice weekly and may receive visitors. Mr. Horth said that there were six separate cells approximately the size of his own, and that one was filled with young girls, several of whom were pregnant. He could not vouch for the treatment of prisoners outside his cell, but had "heard" that upon their initial admittance terrible things had been done to them to make them talk. None of the prisoners had the vaguest idea how long he might be confined. However, Mr. Horth noted a continuing changeover as persons were released and new inmates admitted. Among the new arrivals, he noted several who were in a state of shock and affected by nervous twitching as a consequence of their torture session.

CELLMATES ARE INNOCENT

In Mr. Horth's opinion, five of the six in his cell were absolutely innocent of subversive political activity. The sixth, a former student at the USP Faculty of Philosophy, "looked like he might easily throw a bomb" and, while friendly, carefully shied away from discussing political topics with the American. Two were students at the USP Faculty of Economics who appeared to be quite naive about present-day Brazilian politics or political philosophy in general; they claimed they only desired to return to their studies. Two others were common construction laborers who had been apprehended while residing in a rented room in a building in which also lived a group of suspected terrorists (who were not present at the time of the raid and escaped). Mr. Horth recalled that the principal concern of these workmen was that as minimum wage earners they simply did not earn enough to support themselves. One of them even concluded that life in prison was comparatively better than on the outside since he had been tortured only once and received three decent meals daily as well as a dry place to sleep. The last cellmate was an adventurous youth who had been a charter pilot in the state of Mato Grosso until opening a profitable nightclub in a Sao Paulo suburb about a year ago. The nightclub owner's main gripe was that he was losing a great deal of money as a result of his detention. In all cases, according to Mr. Horth, the prisoners blamed "the system" for what was happening to them, and surprisingly they did not seem to bear a grudge toward the Brazilian government or towards individuals. On the contrary, they all praised President Medici and expressed high regard for his programs.

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NO PROTEST PLANNED

While temporarily shaken up by this unfortunate episode caused by mistaken identity, Mr. Horth desires to remain and work in Brazil. As an intelligent and sensible person, he philosophically accepted the apologies of the DEOPS authorities for their error and has no intention of pursuing the matter. At the same time, he is very much aware of the need for government officialdom and that element of foreign business closely identified in the public eye with the GOB to open a dialogue with the people, especially with the university students. To this end, he is most anxious to become involved in the local scene and requested that he be included in any seminars, meetings, etc. which might be sponsored by the American Chamber of Commerce or the Consulate General.

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