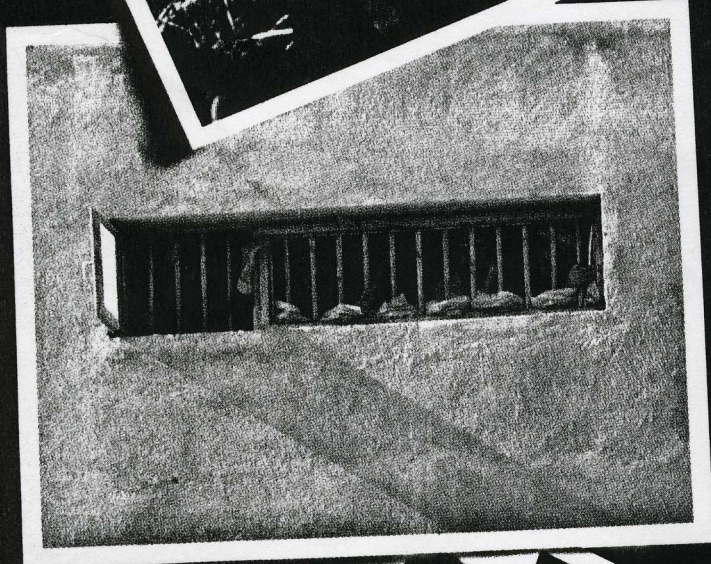


Insight

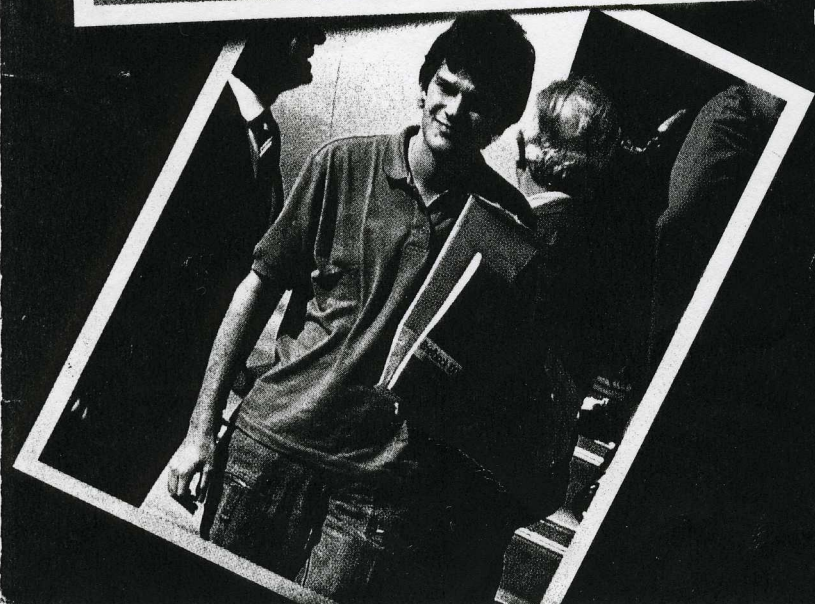
Play Out the Play / Page 5

July 4, 1988 / \$2.00



KABUL PRISON MEMOIR

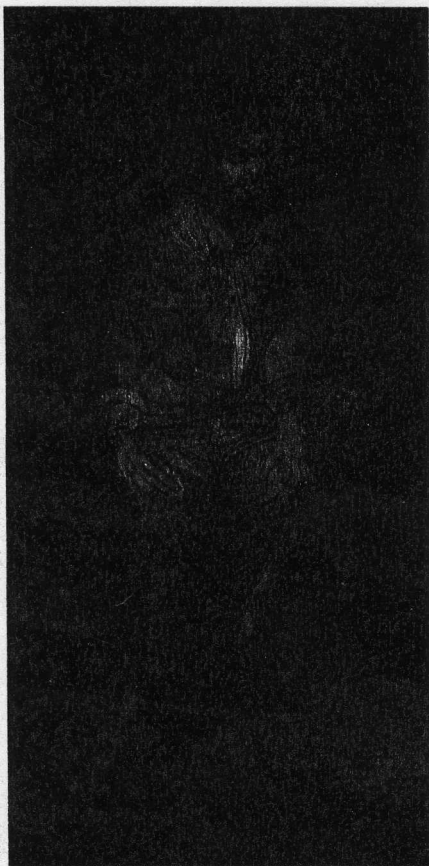
FAUSTO BILOSLAVO,
AN ITALIAN JOURNALIST
SPENT SEVEN MONTHS
AS A PRISONER
OF THE COMMUNISTS
IN AFGHANISTAN.
THIS IS HIS STORY.



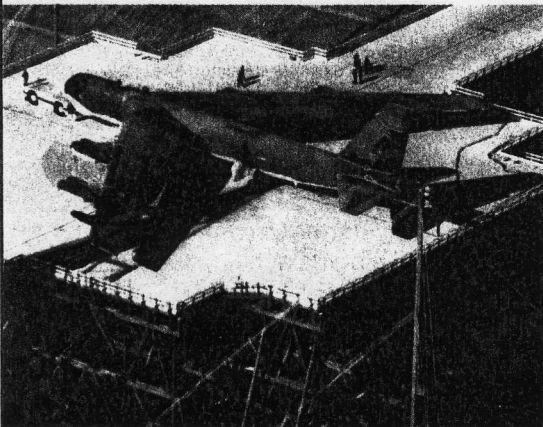
Insight

on the news

Vol. 4, No. 27



8 / Captured by Communists



18 / Electronic Pollution



26 / Thatcher's Dictums

COVER STORY

8 Behind Bars in Kabul Fausto Biloslavo, an Italian journalist, was on assignment in Afghanistan, traveling with the resistance, the mujahideen, to cover their war against the communist regime and a Soviet occupying army. On his way out, separated from his traveling companions, he fell into the hands of government soldiers. It was the beginning of a seven-month ordeal of endless interrogation, isolation and ill treatment in the prisons of Afghanistan. Along the way, he met many others who had suffered fates even worse than his own, who told him about mass killings and produced the evidence of their own bodies to document torture and atrocities. Biloslavo, now a free man, lived to tell the tale. This is his story.

NATION

18 Waves of Trouble Electromagnetic waves from television, radio, radar, household appliances and other sources not only cause problems for electronic equipment but also may harm people. What to do about them is a dicey question.

21 Now You See It . . . A civil suit charging massive fraud against Northrop in the manufacture of the Stealth bomber may be about to disappear.

22 Government Briefing

23 Congressional Briefing

WORLD

26 The Gospel of St. Margaret Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain recently went on the offensive to defend her conservative policies against her critics in the Anglican Church. Wealth, she informed them, is not evil.

28 What Would Tito Think? Yugoslavia, yet another moribund, centralized economy in Eastern Europe, looks west for salvation. And again comes a bailout on the basis of stale promises of reform.

30 Mitterrand, Oul; Socialists, Non Francois Mitterrand figured a 54 percent victory in the presidential election was a clear sign to shoot for a Socialist majority in the National Assembly. He figured wrong, as did the pundits.

34 Blow to the Midsection President Duarte is dying of cancer. The prospects for his centrist Christian Democrats — and El Salvador as a whole — may not be much better.

36 Intelligence Briefing

38 Press Briefing

COVER PHOTOS OF FAUSTO BILOSLAVO IN AFGHANISTAN BY RICHARD MACKENZIE / INSIGHT; OF POLI-CHARKI PRISON IN KABUL BY PHILIPPE LEDRU / SYGMA; OF BILOSLAVO IN ITALY AFTER HIS RELEASE BY OLYMPIA

One Man's Sentence in an Afghan Hell

EDITORS' NOTE: Fausto Biloslavo, an Italian journalist with the Albatross Press Agency, was taken prisoner by communist troops in November as he sought to leave Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. Seven months of interrogation, isolation and ill treatment followed. Biloslavo was freed after months of diplomatic efforts that ended in a personal appeal from Italy's president to the president of Afghanistan. He wrote this account of the brutal existence inside Afghanistan's prisons exclusively for Insight.

"Three years ago in the month of Ramadan, they rounded up 320 prisoners in one night. Before they were bound and gagged, they managed only to invoke Allah, whereupon they were loaded on prison vans and carried to the army's rifle range. And there, just like so many before them, they were mowed down and buried in large communal graves."

— A fellow prisoner at Poli-i-Charki

A mild November day in the province of Laghman, a southeastern zone of Afghanistan: My assignment as a free journalist in occupied territory was about to end. As I sat by the side of an excavated road I observed my traveling companions' departure. The lapis lazuli smugglers we had joined in order to reenter Pakistan set out, and the figures of Richard Mackenzie (of *Insight*) and Tony Davis (of *AsiaWeek*) vanished behind them a few minutes later.

We had celebrated my 26th birthday together only the night before, Friday, Nov. 13. We were finally heading back toward Pakistan after three months of wanderings in north Afghanistan. In our rucksacks we were carrying our pictures and notes on resistance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud's victory at Keran (*Insight*, Jan. 25) as well as an exclusive interview with the brother of Afghan government leader Najib, who had recently escaped from Kabul in order to join the resistance.

Our return was no easy business. Soviets and communists aren't the only danger facing journalists who venture into Afghanistan. On that mild morning, we also ran the risk of being captured by the guerrillas of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami, an extremist and fiercely anti-Western resistance group bitterly opposed to the faction that we had traveled with during our journey.

My greatest concern was that the fruits of my three months' labor in that bleak and inhospitable country might be seized or destroyed, as had happened to colleagues

of mine. After having entrusted the guide with my films and journal, I had allowed my colleagues and the Afghan smugglers to proceed. I sealed my fate in that last desperate attempt to salvage my material. By the time I set out in my companions' tracks, they had probably already abandoned the main road and turned off into one of the innumerable side valleys. At the crossroads my guide had not waited for me, obviously concerned not to lose contact with the rest of the caravan. I tried to follow the tracks left by our horses and mules. The final architect of my fate was an Afghan passerby, who swore that he had come

across my companions a little earlier.

Some kilometers later, the red flags that point out allied posts to Soviet aircraft filled me with a grim sense of despair and foreboding: I had advanced all by myself into territory controlled by the communist army. A surly Afghan peasant who refused to provide me with hospitality until sundown confirmed my worst fears: The region was swarming with government troops.

In desperation I began to retrace my steps. One, two, three government checkpoints: It seemed that I'd almost made it. But at the fourth post, just 200 meters from

a curve in the road and possible salvation, my hopes were dashed by a burst of gunfire. I made a desperate run for it, pursued by bullets that ripped into the ground all around me, raising little clouds of dust. I dove into an irrigation channel parallel to the road.

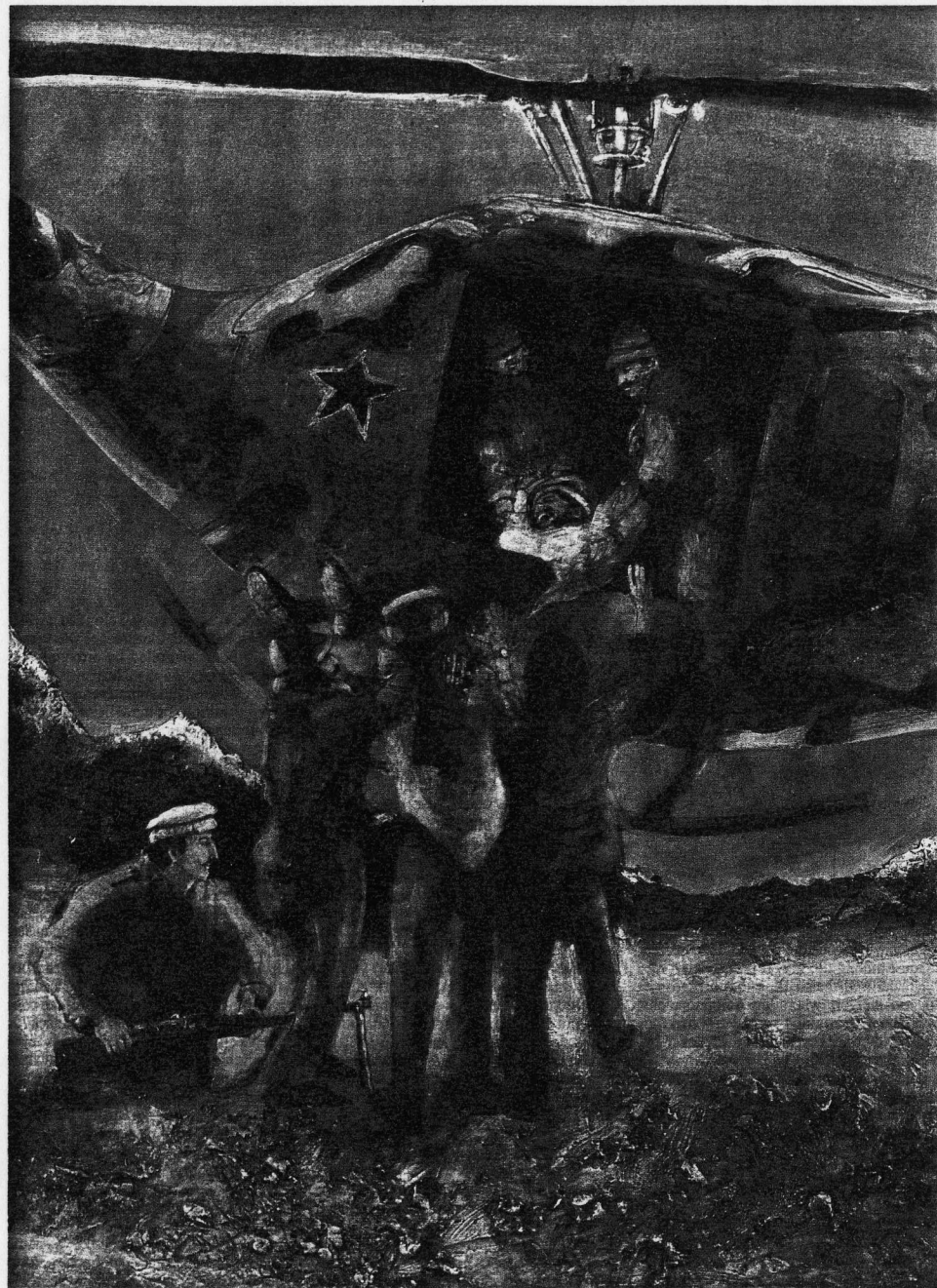
I hoped I might be able to conceal myself in a patch of shrubbery, but no sooner had this crossed my mind than I saw the bushes explode in a hail of machine-gun fire. Dragging myself along the irrigation channel with the water up to my waist, I finally reached the ruins of a bombed house:



Biloslavo's initial beating at the outpost

my last hope. Some minutes later, the cold metal of two Kalashnikov barrels pointed at my throat put that hope to rest.

A finger was twitching nervously on the trigger behind one gun barrel. I had my hands up, but that posture, it seemed, brought with it no assurance that I was going to live. Two huge black eyes were glaring at me from behind the weapon in a mixture of terror and surprise. The government soldier in question was 15 years old, perhaps less. He was wearing the shabbiest civilian clothes, and even the short Soviet AKM seemed enormous in his small and

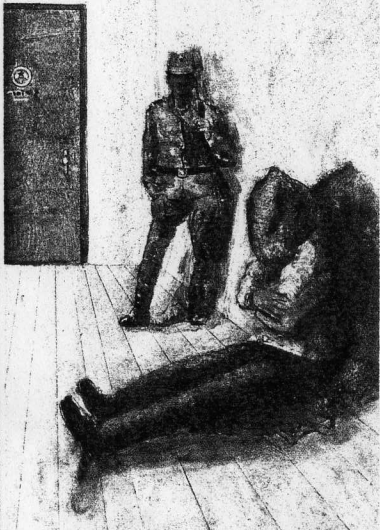


Passed by government soldiers onto a Soviet helicopter for the flight to Jalalabad

A KGB official was waiting for me. His face seemed kindly enough, but his question chilled my blood: "Did you try and kill yourself en route?"

stumpy hands. For what seemed an eternity, my life hung in the balance — in the hands of a conscript who was no more than a child.

He'd probably like to shoot — if more through fear than loathing. In resignation I waited for the blast from his gun. But one of his comrades, about the same age and with the same look of bewilderment on his face, spoke up in protest, and that appar-



Hooded, he awaits questioning.

ently is what made the young fellow decide against pulling the trigger.

They used their rifle butts to prod me toward the fort where my imprisonment was about to begin. I turned my head to look at them. They had calmed down by now, and their faces had become expressionless. Like so many of their comrades, they had in all probability been forcibly recruited to fill the gaps in an army decimated by desertions; as conscripts, they are simply trying to survive the downfall of a regime.

My ordeal began with the horrendous lashes that the commander of that outpost of lost souls proceeded to rain down on my back. "Did you really imagine that you could escape and get to Pakistan?" yelled the officer, who truly seemed enraged by my rather obvious attempt to avoid capture.

No matter that I kept my hands above my head and continued to insist that I was a journalist — the blows of his rod kept pounding away at my skin.

The reasons for all this nervous energy became clear to me some hours later. It is because you live in a perpetual state of terror in posts like this. Night after night, the resistance uses fire and iron to hammer away at this godforsaken band of Sarandoy, or paramilitary national police. The isolation goes hand in hand with the chaos, squalor and disorganization that are such a hallmark of the Afghan army. Few of the soldiers inside the camp wore a full uniform, and many of my guards seemed scarcely any different from the scruffy guerrillas who swell the ranks of the resistance. It seemed perfectly natural to me when a pair of these conscripts-of-despair divided up my money and camera equipment. A squad then transferred me from the outpost to the main fort.

As I devoured a plate of lentils, I realized that I was now a witness to one of the darkest, most tragic and least-known aspects of the entire Afghan war.

Nighttime is just one long sleepless nightmare for the occupants of this small garrison. The resistance goes on the attack promptly at sundown. Light and heavy weapons keep firing away remorselessly in an arc of 180 degrees around the fort. Every once in a while I'd kid myself that the *mujahideen* would come to my rescue, but then I'd come to my senses, realizing that this attack was one small incident in an interminable war of attrition waged by the resistance against the communist forces.

By daybreak, the initiative was back in the hands of the besieged. Summoned by radio, a squadron of nine helicopters appeared on the horizon in hedgechopping flight. As signal flares were lighted at the fort, the Soviet Mi-24s spewed forth a sea of rockets and missiles toward anything that stood out from the dreary desolation of the surrounding plateau.

The bombing went on for a couple of hours, and then one of the helicopters descended over the camp's inner yard. In an instant, a beseeching throng emerged from the innermost recesses of the communist outpost, a crowd of miserable wretches appearing out of the ruined and abandoned missile-ravaged houses. They were wounded and bandaged men, cripples dragging themselves along on crutches, tottering old people and little children. In a scene from "Good-bye to Saigon," this shapeless mass of sad cases took the inner yard by storm and tried to clamber onto the helicopter.

It was hovering there just for me. I was dragged along by a group of soldiers, then passed over their heads into the helicopter. The roar of its blades scarcely managed to drown out the impassioned cries of the throng below.

The flight to Jalalabad was a kind of wild slalom through the jagged peaks of Afghanistan — an act of folly, but one imposed upon the communist pilot by the risk of Stinger missiles in the hands of the *mujahideen*. During our acrobatics, the side rockets fired haphazardly at targets among the rocks. Their metallic screeches made me shudder. I gazed after them through the porthole as they darted off toward the tallest hills and smashed to smithereens in pillars of smoke, one after another.

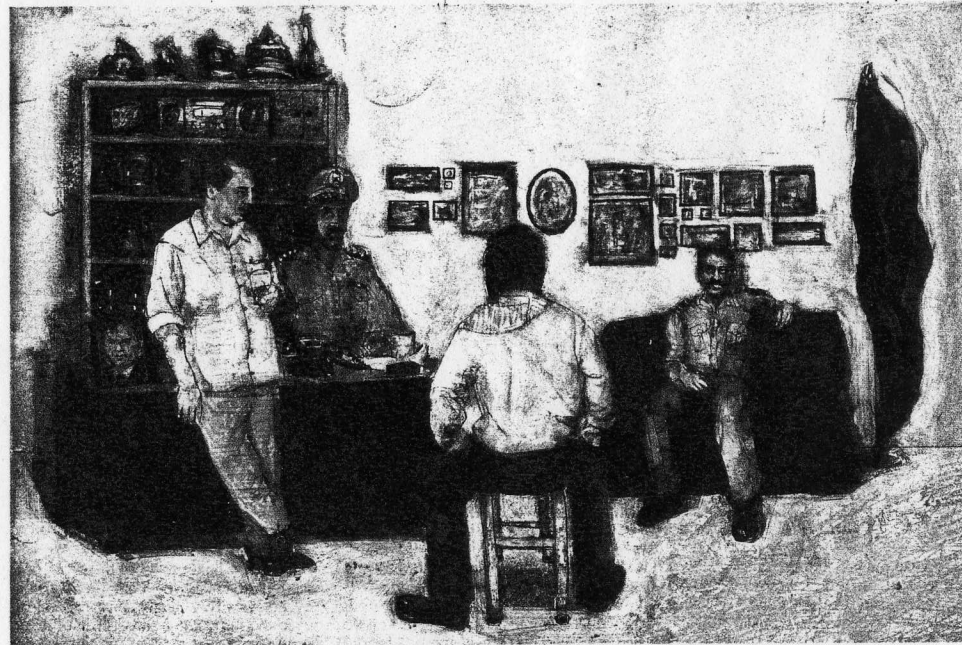
At the Jalalabad airport, a hood was pulled over my head, but I could still see through it enough to get a glimpse of something of my surroundings. The airport's airstrips and yards were chock-full of military vehicles and aircraft. I climbed aboard a jeep, and outside, the streets I was crossing were being patrolled by armored personnel carriers.

At an isolated headquarters, a KGB official was waiting for me. His face seemed kindly enough, in perfect harmony with the smiling portrait of Mikhail Gorbachev he kept on his desk, but his question chilled my blood: "Did you try and kill yourself en route?"

Trying to guess whether he meant this as a threat, a piece of advice or a prediction as to one possible outcome, I told him I had not. Eventually, after a couple other utterly pointless questions, I had the impression that I had been brought into his presence simply out of the Afghan communists' sense of their duties as subjects.

In all probability I was standing in front of the controller for the local police. Yet despite his ostensible good nature, the controller was in fact quite cold and detached. We never once looked each other in the eye. All he did was look me up and down while I spoke with the interpreter. At the end, clearly bored with this useless official questioning, the controller craftily promised to send me back home on a special flight — in return for a full confession. It was simply his way of bidding me good-bye.

That same day, after having been forced to put on an Afghan government army uniform, I was loaded onto an Ilyushin and shipped off to Kabul. On board they sat me down in front of some Soviet paratroopers wearing civilian clothes, who were going home on leave. Also present were some



The brief interrogation before the smiling and crafty KGB officer

senior Afghan officials and members of the Soviet regional *nomenklatura*, the elite. When the lights went out at takeoff, I fancied I saw, all over again, the faces that seemed to epitomize the whole sorry plight of Afghanistan, gathered to poke fun at me.

In the months to come, the uniform forcibly imposed on me at Jalalabad was to cost me hours and hours of nerve-racking interrogation. But for the time being I had not yet sensed any trap and merely bemoaned the coarse fabric, like sackcloth, uncomfortable against my skin.

A change of clothing was awaiting me in Kabul at the KhAD isolation prison, a lugubrious graveyard for human beings buried alive. I was forced to wear a kind of pair of Afghan pajamas, hopelessly ill-suited to the harsh climate in the jail. With few replacements, these were to be my sole garments over the course of four long months. The fabric had black and yellow stripes and a design reminiscent of the uniforms the Jews were forced to wear in Nazi concentration camps. All of my other garments, including my underwear, had been seized by the Afghan secret police officers.

My cell was No. 7, on the second floor. It was four paces by three. Air filtered between the cracks in the sheet of metal covering the only window. The pane of glass had been painted yellow so as to keep one from ranging one's gaze over the surrounding scenery. At night, the faint yet irritating light from a light bulb was never

turned off. Even the light was yellowish, just like the walls — an endless gloomy yellow monotone that had a way of permeating your brain.

Silence was a requirement imposed by brute force. Inside the jail everything was forbidden, but most of all you were forbidden to try to forget about your own desperation. The guards caught a young lad who was drumming a message out on the wall, and he was savagely beaten. The cell walls were frequently plastered to wipe out graffiti incised by the inmates.

Everything in the jail, even physiological needs, was bound up with a whole bureaucratic rigmarole. If you needed to go to the bathroom, you knocked on the door of your cell and waited patiently for the *pairador*, or guard on duty, to let you out and accompany you in ritual silence to the large room that functioned as a communal sewer. This was the only concession to the principles of hygiene made by the prison administration.

As a foreigner, I alone among the prisoners was entitled to a bucket of hot water each week, a precious luxury indeed in a place infested with parasites, where the temperature was always very low.

Bitter cold and claustrophobia were the worst foes of all. We lived two or three in

the same tiny cell, our own bodies providing the only heat. By January our exercise hour, which consisted of permission to silently stroll along the perimeter of a large open room, was rendered impossible due to the severe cold and copious snowfall.

Yet the physical and environmental hardships were nothing compared with the atmosphere of terror prevailing in each cell. The prisoners seemed like automatons, stripped of all self-determination, overwhelmed by the power of threats and acts of violence their captors enjoyed.

Sederat, as this prison is called, is an isolation jail. Its detainees, held while awaiting trial, are subjected to interminable interrogations. Such people have neither rules nor rights nor terms of imprisonment to be complied with. Having no lawyers to turn to, they can rot away in their cells for years on end, vanish into nothingness or be convicted without trial.

Nearly all of my companions in incarceration had been forced to undergo a series of barbaric beatings and tortures. "They kept me sleepless and hungry for 10 days on end," a companion in misadventure confided to me, "and at night I was forced to remain standing, while my days were spent being kicked and subjected to electric shocks."

Frequently the confessions, extorted for the use and consumption of the "revolutionary special tribunals," were the result of even more barbaric forms of treatment.



Third from right, amid Soviet paratroopers waiting in a transport jet to go home on leave

"They had me bound to a chair while they applied to my toes the wires from a Soviet field telephone," explained one Afghan inmate, "and when they began to turn the handle generating electricity, I swallowed a bit of *nassuar* [a form of hallucinogenic tobacco] so that I could stand the pain. It was far worse with some other people, because they received electric shocks under their tongue, armpits or genitals. . . . With each electric shock their naked bodies would be jolted from the ground."

I was surrounded by human wreckage: people with their backs smashed to pieces, dislocated jaws, twisted nasal septa, their bodies covered with scars of every description and bearing the hallmarks of cigarettes stubbed out against their skin.

Alas, in this hellhole there were plenty of professional troublemakers, spies and informers. Shir Mohammad, otherwise known as Shirmaka, was one of these. In common with so many others, he had received a vague promise of clemency that might perhaps be granted, or perhaps not. He clearly hoped so, and in the interim worked full-time for the secret police. Sitting in my cell, he asked me pointless and insinuating questions for hours on end before being (somewhat abruptly) invited to leave.

Turgun, a young Turk captured while serving in the ranks of the resistance and left to his fate in Afghan jails for four years, had had occasion to witness a great deal worse. "A contemptible individual positively brimming with tip-offs for the interrogators would offer the detainees drugged tea and, after having got them to talk, would rape them with the guards' blessing," he later told me.

The narrow space of the cell that I

shared with a string of other poor bastards was a microcosm of human misery.

Joe Mohammad, who vanished from view almost immediately, seemed to have twisted against his own relatives the charge of having committed an act of violence. The mysterious Alim was a former secret police officer charged with having poisoned (under orders from the resistance) a consignment of rice that the government had been planning to distribute among the general public. Dahud, accused of knowing where the resistance kept some Stingers concealed, pretended to be mad, but repeated beatings seemed to have caused him to confuse the boundaries between comedy and reality.

Most conspicuous of all was the figure of Rasul, an Afghan from the province of Logar. He resembled no one so much as Genghis Khan — his head shaved right down to the scalp, a square jaw and bushy mustache. He was accused of having blown up the Jalalabad telephone exchange, and for a year he had been waiting for visits from his family, to no avail. In the meantime, he was pleading innocent and placing his trust in Allah. His five daily prayers toward Mecca served as my timepiece and accompanied my calisthenics. We conversed in a kind of imaginary language: an Esperanto borne of desperation and consisting of sounds, common words and gestures.

Rasul accordingly became my official interpreter during the interminable series of personal battles that for four months running confronted me with the inflexible bureaucracy inside the secret police prison. These would be trifling battles indeed, from the shoes of a free man, but they became vitally important in a place where

your jailers would use every means at their disposal to break you both morally and psychologically. I fought for a handful of sugar and for just one more sheet of toilet paper; I struggled for my right to speak in the deafening silence of the living graveyard.

My every request meant an unending succession of refusals, prevarications and delays. My first interlocutor was the guard: It was his job (when he remembered) to report to his superior, who in turn referred the matter further up. Little by little my requests filtered up to the highest reaches of a prison administration accustomed to treating its detainees like animals. Pretty soon I came to realize that I was a privileged person. My complaints were not silenced to the sounds of jackboots and truncheons, as was the case with other prisoners, and sometimes my protests were even heard.

Over four months I scored a satisfying number of victories. My first victory (as well as the sweetest!) was my procurement of a special diet, in view of the fact that I had been suffering from near-chronic dysentery since I had been captured. Standard food for Sederat's prisoners consisted of a half-liter of tea for two at breakfast, rice with some occasional scraps of meat for lunch and watery soup with potatoes for dinner. As a journalist and Westerner, I was vouchsafed a thin slice of bread in the morning and yogurt in the course of the day.

My other victories had to do with the restoration of my underwear and socks, and the provision of a larger quantity of toilet

I was surrounded by human wreckage: people with their backs smashed to pieces, dislocated jaws, twisted nasal septa, their bodies covered with scars.

paper. At the start I had been entitled to just one roll a month: a manifestly inadequate amount, considering that by my calculations this amounted to not more than two sheets per day. Notwithstanding my determination to do so, I failed to convince my jailers of my need to keep in shape. I had started to exercise regularly after some weeks in detention, when I noticed that my stomach was swelling up monstrosly and my physical condition was deteriorating. I used rolled-up blankets as weights. I asked my cellmate to push down on them to compel me to greater effort. After two weeks I was forbidden to take this exercise, on the grounds that it was "harmful to the body."

Despite the strict regime of isolation to which we were all subjected, there was still a thin thread that connected us to the outside world. In January the sound of the resistance's onslaughts shook Kabul night after night, keeping the whole prison awake. Inside the jail the rumor was already circulating that the Soviets were ready to abandon Afghanistan. By the beginning of February, our prison's very own jungle drums were spreading the news that the Red Army would be departing in May.

These rumors gave me hope for release in the not-too-distant future and gave me the strength to stand up to the interrogations that followed my arrival at Sederat. My encounters with my inquisitors were none too reassuring: "Don't concern yourself about your future, but just remember that we have ways of making you talk!" So I was admonished with a sly smile by the person in charge of the commission that was investigating my case.

He was revolting to look at. Chunky, with brilliant hair and his face framed by a pair of heavy spectacles, he was unable to conceal the ruddy color of his cheeks produced by his excessive fondness for vodka.

Thus began a series of interrogations that would progressively evolve into interminable persecution.

Everything seemed designed to force me to make confessions that had nothing to do with me personally. Day after day my jailers would ask me the same questions, with the flagrant aim of getting me to contradict myself and admit to activities considerably more dangerous than journalism. "Why were you wearing Afghan clothes? . . . Was your government aware of your trip? . . . Can you repeat for us the contents of your conversations with Massoud?"

After some weeks my answers grew mechanistic, almost automatic. In December, after one month of imprisonment,

I realized that the Italian Embassy had not yet been informed of my capture and that my imprisonment had been kept secret. And so I began a hunger strike in order to ensure that the Italian diplomatic representatives would be notified.

As I would understand later, I obtained only bogus promises, but in return I became aware that I was untouchable. Unlike the other prisoners, I could complain without getting beaten up. The succession of interrogations, which would ultimately bring me face-to-face with a "special tribunal for the Afghan revolution," fairly soon became a psychological battle of wills with my inquisitors. Profiting from my privileged status, I disrupted their rhythm by making sarcastic rejoinders to the monotonous succession of questions. Their inability to respond with their customary methods unnerved them, making our confrontation more tolerable. An assigned secret police officer vented his frustration by crumpling paper and nervously snapping some pencils. His wrath reached its peak when I jumped up and stalked off toward the exit door.

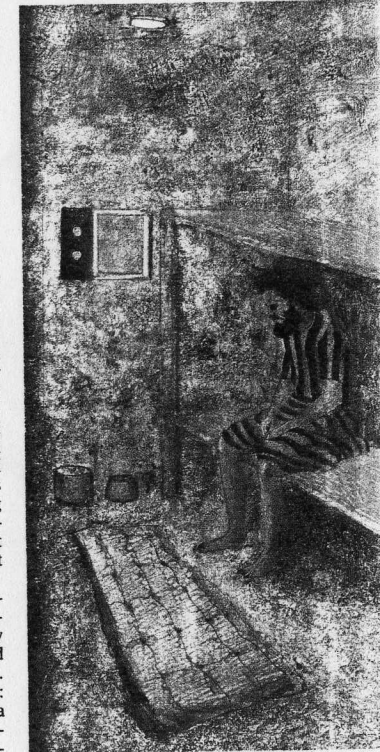
With my trial in the offing, my relations with my jailers grew even more tense. For months now I had coexisted with revolting parasites, which seemed to proliferate exuberantly in my increasingly bushy beard and hair. My request for a barber had been turned down on several occasions, and I began to suspect that something fishy was going on. They probably wanted to bring me up before the judges in a state of complete physical degradation. It would present them with a picture not of a journalist but of a mountain bandit.

On Feb. 13, three months after my capture, I received my first visit from the Italian charge d'affaires in Kabul. It was a very emotional moment for me; I finally had proof that my case was being monitored. But joy was swiftly followed by despair: The next four weeks were consumed in a total state of emptiness. No more interrogations, no more visits, scant and inconclusive reports regarding my trial. I had the feeling that I had been forgotten about all over again.

I spent these days reading and rereading some letters written months beforehand, which the prison authorities had only now sent on to me. This emptiness was more frightening to me than the interrogations; I simply could not understand what was going on. Every once in a while I would lose control and yell, "You're all barbarians!" at the top of my lungs as I pounded my fists against the door. It didn't get me very far.

At long last I learned that my trial had been set for mid-March. In an old movie house, a trio of judges (members of the revolutionary special tribunal) were ready to try me on the charges drawn up by a public prosecutor, whom I first encountered at the trial.

I was presented to the judges as a "coun-



A small cell, a relentless light

terrevolutionary in the service of imperialism . . . [who had] come to Afghanistan to gather military intelligence on behalf of the diabolical international spy organizations." I was accused of having taken part in the implementation of "counterrevolutionary plans" and of being at the same time a "military adviser, saboteur, spy and terrorist." (The word "journalist" seems not to exist in the Afghan vocabulary.) Film, photographs and articles made by myself were

Seven years — handed down at the conclusion of the farce — well, it even struck me as too light a sentence for a “diabolical international spy.”

to be used as part of “a propaganda scheme the purpose of which is to bring the Afghan nation into disrepute.” Thanks to a tiny piece of lapis lazuli that had been confiscated from me at the time of my capture, I was further accused of smuggling — or better still, “acts of theft injurious to Afghanistan’s mineral resources.”

I was assigned a silent Afghan lawyer; he played his cameo role to perfection. Invited specially for the occasion, Soviet television filmed the entire proceedings, endeavoring with their cameras to lay bare my frailties. I read out a statement in my defense. It represented the only right to which I was entitled.

Seven years’ detention for acts of espionage — handed down at the conclusion of the farce — well, it even struck me as too light a sentence for a “diabolical international spy.” The day after, they transferred me to Poli-i-Charki, the notorious penal fortress on the outskirts of Kabul. They made me board a windowless police van. I breathed the dust and pondered my misfortunes.

Eighty to 90 Afghans lived like animals herded into a pigsty in Room 75, on the ground floor of Cellblock 2. My place was

among them. Here things took a dramatic turn for the worse. In this jail I lost my entitlement to a special diet, and the negligible food given to me by the authorities was emphatically inedible. The cold was perhaps even more intense than at Sederat. Having no money, I couldn’t buy anything at the prison store. I didn’t even have a bowl for my meals and a cup for my tea.

In the hope of a better future, I sought out the solidarity of the other detainees. I survived thanks to the charity of these poor people.

The vast majority of this small population were political prisoners, and they placed their trust in the invincible weapon of religious faith. When they prostrated themselves in lengthy rows facing Mecca, the gloomy and inhospitable hall would be transformed into a latter-day catacomb. As far as these “martyrs” of Afghanistan are concerned, prayer is a source of comfort in the face of everyday sufferings, as well as a means of deliverance from the injustices the faithful have undergone.

Kabir, an ascetic some 35 years old, was the spiritual leader of these people. Sentenced to 16 years for membership in an Islamic party, he had already served half his

term. “I have never committed any crime,” this teacher explained. “All I ever did was to declare myself a Muslim and an anticommunist.” Tortured, beaten up, threatened with death, he spent four years in solitary confinement in the notorious Cellblock 1, which is for those who have been sentenced to death. “If I complained they would force me to live in the toilets for a number of weeks, where I had only the clothes on my back and I was entitled to just half a loaf of bread a day. When an international commission visited the cellblock, they locked us up in the warehouses and replaced us with soldiers dressed as detainees; their job was to extol the virtues of imprisonment and the behavior of the guards.”

Jassin was another member of this brotherhood. After having been tortured and beaten, he confessed to numerous terrorist acts on behalf of the Hezb-i-Islami of Hekhmattayr. They had sentenced him to death and he was awaiting execution. “I have never been afraid. I fought for the jihad,” he would insist with a nervous smile on his lips. “One day this door will be opened and they’ll come and take me away to be shot. . . . That will mean that my time has come.”



The crowded inmates of the notorious Poli-i-Charki on the outskirts of Kabul

A dozen days later I was transferred to a cell deemed more secure. Here I could have little expectation of acts of assistance from my companions in imprisonment. Most of them were former communist officers, soldiers or functionaries convicted for common-law offenses. The most enigmatic character was an illustrious agronomist from the Panjshir Valley. He was nicknamed Panjshir Sahib — Mr. Panjshir. Through fear of reprisals he did not care to reveal his name to me, but judging by what he told me in jail, until fairly recently he had been one of the regime’s major scientists. Now disgraced, following a number of disputes with Soviet experts, he had been tortured and ultimately sentenced to 20 years in detention. Decisive factors behind his conviction were a research trip to the United States and his kinship with guerrilla leader Massoud.

Survivors from the Hafizullah Amin era were shortly transferred into the cell. Sentenced severely, they tried to keep the sorrow of their detention out of their minds by raising a white dove: a curious symbol of peace for people who had led Afghanistan toward the abyss of war. Encountering detainees who had survived so many years in prison struck me as rather odd.

Within the walls of this jail, one speaks of massacres as casually as one speaks of food or the weather. “On the occasion of a revolt inside Cellblock 2,” I was told by a companion, “a detachment of Soviet soldiers burst into the cells and dragged away dozens of detainees, who were never to be seen again.”

According to the accounts of Poli-i-Charki’s veterans, Amin had had his semi-conscious victims buried by bulldozers on the jail’s perimeter. The first Soviet-installed leader, Babrak Karmal, and the cur-

rent head of state, Najib, both responsible for mass executions, seem thus far to have preferred hanging or shooting their prisoners. “But sometimes they even used the most unbelievable procedures,” one detainee explained to me. “Tough interrogations were conducted aboard aircraft or helicopters, and they would culminate in a fall through the air after the confession.”

In Sederat, they hung weights from one prisoner’s genitals, and he was forced to remain standing while being beaten with a stick, I was told. He wept, howled and yelped with pain and kept right on saying that he knew nothing, and so he died after a couple of days of torture.

The true nature of these horrors at times even surpassed the most elaborate fantasies: At Poli-i-Charki, there was a rumor making the rounds that a number of detainees had been bled to death through supplying blood for hospitals crammed with casualties. Certain prisoners who had fallen ill had not received medicine because they were regarded as enemies of the revolution.

Such atrocities were the norm and served to maintain an atmosphere of constant terror, particularly in the central cellblocks, where an air of rebellion was always simmering beneath the surface.

Those who did not die frequently went mad. There was the case of a rough young Pakistani with his head shaved down to his scalp, known by everyone in the jail as Spangul. He sat in a corner, all huddled up in his terror, his clothes torn and bloodstained and his eyes swollen with tears and bruises. Nobody knew his real name — not even he knew. Spangul had the brain of a

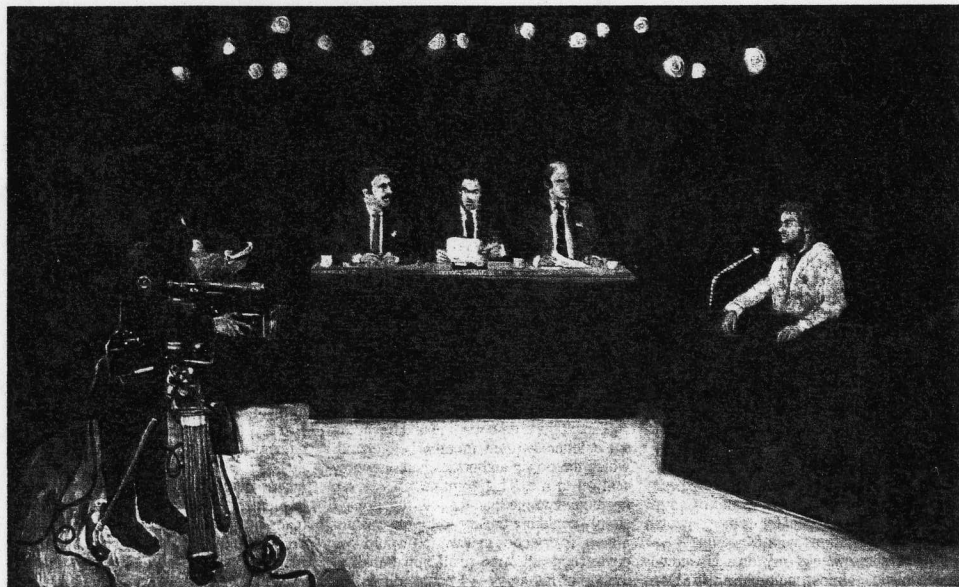
child, scorched by the electric current his torturers had inflicted on him during his interrogation. He had been beaten by the guards because he had not gone back into his cell after the exercise hour. He wandered aimlessly through the courtyard — free, perhaps, in his own dementia.

Spangul was one of many madmen vegetating in Cellblock 3 of Poli-i-Charki in the area reserved for foreigners, where I was transferred at the beginning of April. Here, the nights reverberated with the shrieks of lunatics incessantly reiterating their sorrow.

After having heard a great deal about him, I finally met Alain Guillo, the French reporter captured Sept. 12 and sentenced to 12 years on the same grounds as I was; from then on I shared a cell with him on the second floor of Wing 3.

This dormitory burst at the seams with 60-odd other foreigners, mostly Iranians and Pakistanis. Some had answered the call to the holy war by joining the *mujahideen*, while others were secret agents. Many were simply hapless shepherds who had been captured while they were chasing their goats over Afghanistan’s poorly defined borders.

Such had been the fate of the 28-year-old Pakistani shepherd Khudadad, a native of Gilgit. The previous year, while he was pursuing his flock, he had crossed over into the Afghan province of Badakhshan and was captured by three Soviets on horseback, who tied him up and dragged him to an underground base: “They kept me prisoner in a hole, watched over by a pair of trained dogs; these were obviously special dogs who obeyed orders delivered in Russian by my captors. These animals accompanied me to the toilet. They were so well-trained that by the end of the time allowed



The Soviet television camera records Bilosiyav’s trial for spying and smuggling.

From mouth to mouth, from cell to cell, the words on everyone's lips were the same: "Sciuravi buro bakai" (Soviets go home).

me for my bodily needs, they would drag me away, after having hurried me up with a bite in the legs.

"Then I was taken to Kabul, where they started to beat me to a pulp to try and force me to say that I was a Pakistani spy. The Afghans showed me no mercy and beat me pitilessly. One particularly violent kick caused one of my testicles to explode, and I fainted. When I regained consciousness I

I'm just like them. . . . I just know that I'll be punished after making these statements to you, but I'm not afraid because I'm not worth a damn thing anymore."

Still surviving in the cell that I shared with Guillo were an Iranian doctor who had been captured while giving assistance to the *mujahideen* and a young Turk who had entered Afghanistan to fight alongside the partisans.

Turgun, the Turk, was one of those "CIA agents" who had consented to "confess" his sins for Afghan television. "When they arrested me I was just 16 years old," explained this likable "henchman." "In order to extort that confession, they locked me up underground and tied me up against a wall. Last but not least, they tore my skin off in shreds with a kind of scalpel. I resisted for a couple of days, but then I just couldn't go on anymore." This young man didn't know one word of English; he had no idea what the CIA might be.

By the month of May, the sounds of war were distracting my attention from the daily horrors of detention. The distinct sounds of muffled explosions could be heard coming from the outskirts of Kabul: The resistance's missiles had resumed their assault on government areas. Every explosion brought a chorus from the detainees: "*besan-besan*," they said, referring to the ground-to-ground missiles launched by the *mujahideen*. The exercise hour, spent in a triangular area set between the reinforced concrete bunkers of that slaughterhouse jail, was disturbed by the roar of helicopters patrolling the airspace around the capital.

From mouth to mouth, from cell to cell, the words on everyone's lips were the same: "*Sciuravi buro bakai*" (Soviets go home). The official reports on the large black-and-white television inside the dormitory were crowded out by a jumble of rumors, partly imaginary and partly borne out by the facts.

Political prisoners who had been detained in regional centers, now rendered insecure by the Red Army's withdrawal, were being transferred to Poli-i-Charki. If reports from Afghans locked up in other wings of the prison were anything to go by, a number of cities were about to fall into the hands of the resistance. In confirmation of this contention, it was soon learned that an Afghan general had recently been killed in the course of a guerrilla attack on the province of Kandahar. This piece of news did not fill all the prison inmates with joy, though, because mixed in with the detainees were the dozens of informers and quislings who had already begun to fear for their lives.

On the eve of my release I was transferred back to the secret police jail. Alain Guillo had left some days previously, and I was left alone yet again. In a narrow cell in the KhAD prison where I awaited my freedom, two men were waiting for the next summons for interrogation. The older of them was repeating the name of Allah in an unceasing singsong. The other, most probably a *mujahid*, was not afraid of his fate. In the eyes of both of my occasional cellmates I glimpsed the ray of hope linked to imminent Soviet withdrawal. "We shan't be here for very long. . . . do you think?" the older one inquired of me suddenly. "There'll be a reconciliation amnesty, otherwise the resistance will conquer the capital." I looked at him but didn't know what to say in reply. After 6½ months of imprisonment I had learned how dangerous it was to get one's hopes up while still locked up within the walls of Afghan prisons.

I learned this lesson once again when, confident that I had left prison behind me for good, I boarded the sardine-can police van that was to take me to freedom. After a dozen minutes or so, when the rear door was reopened, I once again beheld the grim spectacle of the KhAD interrogation center.

But some hours later, that same police van deposited me at the entrance of the Hotel Ariana, where I was greeted by Ambassador Bruno Bottai, the foreign affairs secretary-general, who had been sent there carrying a plea for mercy from the president of the Republic of Italy, Francesco Cossiga.

I did not really relish my freedom (in the broadest sense of the term) until the day after, when the special plane that was flying me home reached an altitude of 10,000 meters. We were flying above the clouds, and I gazed happily over the horizon, which seemed to go on for ever and ever. The war in Afghanistan was continuing underneath those clouds. I had already begun to write notes, some of which I had taken down on the back of silver cigarette paper for fear of being found out, or in the hope of getting them, if not myself, to my colleagues.

Now that I am free and can write all of this, I hope that my readers will not interpret it simply as one man's story, but rather as a tale that allows everyone to hear the cry of the Afghan people, echoing through the walls of the modern-day catacombs where I managed to survive for 202 days — a howl of anguish that must never be forgotten.

Translated from the Italian by Neil Langdon Inglis

CAPITAL CONTRACTS

The Most Useful Washington Directory Ever Published.

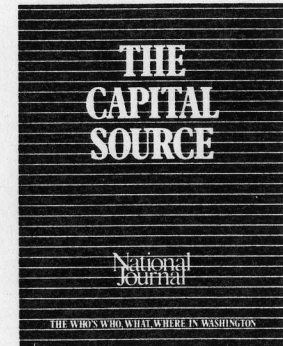
Now, one comprehensive publication is your source for the names, addresses, and phone numbers of the people in power: *The Capital Source*, The Who's Who, What and Where in Washington.

The Washington power structure reaches far beyond the "official" government... so does *The Capital Source*. Here you'll find comprehensive listings not only of the government and its myriad agencies, but of all the

influential corporate, professional and media organizations in Washington as well.

The Capital Source's quick-reference, tabbed sections cover all three branches of the Federal government; foreign embassies and local government; major corporations, unions and interest groups; trade associations, law firms, ad agencies and PR firms; national, foreign and local news media; and everybody else who's anybody in Washington.

If you work in Washington, or deal with the Washington power structure, you can't afford to be without this one-of-a-kind directory. Call or send for your copy today.



Please send _____ copies of *The Capital Source* @ \$20 each. (For 10 or more copies, call for special bulk rates.) FOR FASTER SERVICE, CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-424-2921

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Check enclosed Visa Mastercard American Express

Acct # _____ Exp. date _____

D.C. residents add 6% sales tax.

MAIL TO: NATIONAL JOURNAL, 1730 M St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20036

National Journal

What the Leaders Read.

Aboard a truck to freedom

couldn't even stand up. I was in so much pain. For days I dragged myself along on all fours like an animal, down the corridor to reach the bathroom. My jailers continued to kick me all over and tear my hair out, insisting that I confess.

"Eventually I had to give in," he said. "With the Kalashnikov barrels at my back I was forced before the television cameras and forced to confess to being a spy in the service of the Pakistani government. Then they sentenced me to 20 years in jail."

Khudadad, locked up in Wing 3 of Poli-i-Charki, had been reduced to a state of misery. "I'm no longer a man," he repeated to me in a disconsolate voice. "I can't even take a wife. Dogs live in chains and food is the only thing on their minds. . . . and now