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Scholars examining the career of New York City Mayor Ed Koch rarely, if ever, study his congressional human rights record.¹ Instead, they focus on his tumultuous three-term career as mayor of New York (1978-1989) and the transformations and conflicts the city weathered during his administration. Even those who do look at his seven-year stint in Congress (1969-1977) acknowledge that he set his sights on running for mayor within eighteen months of arriving in Washington, and therefore rarely focus on his foreign policy credentials.² In a similar vein, historians of human rights tend to mention Koch only in passing.³ Representative Donald Fraser and Senator Tom Harkin remain the focus of most historical works on congressional human rights campaigns for their activism, hearings, and legislation that helped challenge Henry Kissinger's intransigent State Department.⁴ If referenced at all, scholars will point to the "Koch Amendment" that cut off foreign aid to Uruguay's military dictatorship in 1976. Up until now, however, no one has examined the passage of the Koch Amendment in detail or how this improbable ally became interested in the small Southern Cone nation of Uruguay in the first place. Sarah Snyder's article, "Ending our Support for the Dictators': Ed Koch, Uruguay, and Human Rights" changes that.

In this piece, Snyder examines how activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) successfully persuaded Koch to take up the case of Uruguay and cut off \$3 million in military aid to a country that, at the time of the Amendment's passing,

¹ Jonathan Soffer, *Ed Koch and the Rebuilding on New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); John Mollenkopf, *A Phoenix in the Ashes: The Rise and Fall of the Koch Coalition in New York City Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). Even in his own memoirs, he focuses on his years as a mayor and doesn't mention the country; see Edward I. Koch, *Mayor: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984). In another book, he published a collection of his letters where he mentions Uruguay only once in passing reference to his work on Central America, Edward I. Koch, *All the Best: Letters from a Feisty Mayor* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 21.

² Soffer, *Ed Koch and the Rebuilding on New York City*, 110.

³ To see some of the previous mentions of Koch, see: Kathryn Sikkink, *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 73, 127; Natalie Kaufman Hevener, *The Dynamics of Human Rights in United States Foreign Policy* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984), 220. Schoultz perhaps gives Koch more credit than other scholars; see Lars Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 160. In Spanish, Marisa Ruiz has the most extensive examination of Koch in her work on Amnesty International, see Marisa Ruiz, *La piedra en el zapato: Amistía y la dictadura uruguaya* (Montevideo: Universidad de la Republica Departamento de Publicaciones, 2006), chapter 5.

⁴ Sarah Snyder, "A Call for U.S. Leadership': Congressional Activism on Human Rights," *Diplomatic History* 37:2 (April 2013): 372–407; Barbara Keys, "Congress, Kissinger, and the Origins of Human Rights Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 34:5 (November 2010): 823–51.

boasted the highest rate of political imprisonment in the world. Further, Snyder traces how once Koch became involved in the issue, he navigated the legislative process to get the amendment passed despite pushback from a local embassy and an intransigent State Department that remained supportive of the anti-Communist Uruguayan dictatorship. Snyder's research on the Koch Amendment's passage draws from an impressive use of archives that range from the diplomatic archives in Uruguay, various congressional papers, NGO records, and most notably, Koch's still fully unprocessed municipal papers.

Snyder makes two important historiographical interventions in this article. First, she adds to a growing body of work that focuses on congressional actors that pushed a human rights agenda far before Jimmy Carter ascended to the presidency, inserting Koch into the list of congressional representatives who participated in these efforts.⁵ Snyder argues that personal connections and NGOs, particularly Amnesty International, successfully lobbied Koch to bring the case of Uruguay to the floor of Congress.⁶ Although the State Department and U.S. Ambassador to Uruguay Ernest Siracusa were particularly insistent about continuing U.S. aid to their anti-Communist ally and attempted to downplay the human rights concerns, Koch came to congressional hearings armed with information and reporting from Amnesty International and the Washington Office on Latin America. As such, utilizing information from these human rights organizations, Koch and his allies in Congress were able to bring the horrors of Uruguayan dictatorship to view and spur congressional action.

Her second intervention looks beyond the initial vote in the House, as Snyder lays out how Koch succeeded in getting the amendment passed through reconciliation in the Senate and avoid a veto. Snyder catalogues Koch's reaching out to a mailing list of thousands of people, whom he encouraged to write in support of the amendment to Senator Daniel Inouye, the chair of the reconciliation efforts. Koch also marshalled organizations such as the United Auto Workers and the U.S. Catholic Conference to lobby and back his efforts. Lastly, Koch wrote to editors at papers such as the *Washington Star* and the *New York Times* and encouraged them to publish in support of the amendment (15). By retracing this process, Snyder offers an important window into how the latter stages of the legislative process can be influenced by public pressure. She spotlights how, even though it was the NGOs that brought the case of Uruguay to Koch's attention, he ultimately made a concerted and sustained effort to seeing the amendment pass. Both Koch and the NGOs were essential actors in cutting off the aid to the Uruguayan military in 1976.

Some contemporaries and scholars of Koch downplay his role in cutting off aid in Uruguay as merely political and focus on Koch's passing interest. For example, Ambassador Siracusa, Koch's adversary throughout the whole campaign, claimed that Koch was only "riding the tide of human rights activities for his own political purposes and not much more."⁷ Historian Barbara Keys also highlights an interview she conducted in 2012 with an Amnesty International staffer, Joshua Rubenstein, where he argued that Koch "would not have known Uruguay from the moon" without Amnesty's information.⁸

⁵ Sarah B. Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (Columbia University Press, 2018); William Michael Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and U.S. Cold War Policy toward Argentina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), chapter 3; David Forsythe, *Human Rights and US Foreign Policy: Congress Reconsidered* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1988). Examining congressional actors' role in U.S. foreign policy is also being expanded to the 1980s; see Rasmus Sinding Søndergaard, *Reagan, Congress, and Human Rights: Contesting Morality in US Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁶ Snyder makes a global case for the importance of this historiographical turn in her book, *From Selma to Moscow*. Uruguay is not a case study in the monograph, but this article adds another case study to that broader argument.

⁷ Ernest Siracusa Oral History Interview, June 1989, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

⁸ Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 209. Lars Schoultz makes a similar point about Amnesty International's influence in Lars Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 84.

Both assessments of Koch might be true; Snyder's work recognizes the imperative role that Amnesty played in lobbying Koch, and he even launched his first campaign for mayor soon after the amendment's passing. Yet, whether for political reasons or not, cutting off aid was anything but symbolic for Uruguayans. It was not insignificant for the Uruguayan military, which frantically catalogued his Congressional efforts in their Ministry of Foreign Affairs and tried to lobby against the amendment's passing.⁹ Members of the military even made an off-handed comment about trying to assassinate Koch, a threat that the CIA took very seriously for a time.¹⁰ Perhaps even more notable, the motivations did not matter for the Uruguayan opposition or those who languished in prison who heard about the amendment and were buoyed by the international support. Julio María Sanguinetti, the first civilian president after the dictatorship finally fell in 1985, even invited Koch to Uruguay in 1986 to thank him for his work during the dark years of the military's rule.¹¹

Koch was ultimately an unlikely human rights ally, but examining his role demonstrates the effectiveness of NGO human rights lobbying in Congress and the various facets of the legislative process. Snyder's article thus plays an important role in demonstrating how smaller, less strategically important countries can expose the myriad of ways human rights gained in prominence among activists and political actors in the pre-Carter era.

Debbie Sharnak is Assistant Professor of History and International Studies at Rowan University. She is working on a book manuscript entitled "*Of Light and Struggle in Uruguay: The Contested International History of Human Rights*" which examines the evolution of human rights discourse and the origins of transitional justice from the mid-1960s through the 1980s. Her work has been published in *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, *the Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, *TALLER*, the *Washington Post*, and several edited volumes on topics such as U.S. foreign policy, Latin America, human rights, and transitional justice.

⁹ Folder 5, Box 21, Archivo Historico-Diplomatico, Montevideo, Uruguay

¹⁰ See documents at "Ed Koch Threatened with Assassination in 1976), *The National Security Archive*, 18 February 2004, accessed at <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB112/>.

¹¹ Ben Kubasik et al, "Behind the Scenes," *Newsday*, 23 September 1986. After Koch's death in 2013, the Uruguayan Embassy in Washington DC also hosted a ceremony in his honor to commemorate the work he had done. See: "Homage to the Memory of Honourable Edward I. Koch," 18 April 2013, *Ministerio de Educación y Cultura*, accessed at <https://www.centrosmec.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/33675/1/edward-koch.pdf>.