

19. Information provided to the author by the security forces; see also RUC, *Constabulary Gazette* (November, 1979). Sir Maurice retired after eight months in office, owing to ill health. He was succeeded by Sir Brooks Richards.
20. Tony Geraghty, *Who Dares Wins: The Story of the Special Air Service, 1950-1980* (London, 1980), pp. 144-52. First deployed for deep patrol action in Malaya, 22 SAS was subsequently active in most of Britains post-war counter-insurgency campaigns. It now provides Britain's "National Response Team" against any threat which is beyond the capacity of normal police methods and armaments. 22 SAS is organized with a Headquarters and Signal Squadron and four Sabre Squadrons, each consisting of about 80 men in four troops. The total establishment of 22 SAS is probably between 350 and 400 men. The regiment is self-contained and airmobile. High performance is ensured by a rigorous selection and training program lasting some seven months. With the exception of a small command and training cadre the regiment consists entirely of volunteers from other regular regiments.
21. Geraghty, pp. 154-55; for a detailed study of the legal aspects of the conflict see Robin Eveleigh, *Peacekeeping in a Democratic Society: The Lessons of Northern Ireland* (Montreal, 1978).
22. David Charters, "Special Operations in Counter-Insurgency: The Farran Case, Palestine 1947"; *JRUSI*, vol. 124, no. 2 (1979), p. 57.
23. These incidents are discussed in detail in Geraghty, pp. 153-61.

A CRITIQUE OF THE URBAN GUERRILLA: ARGENTINA, URUGUAY AND BRAZIL

by
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In the two decades since the 1959 Cuban Revolution, the magnetism of revolutionary warfare has attracted many young Latin American radicals, disillusioned with the reformism of traditional Left parties. Though the "lessons" drawn by the continent's combative Left from the Cuban experience were always questionable, armed struggles are still being waged in several countries, stimulated by the Sandinista triumph in Nicaragua last year. The urban guerrilla strategy itself became fashionable in the late 1960s, after the 1967 death of Guevara in Bolivia and a number of rural guerrilla defeats, and soon made an impact out of all proportion to the numbers enrolled in guerrilla ranks. In Argentina, above all, peak individual guerrilla operations by 1975 were characterised by the mobilisation of hundreds of combatants, the extortion of multi-million pound kidnap ransoms and scores of casualties. But in no country did urban guerrilla strategies prosper in the long term and it is the aim of this paper to account for their failure.

"Urban guerrilla warfare" should not be confused with "terrorism", especially when the latter term serves as a pejorative. It can be best defined as "a form of unconventional war waged in urban or suburban areas for political objectives"¹ and differs from political terrorism through being more discriminate and predictable in its use of violence. Its frequent equation with terrorism is facilitated by the fact that urban guerrillas seldom reject terrorism as one of several forms of action, and indeed tend to use it extensively when they

are politically weak and isolated. The countries selected as examples with which to illustrate this critique are those in which the strategy had its greatest impact, though the Brazilian guerrilla performance ranks lower than those of Argentina and Uruguay both in terms of duration and significance. Elsewhere, urban guerrilla campaigns have been either too brief or too recent for inclusion in this critique.² Prior to outlining reasons for urban guerrilla failure, brief mention will be made of common factors present in the emergence of urban guerrilla warfare in the three countries selected, of urban guerrilla theory and of the general course of armed struggle in each country. In explaining the failure, more attention will be paid to defects in the strategy than to adverse external conditions such as the strength of the guerrillas' military opponents.

The Background

Urban guerrilla warfare in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil possessed considerable national coloration but the principal factors involved in its emergence were remarkably uniform from country to country. In order to appreciate this uniformity, it must first be noted that the personnel of the urban guerrilla was drawn largely from the lower-middle classes: the core was university-based but white-collar employees and people from the liberal professions also featured prominently. Working-class participation was not always negligible, especially in the case of the Argentine Montoneros, but nowhere did it exceed around 30%.³ All three countries have large lower-middle classes, Uruguay leading with a 50% component. Political, social, economic and ideological factors intervened in the radicalisation and "militarisation" of thousands of youths during the 1960s, the main ones being:

1. Legal forms of free political expression had been suppressed by military rulers in Brazil (after the 1964 coup) and Argentina (following the 1966 Onganía coup), while in Uruguay civil liberties were progressively curbed by civilian governments from 1965. Popular parties and movements were proscribed in the stratocracies, but even in the "Switzerland of Latin America" (Uruguay) constitutional Left-wing progress was hampered by a power duopoly exercised by the Colorado and Blanco parties and by the peculiarities of the electoral system (in 1971, most voters opted for reform candidates, yet the Right-wing Bordaberry became president). Moreover, from 1968 political power in Uruguay was highly concentrated in the executive, with President Pacheco fully exploiting new special security powers and suspending constitutional guarantees by means of an almost continuous state of siege. By 1970, the Tupamaros were referring to the Pacheco government as "the dictatorship",⁴ and executive powers were further strengthened when Bordaberry declared a "state of internal war" in 1972. In each place, the closure of avenues of political expression and the readiness of powerholders to resort to violence to frustrate radical aspirations and debilitate opposition forces led many to consider that, in the words of Perón, "against brute force, only intelligently-applied force can be effective."⁵
2. In all three countries, members of the lower-middle classes were adversely affected by serious national economic problems. Previously relatively privileged, many found themselves victims of rising inflation and/or declining career prospects. Some shifted simultaneously in a nationalist and socialist direction, for the major beneficiaries of the economic policies from which they suffered were often not only big, but also foreign, capitalists. Radicalism motivated by

socio-economic decline was not only expressed through the rise of the urban guerrilla but also through the growth of white-collar unionism, especially among public and bank employees.

3. Given that students and former students predominated in urban guerrilla organisations, one should not underestimate the importance of governmental attacks on the universities, in which an unprecedented degree of violence was used. During the latter half of the 1960s, students in each country were shaken by police invasions of their campuses (the 1968 violation of university autonomy in Uruguay being the country's first), by purges of liberal-minded academics, declining job prospects in several areas and by their acquaintance with police truncheons during attempts at peaceful protest. Student demonstrators killed by the police were regarded as martyrs and widespread middle- and working-class indignation was expressed by huge crowds at their funerals and through protest strikes.

4. The impact of ideas emanating from or inspired by the Cuban Revolution was enhanced by the weakness and historic failures of the traditional Left in these countries. Revolutionary nationalists, like the Tupamaros and Montoneros, attributed the latter in part to the Communists' and Socialists' inadequate attention to the 'National Question'. More widely, the proto-guerrillas mistook instances of economic mass militancy for revolutionary fervour and concluded that it was only the bureaucratic *methods* of the traditional Left (and of Peronist leaders in the Argentine case) that were holding back radical solutions to national crises. "Objective revolutionary conditions" were considered present or maturing and urban guerrilla warfare, by demonstrating the possibility of revolutionary success, was deemed capable of luring the masses away from traditional reformist leaderships.

5. In terms of the strategic debate taking place within the revolutionary Left, urban guerrilla warfare was seen by many as the next "logical" step following the collapse of rural guerrilla ventures. Most of the social forces to whom the guerrillas looked for support resided in urban areas (80% of Uruguayans and Argentines and 54% of Brazilians are urbanites); levels of mass political awareness and organisation were highest there and arms, money and other resources far more accessible than in the countryside.

6. In Argentina and Uruguay, especially, the diffusion of radical Catholic ideas helped to create an intellectual and moral climate conducive to the resort to arms. Radical Catholic theses rarely advocated the initiation of urban guerrilla warfare but did go some way towards legitimising it by differentiating between "the just violence of the oppressed, who find themselves forced to use it to gain their liberation" and "the unjust violence of the oppressors."⁶ Liberation theology facilitated the moral leap from pacifism to armed struggle for the many Catholics who joined the Montoneros and Tupamaros; it urged Christians to participate in social and national liberation struggles and commended the self-sacrifice of those who dedicated their lives to popular causes.

Urban Guerrilla Theory and Strategy

One should not exaggerate the importance of urban guerrilla theory since, in many cases, as the Tupamaros admitted of themselves, "action, practice, came

first, and then theory.” Debray’s heresy of programming guerrilla warfare ahead of the building of a revolutionary party (“The guerrilla force is the party in embryo”)⁸ did find adherents, but in its origins at least, the appeal of urban guerrilla warfare was eminently anti-intellectual. A cult of action emerged in the course of a revolt against the bureaucratic practices and empty rhetoric of the traditional Left. Guerrilla impatience at the pace of developments was evident, particularly in the case of the Argentine Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), who explicitly stated that they were pursuing the “short cuts” which would make the conquest of power “nearest and shortest.”⁹ The emphasis was upon action, in Uruguay as a means of uniting the Left and in Argentina as a way of overcoming a stalemate in the post-war conflict between Peronist and anti-Peronist forces. In Brazil, Marighela at times seemed to advocate action for action’s sake: “Take the initiative, assume the responsibility, do something. It is better to make mistakes doing something, even if it results in death.”¹⁰

Those practitioners of the new variant of armed struggle who claimed that “objective” revolutionary conditions already existed, presented themselves as “a subjective fuse to trigger the explosion.”¹¹ The maturity of conditions was not, however, regarded as crucial: echoing Debray, the Tupamaros asserted that “the very act of taking up arms, preparing for and engaging in actions which are against the basis of bourgeois law, creates a revolutionary consciousness, organisation and conditions.”¹² Urban guerrilla warfare, it was thought, would act as a catalyst to accelerate social and political processes leading to revolution; it would expose the corrupt and repressive nature of the regimes being challenged, while winning mass support through demonstrating the vulnerability of the state forces. Under no circumstances did the theory envisage the guerrillas themselves inflicting a military defeat on their enemy; rather, the demise of the latter depended upon the guerrilla nuclei developing into people’s armies.

Strategic thinking differed from country to country and from organisation to organisation. In Brazil, urban guerrilla warfare was initially considered by most pioneers merely as a means of providing logistical support to a rural guerrilla movement and people’s war in the countryside. However, militants who set out in the mid-1960s to comb hundreds of kilometres of rural terrain in search of an ideal “strategic zone” soon discovered that suitable land for rural warfare (mountains and jungle) was remote from population centres, while geographical conditions were adverse where a politicised peasantry was indeed to be found (the North-East). In the end, strategic planning was adapted to social and political reality: what support there was for armed struggle lay in the major cities, chiefly among students, not among rural workers cowed by the repression of the Peasant Leagues.

The Uruguayan guerrillas also looked originally to a rural campaign, but by the mid-1960s national reality had overshadowed Cuban influence and an urban strategy was implemented. Tupamaro perspectives foresaw the possibility of direct or vicarious intervention by the USA against their movement, yet felt that this would only strengthen their social base, enabling them to lead a resistance struggle against an occupying army. Finally, in Argentina, Peronists and Guevarists disagreed over guerrilla strategy. While the urban guerrillas of the Peronist Left saw themselves as the “special formations” of a mass movement which would also wage political and industrial campaigns, the Guevarists

presented themselves as the embryos of a future revolutionary army which would operate over both urban and rural terrain.

The Course of Urban Guerrilla Warfare

Brazil. The Brazilian urban guerrilla movement was the weakest of the three and never posed a serious threat to the post-1964 military regime. Its relative debility must be seen in the light of widespread lower-middle class support for the new rulers, regarded initially as rescuing the nation from a "Communist" threat, supposedly constituted by the deposed Goulart government, and as crusaders against spiralling inflation. Initiated in 1968, a year after the disintegration of a rural *foco* in the Serra do Caparão, the Brazilian armed campaign lasted only four years. Its protagonists derived from splinters which broke with the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) and Workers' Politics (POLOP), the latter being a Left Marxist tendency formed in the early 1960s; various combat organisations were formed, the most notable being National Liberation Action (ALN), the Popular Revolutionary Vanguard (VPR) and the Armed Revolutionary Vanguard (VAR-Palmares).

It is doubtful whether any guerrilla movement could have firmly established itself in Brazil in 1968, the year which saw the introduction of Institutional Act V. This strengthened presidential power, sounded the death-knell of rearguard attempts at redemocratisation and removed the final constitutional obstacles to ruthless anti-subversion measures. However, the mainly-student guerrillas themselves can be criticised on two grounds: for organisational deficiency, particularly in the case of the ALN; and, related to it, a poorly-controlled, though discriminate, use of violence. ALN leader Carlos Marighela, after 30 years in the PCB, rebelled against the party's bureaucratism only to adopt a position close to reliance upon spontaneity. He promoted the creation of tiny "firing groups" of 4-5 fighters, in such a way as to almost invite infiltration and guarantee anarchy: "Small autonomous organisations and individual revolutionary militants and free-shooters join our organisation with absolute freedom of action providing they accept, defend and fulfil without reservation all our strategic and tactical principles." Even at the top, no premium was placed upon security, for leaders in order to merit the confidence of fighters were expected to participate in the "most dangerous" activities.¹³ Paradoxically, the fragmentation of the Brazilian guerrilla movement, the frustration of unitary attempts and the inorganic nature of the ALN favoured early guerrilla survival, by making the task of the enemy security services more difficult; but these questionable advantages were soon outweighed by the guerrillas' inability to coordinate and control their campaigns for exactly the same reasons.

The year 1968 was one of preparation, during which the guerrillas trained and equipped themselves through a number of bomb attacks and "expropriations." A new phase opened with the assassination of US Army Captain Charles Chandler in October 1968, the following year witnessing a series of diplomatic kidnappings aimed at the release of political prisoners. In themselves, these operations were successful: dozens of detainees recovered their freedom following the abductions of the US, German and Swiss ambassadors, and a Japanese consul. However, each "triumph" gave rise to waves of arrests which more than made up for the numbers of liberated guerrillas, and unrestrained torture

subsequently led to further military successes, including the death of Marighela in an ambush (4 Nov 69). By the end of 1971, repression had led to the destruction of the armed organisations and had claimed the lives of the remaining guerrilla chieftains, Carlos Lamarca, Joaquim Câmara Ferreira and Mario Alves.

Brazil's urban guerrillas foundered so rapidly because they embarked upon a high-casualty strategy at a time when mass movements had been pacified (and thus provided them with no protection and meager assistance), and when military regime was at its strongest and most confident. Given that their following was small and socially-narrow, it was certainly rash for them to escalate the military struggle so quickly, though one can understand why they did it: the release of dozens of prisoners, achieved through kidnappings, provided the guerrillas with an illusion of success, as did the world headlines which they attracted. But only student activists were impressed; the labour movement, cowed by repression, generally regarded the guerrilla campaign as irrelevant to its needs. For their part, Marighela's followers isolated themselves from workers by engaging in activity which required very few participants and by rejecting mass work. Only "mass front" work was countenanced by the ALN, and this was to involve armed actions orientated towards the mass movement rather than actual involvement in mass forms of opposition to the regime.

Marighela's strategy and the Brazilian guerrilla campaign were thus both highly militaristic and aggressive, at a time when the needs of the Left were defensive. To his credit, the ALN leader recognised that "we cannot defend ourselves against an offensive or a concentrated attack by the *gorilas*. And that is the reason why our urban technique can never be permanent, can never defend a fixed base nor remain in any one spot waiting to repel the circle of reaction."¹⁴ But given such an admission, it was surely foolhardy to embark upon an urban campaign in the first place. The lack of rural potential obliged the guerrillas to initiate actions in the cities but in turn rendered the latter suicidal: once urban repression became overpowering, the guerrillas lacked the option of a secure retreat into the countryside.

Uruguay. Urban guerrilla warfare in Uruguay was dominated by a single organisation, the National Liberation Movement (MLN Tupamaros), though a handful of small groups (OPR-33, FARO, PCR/MIR and the December 22nd Groups) mounted occasional operations. The core of the Tupamaros was constituted by Socialist Party dissidents influenced by revolutionary nationalist ideas, who soon united with Anarchists, Maoists, Trotskyists and other nationalists on the basis of a common method. Their watchword was "words divide us, action unites us."¹⁵ Operations began in 1963, but the MLN was only structured in 1965 and regular action only began in 1968. Originally Cuban-influenced, their subsequent expertise in urban guerrilla warfare owed more to collaboration with Argentine Peronist guerrillas (the Tacuara Revolutionary Nationalist Movement), the strategic thinking of Spanish Civil War veteran Abraham Guillén and study of the Algerian guerrilla.

The Tupamaros attracted considerable popular sympathy and acquired moral authority through a series of "armed propaganda" actions aimed at highlighting social injustice and the corrupt activities of prominent government and business figures. Food and other goods were seized and handed over to the poor;

journalists drew parallels with Robin Hood and his Outlaws. By July 1972, opinion polls were suggesting that they enjoyed the sympathy of 20% of Uruguayans.¹⁶ However, following the repressive aftermath of the guerrilla occupation of the town of Pando in October 1969 (3 guerrillas were killed after surrendering, 16 were captured and tortured), the Tupamaros were gradually drawn into a war of vengeance against the security forces. Guerrilla operations were briefly suspended during the November 1971 elections, but were stepped up following the Tupa-backed Broad Front's acquisition of 18% of the votes. After obtaining information about the state-sponsored death squad through abducting one of its organisers in February 1972, the Tupamaros assassinated three of its leaders in April and thereby lost all control over the level of political violence. The Uruguayan army, which had been patiently gathering intelligence on the MLN since 1969, now became fully involved in counter-insurgency and the guerrillas were unable to withstand the onslaught. Partly as a result of treason, the next three months witnessed over 100 Tupamaro deaths, 600-700 arrests and the loss of 70 "safe" houses.¹⁷ By the end of 1972, the organisation was no longer a viable fighting force, despite a final attempt to retreat to rural earthen dugouts (*tatuceras*), similar to those used by Grivas's EOKA Cypriots, for operations in rural and suburban areas on a temporary basis.

It had been hoped that the establishment of Tupamaro Support Committees (CATS) would enable the guerrillas to *organise* a mass following; however, the Tupamaro belief that "the supreme effort would be the armed fight, and this would unite and coordinate behind it all other forms of struggle"¹⁸ doomed the CATs to remain mere recruitment agencies of the military apparatus as the campaign developed. Nor did the Tupamaros gain the opportunity to lead national resistance to an army of occupation. They correctly estimated that the Uruguayan government would resort to external assistance against the guerrilla challenge but misjudged the form which it would take. Rather than grant the Tupamaros the boon of having Brazilian soldiers patrolling the streets of Montevideo, their international opponents used more covert but deadly effective means of intervention: aid to the official security forces; the supply of FBI and DOPS (Brazilian political police) officers to organise and assist the death squad; and finally, after the Tupamaro decline, a Brazilian loan of 30m dollars to help defeat a 2-week general strike against the military coup of July 1973.

Argentina. Armed struggle became a regular feature of Argentine political life in 1969 and only declined markedly following the 1976 coup of General Videla. During the early years, Argentina shared the fragmented urban guerrilla pattern of Brazil, but by the end of 1974 all of the organisations had either coalesced around one of two poles, pro-Peronist revolutionary nationalism (Montoneros) and Guevarism (the People's Revolutionary Army-ERP), or they had collapsed. The Montoneros had absorbed the FAR, ENR, Descamisados and FAP-17, and the ERP the FAP National Command, leaving Argentina's urban guerrillas polarised over their attitudes to Peronism and views of the revolutionary process. While the Montoneros considered that Argentina had to initially pass through a distinct "national liberation" stage of revolution prior to setting out on a road towards "national" socialism, and thus fully supported the 1973-74 Peronist governments of C ampora and Per on, the Guevarist ERP condemned these governments as representing a "national bourgeoisie" which had become

so tied to foreign capital that it could no longer perform a progressive role.

Before 1974, the Montoneros were less militarily active than the ERP, yet far greater recruitment success was achieved due to their positive orientation towards the mass movement of Peronism and greater tactical flexibility. While fighting during the 1970-73 years, the Montoneros kept offensive violence to a minimum, selected their targets well with popular traditions and sentiments in mind, and devoted much attention to the promotion of a sympathetic Peronist Youth organisation. Above all, by subordinating guerrilla warfare to mass political work in late 1972 and early 1973, to play a leading part in campaigns for the return of Perón and for the March 1973 Peronist electoral victory, and then by suspending regular armed actions in favour of 16 months of mass activity from May 1973 to September 1974, the Montoneros were able to win a mass following in excess of 100,000. The ERP might well have derived benefits from the post-1973 popular disillusionment with the rightward-moving Peronist administrations had they not committed the blunder of prolonging their guerrilla campaign after Peronism had claimed over 7m votes at the polls. Whereas the Montoneros made use of the legal opening to build mass organisations, the ERP ignored public opinion and, ironically, Guevara's warning against armed opposition to elected governments.¹⁹

Both organisations made what, with the benefit of hindsight, must be regarded as grave strategic errors. The ERP attempted to make up for their political weakness by shifting to the rural province of Tucumán, hoping to establish a firm base among local sugar workers and dominate "liberated zones". In fact, the move only strengthened their isolation. The big cities of Buenos Aires, Rosario and Córdoba remained the principal localities of labour struggle, and though the workers of the declining provincial sugar industry lent them limited support, it was soon undermined by Right-wing terror when the Army moved into Tucumán in 1975. Hundreds of ERP combatants lost their lives in the battles and skirmishes of that year, and a desperate return to the cities in December proved catastrophic. About 140 ERP members were killed when they attacked an important Army garrison at Monte Chingolo in Buenos Aires Province; the military had foreknowledge of the operation and made no attempt to take prisoners alive.

The Montonero mistake was to resume warfare in September 1974, following the death of Perón and his replacement as president by Isabel Perón. True, they had suffered badly at the hands of fascist commandos and the Triple A death squad while operating above ground, but their resort to arms denied them the chance to capitalise upon growing labour opposition to the government, seen especially in the huge mid-1975 general strike. Militarily and financially, they became the strongest urban guerrilla organisation yet seen in Latin America: their peak military action, in the northern city of Formosa, involved the mobilisation of some 500 members, and their famous kidnapping of business magnates Juan and Jorge Born earned them a record ransom of over 60m dollars. However, though their operations represented a spectacular military advance, all lacked popular participation and the political constituency of the Montoneros ceased to expand. They were to outlast the ERP, a force already in ruins by the time of the deaths of Santucho and other leaders in July 1976, but were severely weakened by the repressive measures introduced after the March 1976 military

takeover. Though dozens of security policemen were killed by powerful Montonero bombs in 1976, the conflict became increasingly one between unevenly-matched military apparatus. Between March 1976 and July 1978, some 4,500 Montoneros perished,²⁰ leaving the organisation a shadow of its former self today.

Overview of the Urban Guerrilla Failure

1. The Political Context

While true that the political context in which a guerrilla organisation attempts to develop is an important determinant of its degree of success, general principles as to the "best" conditions for the launching of urban guerrillas are elusive. Certainly, when possibilities for legal mass activity exist, the initiation or continuation of warfare is likely to engender extreme guerrilla isolation; on the other hand, urban guerrillas have yet to prosper against well-equipped authoritarian regimes prepared and able to use draconian methods against them, their periphery and those far beyond it. Faced with an unfettered military regime which was still on the offensive after stifling student and worker opposition in 1968, the Brazilian guerrilla movement never really got off the ground. In terms of durability, the case studies suggest that the most propitious conditions for the promotion of urban guerrilla strategies are either: against a quasi-democratic regime, inhibited by legal restrictions and electoral considerations from all-out repression, but sufficiently intolerant of democratic opposition for guerrillas to be able to credibly pose as the only viable popular alternative; or under an authoritarian military regime lacking political legitimacy, already weakened by mass opposition or crises of some kind and preparing to return authority to politicians. The greater vitality of the Montoneros is an indication of the benefits to be gained from participation in mass movements and from exploiting opportunities to operate legally. Due to their role in encouraging the 1973 military step-down and helping to achieve the Peronist restoration, plus their winning of substantial, visible social support, the last Peronist government was unable to move against them decisively until late in 1975, when they were outlawed.

A final point here is that political conditions can and do change during the course of urban guerrilla campaigns. When their enemy is on the defensive, guerrillas can be flexible and modify tactics and strategies to meet new political circumstances; but they cannot retreat when their enemy is on the offensive — unless, of course, they pull out altogether and abandon their countries until conditions at home change.

2. Organisational Factors

Organisational strength undoubtedly contributed to the superior durability of the MLN over the loose, penetrable structure of the Brazilian ALN. Indeed, the molecular architecture of the Uruguayan guerrillas came as near as possible to perfection: Tupamaro forces were divided into self-sufficient columns, each possessing its own recruitment, intelligence, military and technical apparatus, as well as its own vehicles for work among the people, students, trade unions and army. "Compartmentalisation" was designed to ensure that no member knew more about the organisational set-up than was necessary for his personal

efficiency, and he was kept ignorant of the real names of militants. The boast of Tupamaro "indestructibility" rested upon the belief that, even if several columns were totally wiped out, the others would be unimpaired and therefore able to continue to operate and multiply.

Yet some centralisation and coordination was vital if the anarchic dissipation of ALN forces was to be avoided in Uruguay, and this guaranteed that there would be leaders who could occasion irreparable losses if persuaded by the enemy to cooperate. Losses through treason and infiltration appear to have been greater and more damaging than those resulting from information extracted during the torture of captured guerrillas. The defection of Héctor Amodio Pérez from the MLN, motivated by his removal from the leadership of the key Column 15 of Montevideo at the organisation's March 1972 Congress, played a central role in the Tupamaro demise of that year. Arrested in May, he revealed the location of 30 "safe houses" and bases, including the "people's prison", an important field hospital and several arsenals and documentation centres, before being spirited out of Uruguay. Mario Piriz also left Uruguay a free man after betraying around 300 of his former comrades. In Argentina, the ERP only detected the treason of Juan Ranier, and shot him, several weeks after his tip-off had been instrumental in the deaths of over one hundred of their members at Monte Chingolo. Cooperation secured by use of torture and sodium pentothal also produced "results", including the harmful revelations of the Montonero No. 3, Roberto Quieto, late in 1975 and the deaths of Marighela and Lamarca in Brazil.

Of course, treason and infiltration worked both ways and brought occasional benefits to the guerrillas. The most mighty garrisons have gates which sympathetic conscripts can open to guerrilla attackers, as happened several times in Argentina. On the whole though, in this war of interpenetration, of infiltration and counter-infiltration, those forces backed by state resources had an overwhelming advantage and there was little that the guerrillas could do to overturn it. By 1971, the Tupamaros had come to realise that urban guerrilla warfare was a "high-loss" business, and inevitably so since combatants were operating right in the heart of enemy territory. Faced with this reality, survival depended upon rapid and efficient recruitment, yet here new problems arose: as a leading Tupamaro stated, "When an organisation like ours grows . . . security mechanisms are strained. There is insufficient time to recruit new cadres"; also, "the same men who catch our eye because we consider them potential militants have also caught the eye of the police for the same reasons."²¹ Moreover, the enemy's use of "overkill" when responding to the guerrilla challenge does much to discourage likely recruits at the time when they are most needed. It is those who are on the fringes of the guerrilla organisation, upon whom recruitment depends, who are the most vulnerable, being identified with the guerrillas but lacking the protection of clandestinity. Not only do the risks of personal loss rise, but also the danger to one's family and associates. Thirty members of the Santucho family have been killed, imprisoned, tortured or forced to leave Argentina in recent years.

3. Isolation

Urban guerrillas can only be effective through time if they establish and main-

tain a significant mass base as a source of recruits, auxiliaries, resources and intelligence data. Yet a high degree of social isolation is guaranteed by their adopted strategy, for a number of reasons. Firstly, urban guerrilla warfare is, at least in its origins, a highly élitist form of struggle, embarked upon by would-be vanguards of the masses. At worst, it can reflect contempt for the collective struggles of labour: the miniscule National Revolutionary Army (ENR) of Argentina, for instance, before affiliating to the Montoneros, declared that its August 1970 assassination of labour leader José Alonso had been designed “to show the whole Peronist working class that it had a superior weapon to all those employed during those 18 years (of resistance)” and to indicate that the “main mission of revolutionaries” was “crushing traitors.”²² Labour’s response was a general strike in protest. At best, it reflected impatience with the continuing reformism of major labour sectors, seeking to catalyse their radicalisation through exemplary actions which, as it turned out, catalysed reaction rather than revolution.

Isolation was, secondly, very much a question of class. While most of those who took up arms belonged to the lower-middle classes, the mass of workers exhibited a clear preference for collective means of action — strikes, demonstrations, rallies, occupations. In a majority of cases, worker antipathy to the urban guerrilla was an expression of strong economic sentiment and a reformist rather than revolutionary political stance (even in the case of the CP-led Uruguayan labour movement); but even radical labour groupings, such as the late 1960s CGT of the Argentines, looked to collective methods. This preference rested upon experience of collective triumphs, recognition that labour was strongest when acting in a united fashion and upon the collective nature of the productive process. Moreover, the urban guerrilla option was less open to the working-class activist, often the sole provider of his family’s sustenance, for economic reasons.

Thirdly, leaving aside the question of whether or not social support is available, urban guerrilla warfare is a physically-isolated form of struggle. Since the urban guerrilla operates right in the centre of enemy territory, he cannot like his rural counterpart establish “liberated zones”. There is thus no possibility of organising a substantial social-economic-political support base while fighting a guerrilla war in the cities, and this was precisely the reason why the Brazilian guerrillas envisaged their urban campaign as a mere preparation for a “people’s war” in the countryside.

Finally, looking at guerrilla actions themselves, there was everywhere a marked tendency for military operations which were in some way related to popular needs to constitute a declining aspect of urban guerrilla repertoires as campaigns developed. “Armed propaganda” actions, specifically designed to awaken popular sympathy, were the most successful in terms of public relations, but were restricted to the early phases of warfare. As far as the Tupamaros were concerned, after an early stage of publicising the existence of their organisation, continued “armed propaganda” would only have led to a loss of popular prestige through “giving the false impression of seeking publicity more than the defeat of the enemy.”²³ When the urban guerrillas reached levels of development where open confrontations with the armed forces became technically feasible, their operations became totally divorced from popular activity. Attacks on

military bases, multi-million dollar kidnappings and assassinations of army and police chiefs demanded nothing of the workers except applause. In Debray's words, urban guerrilla warfare everywhere degenerated into "a technological battle between specialists in clandestine violence, with the masses in the role of spectators around the ring where the professionals were fighting it out."²⁴

4. Militarism

Though many urban guerrillas started out as political activists who regarded armed struggle as an extension of politics by other means, the guerrilla organisations which grew soon became dominated by military rather than political criteria. As the urban guerrillas developed militarily, as they moved on to higher planes of warfare through a series of *saltos* (leaps), the political wisdom of specific guerrilla operations tended to take second place to considerations of what was technically possible. The peak military action by the Montoneros, their October 1975 spectacular in Formosa, brought them no political kudos: it was aimed at undermining military morale, provoking divisions in the armed forces and indicating Montonero military prowess; its political contribution to popular struggles was nil and public opinion noted that the majority of victims of the attack were "nine workers who by force of circumstance found themselves in the Armed Forces as conscripts."²⁵

Given the isolated nature of urban guerrilla warfare, military *saltos* tend to "intensify a situation militarily to a point far beyond what can be sustained politically",²⁶ hence leaving protagonists vulnerable in the face of the inevitable backlash. Increasingly, guerrilla behaviour came to be dictated by what the Montoneros later termed the "dialectic of confrontation": the guerrillas were drawn into an escalating spiral of violence in which they found themselves more and more *responding* to enemy moves rather than determining the rules of the game. They felt obliged to reply blow for blow to state counter-measures in order to demonstrate their own continuing vitality and the vulnerability of their foe. Trapped by this "dialectic", the guerrillas channeled most of their resources into the military front, to the detriment of mass political work, and made little in the way of a contribution to campaigns for more militant labour leaderships. The military struggle acquired a dynamic of its own and the task of winning over the masses was reduced to that of incorporating activists into the military apparatus.

Some guerrillas mistook their military might for social influence and, like Bonet of the Argentine ERP, deluded themselves into considering that they were "the proletariat in arms."²⁷ Others recognised that their mass support was limited, lost confidence in the revolutionary potential of workers and adopted a "we won all that we could" attitude, prior to concentrating solely on military activity. In Argentina, the ERP on three occasions — following the assassination of leader Luis Pujals in 1971, the Trelew massacre of guerrilla prisoners in 1972 and the 1974 Catamarca massacre of ERP guerrillas who had surrendered to the army — dissipated their energies in vengeance campaigns.

Perhaps the urban guerrillas would have been more circumspect overpromoting armed confrontations had they appraised the strength and capacity of their opponents more accurately. References to the collapse of the weak Batista regime were inappropriate. What the guerrillas failed to realise was that the

armies of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay also had a potential for *saltos* and could surprise them with well-timed escalations of their own. The Tupamaros in particular underestimated the state's ability to strengthen its coercive apparatus rapidly: they confidently began a sustained campaign in 1968, when the armed forces possessed only 12,000 poorly-equipped and -trained troops and the 22,000-strong police had only 1,000 men trained to combat guerrillas, but could not subsequently match the military expansion of the state forces, assisted by US, Brazilian and Argentine specialists, and were caught off-balance when the enemy launched the 1972 counter-offensive.

Militarism was inherent in the logic of urban guerrilla strategy, while also being a product of weak support for revolutionary politics in the countries concerned. Yet opportunities to extend Left-wing influence, squandered by the militaristic Left, did exist in Uruguay, where there were six general strikes between 1971-73, and Argentina, which witnessed the biggest general strike in its history in June-July 1975. By stepping up the guerrilla campaigns during these years, the armed organisations placed themselves in political quarantine and presented no effective challenge to established labour leaders. In fact, their activities made it easier for governments to curb the activities of industrial militants, under the pretext that the latter were "industrial guerrillas". Nevertheless, military escalation continued relentlessly, prompted by guerrillas who feared that repetitious actions would lead to public apathy. That fear was clearly present in a comment made by the Tupamaros at the end of 1971: "the Organisation and its activity have had something of the effect of a vaccine injected into the social body. At first, it caused convulsions, but the organism came gradually to secrete its own antibodies, and it can now absorb it without danger. The time may come when it has been once and for all desensitized."²⁸ Faced with this prospect, the standard guerrilla response was to attempt increasingly audacious and spectacular military operations.

5. Ideological and Theoretical Weakness

Urban guerrilla theory was a defective guide to action, for it failed to really explain how guerrilla action would impel the masses to revolutionary deeds. It merely assumed that efficient military operations would galvanise them, yet one might more reasonably expect the reverse to be true. If, for example, the kidnapping of a manager by urban guerrillas is successful in securing improved working conditions at his factory, the need for workers themselves to struggle is greatly diminished; and labour passivity may further result from repressive state measures introduced to combat the guerrillas.

Most of the urban guerrillas formations were weak on revolutionary theory and ideologically vague. The method of the urban guerrilla was not the only cement holding the groups together — otherwise one could not account for the multiplicity of organisations in Brazil and Argentina — but it was considered the most decisive factor in defining who was a revolutionary. Not untypically, an Argentine FAR leader admitted in 1971, "we put things into practice before making up theories about them."²⁹ In the short run, this was a decided advantage for the guerrillas: the vague revolutionary nationalism of the Montoneros and Tupamaros found an echo among all but the most powerful social classes. However, in the long term, theoretical and ideological guerrilla poverty proved

damaging, facilitating as it did the growing predominance of military over political considerations in guerrilla decision-making.

Conclusion

Urban guerrilla warfare in Latin America has been undeniably effective but its effects have been other than those sought by its protagonists. It contributed to the destabilisation of governments in Uruguay and Argentina but never managed to go beyond that negative achievement to the establishment or exploitation of "revolutionary situations." Social isolation plagued the urban guerrillas and those successful in organising mass support only achieved that objective by coming "above ground" and ceasing, temporarily, to be urban guerrillas. Experience has also shown that urban guerrilla strategies can only prosper, if only in a limited way, when political circumstances constrain either the will or ability of established powers to be ruthless in combating them.

One should not, though, assume that urban guerrilla warfare will now be jettisoned from the methodological armoury of the Latin American Left. Some groups of guerrillas have abandoned it in favour of activity orientated towards mass movements, but many of the conditions which gave rise to the phenomenon remain and have indeed been accentuated under the current military regimes. Urban guerrilla warfare has only been suppressed at the expense of democratic liberties in all areas of life. By resting their authority so visibly on bayonets, the military of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay have given the next generation of revolutionaries plenty of reasons for reaching the conclusion that armed struggle is not only politics by other means but by the only means available.³⁰

Footnotes

1. Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State* (London, 1977), p. 60.
2. Venezuela's 1963-64 experience is omitted because the activities of the Tactical Combat Units (UTCs) in Caracas were short-lived, almost entirely terrorist in character (especially the "kill a cop a day" campaign) and subordinate to the rural guerrilla strategy of the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN). Urban guerrilla activity in Colombia (M-19) and Central America is too recent to analyse.
3. This estimate of the social composition of the guerrillas derives from personal research in Argentina: *The Peronist Left*, PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 1979; and from James Kohl and John Litt, *Urban Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), pp. 143-4 & 191; Joao Quartim, *Dictatorship and Armed Struggle in Brazil* (London, 1971), p. 131; and Alain Labrousse, *The Tupamaros* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1973), pp. 115-6.
4. See, for example, Leopoldo Madruga's "Interview with Urbano", in Kohl & Litt, *op. cit.*, p. 275.
5. Juan Domingo Perón, quoted in *Militancia* (Buenos Aires), no. 6, 19 July 1973, pp. 35-38.
6. Document quoted in John Gerassi (ed), *Revolutionary Priest* (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 49.
7. MLN Tupamaros, *Actas Tupamaras* (Buenos Aires, 1971), p. 36.
8. Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 105.
9. "13 Preguntas a las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias", *Nuevo Hombre* (Buenos Aires), no. 17, 10-16 Nov. 1971, pp. 2-3.
10. Carlos Marighela, quoted in Kohl & Litt, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

11. "Interview with Urbano", op. cit., p. 284.
12. "Thirty Questions to a Tupamaro", in Labrousse, op. cit., p. 133.
13. Marighela, *For the Liberation of Brazil* (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 57-58.
14. Idem, "Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla", in Kohl & Litt, op. cit., p. 101.
15. Quoted in *Generals and Tupamaros* (London & Leeds, 1974), preface.
16. Tupamaro interview in Kohl & Litt, op. cit., p. 302
17. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
18. "An Interview with a Tupamaro", (MLN founder Julio Marenales, in fact) in Maria Ester Gilio, *The Tupamaros* (London, 1972), p. 132.
19. Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Harmondsworth, 1969) p. 14.
20. Personal interview with leading Montonero, Manuel Pedreira, August 1978.
21. Julio Marenales interview, op. cit., p. 135.
22. ENR communiqué, republished in *La Causa Peronista* (Buenos Aires), no. 8, 27 Aug. 1974, pp. 25-29.
23. *Actas Tupamaras*, op. cit., p. 19.
24. Debray, *The Revolution on Trial*, vol. 2 of *A Critique of Arms* (Harmondsworth, 1978), p. 164. Debray himself was not entirely blameless for this state of affairs — he was the anonymous author of the first part of the Tupamaro manual, *Actas Tupamaras*, op. cit.
25. Socialist Workers Party (PST) communiqué, quoted in *La Opinión* (Buenos Aires), 8 Oct. 1975.
26. Kohl & Litt, op. cit., p. 25.
27. Rubén Pedro Bonet, in Francisco Urondo, *La Patria Fusilada* (Buenos Aires, 1973), p. 132.
28. Tupamaro balance-sheet for 1971, in Debray, *The Revolution on Trial*, op. cit., p. 154.
29. FAR interview in Kohl & Litt, op. cit., pp. 380-1.
30. This paper was presented by its author at the Annual Conference of the Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom, held at the University of Exeter, 31 Mar. to 2 Apr., 1980.

BOOK REVIEW

SPIKING THE MEDIA

by Maurice Tugwell

Arnaud de Borchgrave and Robert Moss
The Spike
Crown Publishers, Inc, New York, 1980

"In Moscow they speak of détente and co-existence between East and West. Yet the great war in the shadows between the two major world power blocs continues day by day, week by week, year by year. Thus if the Soviets realize that they cannot conquer from *without*, by military force, they will try to do so from *within*, using subversion, corruption, blackmail, bribery; and there are enough fools — and rogues — in the West always prepared to become their tools."