

Inmate Held Unjustly for 29 Years

BUENOS AIRES, Feb. 12 (UPD)—A 60-year-old former milkman returned home to his wife and married children today from the mental hospital here where he had spent nearly 29 years waiting for a mental examination.

Alejandro Novoa owed his release from the Melchor Romero State Hospital to the conscientiousness of Dr. Horacio E. Diaz, the hospital's newly appointed administrator.

Although he was never judged insane nor convicted of a crime, Novoa's family had been unable to obtain his release.

Diaz, reviewing Novoa's file shortly after taking over his new post in December, found numerous letters from the family complaining that he was illegally and unjustly confined. Novoa's identification documents were missing from the file, and the few medical and mental records there were inconclusive.

Diaz ordered a mental examination for Novoa, which showed him to be sane. He then appealed to the state courts for an order to release him.

In tracing Novoa's case for the courts, Diaz found that he had been arrested in Buenos Aires in April, 1937, during a roundup of laborers suspected of being involved in violent demonstrations.

Police questioned Novoa for several days, then sent him to the hospital for a mental examination. Charges against him of disturbing the peace were dropped.

Diaz was unable to find any record of a mental examination having been made on Novoa in 1937. The only records he found were reports of "depression" entered in 1938 and again in 1948.

The administrator blamed the irresponsibility of his predecessor for Novoa's prolonged confinement.