

6. Grigori Potemkin was a minister of the Empress Catherine. For a tour of the Crimea in 1787 he is said to have spotted her route with prosperous looking fake villages filled with prosperous looking fake villagers. Perhaps the first Russian to have done this, he started a long and successful tradition.
7. I remember talking to a Canadian corporal who had been told only about the massed hordes and had never heard of the problems the Soviets have. One can so overdo the conventional presentation of "the Threat" that one frightens oneself to death.
8. See for example, Joseph J. Collins, "The Use of Force in Soviet Foreign Policy: the Case of Afghanistan," *Conflict Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Spring 1983), pp. 33-35, 42-43.
9. Viktor Suvorov, *The Liberators* (London: New English Library, 1981), p. 221. The name is a pseudonym.
10. In October 1941, with the Germans advancing on Moscow, defeat of the regime seemed certain. For three days the power of the state wavered and Muscovites killed NKVD personnel and looted as their masters fled. NKVD reinforcements regained control on 19 October. Control in totalitarian states is brittle and can suddenly crack and collapse. See Nikolai Tolstoy, *Stalin's Secret War* (London: Pan Books, 1982), p. 242.
11. The designers of the first tanks in 1915 were told that the machines need be good for only 50 miles. Sir Hugh Elles, "Some Notes on Tank Development During the War," *Army Quarterly*, 11 (July 1921), p. 267. While this is perhaps too short a lifetime, these frail machines nevertheless accomplished a good deal.

Gillespie, Richard. *Soldiers of Perón: Argentina's Montoneros*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982.

This is not just "another book about Peron" to be added to an already uneven collection. On the contrary, it is a serious study of the Peronist regime in Argentina and, more specifically, of the guerrilla movement known as the Montoneros.

As the author explains, the word Montoneros comes from "montón," which in Spanish means a mountain, a collection, a pile of things, having clear pejorative connotations. One does not, for example, say a "montón" of flowers but, rather, a "montón" of trash. According to Gillespie, the name Montoneros was selected from a list of fifteen other alternatives for several reasons, which included the nostalgic memories which it brings, its nationalist and anti-imperialist appeals, and its integrative meaning for a society in which the immigrant origins of most of the population were not so distant.¹

In the 19th century, Montoneros were groups of peasants—*gauchos*—engaged in warfare against the landlords of "la pampa." In the glossary of the ruling classes, Montoneros is synonymous with outlaws or bandits. In the jargon of revolutionaries, the word has a superlative meaning; Montoneros were, and are, what E. Hobsbawm once called "social bandits," of whom Robin Hood, the legendary fighter of Sherwood Forest, is the folkloric prototype. In brief, then, Montoneros were popular heroes fighting against the rich and powerful classes to protect and defend the poor and oppressed. Montoneros was the

name adopted by the Peronist Left to define its liberating army and it is this brand of Montoneros that forms the subject of Gillespie's book.

Gillespie does a good job in his well-documented and clearly written book. The first five chapters trace the historical roots of the Montoneros, relating their development to, among other things, the turbulence of Argentinian nationalism, trade union bureaucratization, the manoeuvres of Perón before, during and after he rose to power and, above all, the weakness of the Argentinian political leaders whose "critical faculties" have, according to Gillespie, been totally "over-rocked" by the virus of Peronism.

Together, these factors created the delusion, almost despair, that made the ultra-radical solutions of the Montoneros guerrillas practically inevitable. Here again, in the case of the Montoneros, we see how and why an over-commitment to violence is only another form of alienation, particularly among the youth.

There are many manifestations of these ideological and psychological confusions. For instance, in the early 1970s there appeared in Argentina a printing house by the name *Ediciones de la Rosa Blindada* (Editions of the Armored Rose). It is indeed a difficult exercise to imagine the queen of flowers—the rose—dressed in armoured clothes. It is equally difficult to say what the proper reaction to this should be: tears or laughter?

In my view, one of the most interesting contributions made by this book is its analysis of the relationship between Peronism and Fidelismo. Some Peronist leaders, like John William Cooke, an Argentinian labour organizer of Irish extraction, tried to convince Perón to leave his comfortable exile in Madrid under the protection of the fascist Francisco Franco and move to La Habana (Havana), the headquarters of the movement. Perón never accepted the idea. He never rejected it either, revealing, once again, his characteristic ambivalence regarding the making of final decisions.

Perón hoped, of course, to conciliate the multi-class composition of his followers with the revolutionary rhetoric of the movement, a contradiction inherent to any populist movement. This was one of the most critical factors leading to the formation of the so-called Peronist Left, whose radicalization precipitated the wave of guerrilla attacks led by the Montoneros. What Gillespie correctly defines as "Perón's deliberate strategic ambiguity" is at the very heart of the Montoneros movement.

As one leader put it, for the Montoneros "the only orthodoxy is combat." Following this strategy, the Montoneros promoted a brutal chain of terrorism that included bombings, kidnappings, political assassinations and other "direct action" that endured for more than a decade. The equally brutal repression of these actions by the successive military juntas is known as the "dirty war," even though the Argentinian military described that repression as "the winning of the first battle of the Third World War."

Another contribution of Gillespie's book, which I consider to be extremely positive, is his criticism of the Left's (Peronist as well as non-Peronist) inability to make a serious analysis of Perón and his *Justicialismo* demagogue paraphernalia. Without a doubt, this was, and continues to be, one of the most important reasons for the political and ideological confusion so characteristic of Argentina since the 1940s. Just as the political machinations of Perón are referred to as "pendular strategy," so too might we use the term "pendular intelligence" to describe the swinging way in which the Argentinian *intelligentsia* acted and reacted *vis-a-vis* Perón and Peronism. This *intelligentsia* oscillated from loyalty to Perón, to "Peronism without Peron," to disenchantment with the leader, to many other changing positions. What was always missing was the serious analysis and denunciation of the ideological mystification of Argentina's brand of populism. Here, the Montoneros guerrillas found a fertile ground in which to flourish.

Relatively minor mistakes in the spelling of Spanish words, and the lack of references to the works of noted Latin American scholars, such as Gino Germani, José Nun, Alberto Ciria and Jorge Graciarena, do not take away from the high value of Gillespie's book. His is not only an in-depth analysis of the guerrilla struggle in Argentina but, also, an autopsy of the whole Peronist movement, the darkest chapter of Argentinian political history.

The book properly identifies the diversified social origins and original ideological affiliation of the Montoneros' leaders, noting that many of them began as Guevarists, or members of the extreme right-wing group known as *Tacuara*. Others began their political activities as Catholic nationalists or Trotskyites and very few as Communists. The experience of other countries indicates that when Communists do not organize their own guerrilla groups they rarely enter into union with other guerrillas.

The Montoneros' career as *guerrilleros* usually begins early, in many cases in the teenage years. Among the Montoneros, it is possible to find sons and daughters of oligarchs, of the bourgeoisie, of white collar middle class families and of workers. The guerrilla fervour becomes contagious and irresistible, mobilizing a most heterogeneous cohort. This heterogeneity of social origins and ideological affiliations is revealed in the *Acción Católica*, also, in less pious terrorism. The early age of recruitment, combined with other factors, reflects the lamentable lack of ideological maturity, the regrettable lack of political consistency, and the sorrowful impotency of the movement in promoting real structural changes in national society.

Gillespie demonstrates that, for many years, the political life of Argentina was a world of "token representation."² At least such was the case until the national elections of October 1983, when the people had the chance to elect President Raúl Alfonsín, a non-military, non-Peronist candidate. This is certainly an *avis rara* in the political fauna of the country.

Obviously, the book, published in 1982, could not foresee the

Spring 1984

most recent developments in Argentina's politics, some of which give cause for optimism. However, within the pages of Gillespie's work one finds an excellent starting point for understanding current developments in the country.

The author did not simply rely on secondary sources, choosing to stay in his office at Oxford University, England. Rather, he went into the field, interviewing political leaders (including exiled ones) on different sides of the political fence. From this emerged a book quite different from both the impressionist essays so popular in anthropological literature and the no less frequent and equally naive sub-products of the safari sociology so typical of Ph.D dissertations in American universities.

In sum, this is a remarkably intelligent book, one that can be highly recommended to anyone interested in the complex political games of the Republic of Argentina.

L.A. Costa-Pinto
Professor
Department of Sociology
University of Waterloo,
Waterloo, Ontario

Footnotes

1. Richard Gillespie, *Soldiers of Perón: Argentina's Montoneros* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 82.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

BOOKS RECENTLY RECEIVED

- Abrahamson, James L. *The American Home Front: Revolutionary War, Civil War, World War I, World War II*. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1983.
- Adomeit, Hannes. *Soviet Risk-Taking and Crisis Behavior*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982.
- Akhmedor, Ismail. *In and Out of Stalin's GRU: A Tatar's Escape from Red Army Intelligence*. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1984.
- Albright, David E. *The USSR and Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies/Praeger Scientific, 1983.
- Alexander, Yonah and Alan O'Day (eds.). *Terrorism in Ireland*. London: Croom Helm, 1984.