

9 The Escalation of Violence

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Operation Massacre

10 June 1956, in the early hours of the morning. Location: a repulsive rubbish dump, criss-crossed by ditches that are full of water in winter and filled with unburied animal carcasses in summer; in between, mountains of tin cans and scrap metal. [...] The moment has come. This is proven by a brief, unforgettable exchange [...].

“What are you doing to us?” asks one.

“Keep running,” is the answer.

“We are innocent!” several shout at once.

“Don’t be afraid,” comes the reply, “we won’t hurt you!”

From this point on, the reports break up into fragments, twelve or thirteen tangled balls of panic.

“Operation Massacre” was researched and written by Rodolfo Walsh, an Argentine writer and journalist of Irish descent who was murdered in 1977 during a much larger massacre.

His research does not conceal anything, but remains visible as a permanent stain on the military. In the year before this massacre, the Perón government was overthrown by the military under the leadership of Eduardo Lonardi, who was replaced shortly afterwards by Pedro Aramburu. The coup was euphemistically called the *Revolución Libertadora* (Liberation Revolution). After the French Revolution, the 20th century was the century of social, political and anti-colonial revolutions and, as here, of restorative or even reactionary revolutions. Every coup was justified as a revolution.

The coup initially failed. Naval aviators bombed the Casa Rosada in the hope of capturing Perón, and the Plaza de Mayo, but missed him and instead killed over 300 people in the attack, which lasted several hours. The coup succeeded on its second attempt a few weeks later. Perón fled abroad and lived in Madrid for 17 years un-

til his return in 1973. Evita's body was kidnapped in order to deprive the population of a central object of identification. The aim of the "revolution" was to ban all Peronist organisations and to incorporate all other political forces by forming an advisory council consisting of leading representatives of the UCR, the Socialist Party, the Progressive Democratic Party, the conservative National Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Party. The Peronists were not allowed to participate in the elections organised by the military in 1958 and 1963.

On 9 June 1956, a group of officers and non-commissioned officers led by General Valle decided to overthrow Aramburu's dictatorship. The uprising failed, and eighteen military personnel and fourteen civilians were shot dead. Peronism described this uprising as part of the Peronist resistance, even though the leaders were not Peronists. The Peronist resistance then revolved around demands for Perón's return and the return of Evita's body. In "Operation Massacre," Walsh uses witness testimony to prove that the shooting of the men without charge and before martial law came into effect was unlawful.

A new phase of violence began. As we have seen, the early civil wars and genocide of the 19th century were initially replaced by violence against workers and trade unions. While the military coups and governments up to 1955 were only interested in resolving tensions between competing powers, mostly between the UCR, Peronism and representatives of the large landowners, this changed fundamentally with the bloody coup of 1955. For the first time, the public sphere was bombed in the Plaza de Mayo, killing more than 300 people, injuring around 700 and imprisoning thousands after the takeover.

Illegal repression thus became an integral part of the measures of oppression and a political instrument in the years that followed. The dictators who ruled from 1976 to 1983 intensified these measures in a barbaric manner. Torture was used to obtain the names of further suspects, regardless of whether they could be considered guilty or innocent, and systematic disappearances were used to eliminate all evidence and witnesses.

Operation Massacre is a true account written using the techniques of fictional crime novels. It was published seven years before Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, the classic work of new journalism, but it was largely ignored outside Argentina. This new way of showing reality, mixing factual, specific, and moral, universal truths, is really effective because it gives you the facts but doesn't leave the reader cold.

Authors combine these two levels to varying degrees. The Argentine Miguel Bonasso, for example, combines the torture centre ESMA in Buenos Aires with a fictional character in his non-fiction novel *Recuerdo de la muerte* (Memory of Death, 1988). Javier Cercas contrasts the particular significance of factual truth with universal truth in his work, for example in his novel *Anatomía de un instante* (Anatomy of a Moment, 2014) about the failed military coup in Madrid on 23 February 1981, or in *El impostor* (The Impostor, 2014), who invented his imprisonment in Nazi

concentration camps. In his reconstructive novel *Seven Seconds* (1988), Don DeLillo undertook speculative research with documentary pretensions about the assassination of John F. Kennedy and his assassin Lee Oswald. He describes himself as part scientist, novelist, biographer, historian and existential detective.

We find another way of connecting different disciplines in Hannah Arendt, but also with the aim of giving facts moral content. In her work on totalitarian rule, she explicitly writes a political analysis in the form of historical events, but in the face of human outrage, she refrains from writing *sine ira et studio* with the dispassionate objectivity of science. There is a remarkable parallel in her work between the portrayal of the Jewish woman Rahel Varnhagen's search for her independent self and the search of the disoriented sections of the population for their place in a disintegrating society in the first decades of the 20th century. Varnhagen's search led to self-awareness as a pariah, but for the modern masses the search led to their surrender to totalitarian movements.

"Operation Massacre" is so impressive because of its clear and concise informative language, because the dry description of the killing and the sober journalistic research create such a moving atmosphere.

The military dictatorship that had been in power since 1976 had Walsh in its sights, but did not take any action against him. It was only when he published an open letter to the military junta on the first anniversary of the dictatorship that he was visited on the same day. Walsh knew that he would be abducted, tortured and disappeared. He therefore carried a pistol with him and was shot dead in a firefight. "He got away with death," as the writer Leo Federmaier puts it. We know how and where Walsh died. But his body disappeared, and he too belongs to the newly created species of the disappeared, whom the military refer to as "*disposición final*," or final disposal. "It's a military term for discarding useless things, such as worn-out clothing," Videla explains at a press conference regarding the disappeared. "As long as this is the case, the disappeared are an unknown quantity. If he reappears, well, then he will receive treatment X. And if it turns out that he has not disappeared but is dead, he will receive treatment Z. But as long as he is disappeared, he cannot receive special treatment. He is an unknown quantity, a disappeared person, a disembodied being; he does not exist, neither dead nor alive; he has disappeared."

In his open letter, Walsh denounced the crimes of the dictators with cutting clarity, not in abstract terms, but on the basis of concrete deeds and figures:

What you have destroyed [...] is the possibility of a democratic process in which the people could have eliminated the abuses that you have perpetuated and exacerbated. [...]

You have restored the flow of ideas and interests of the defeated minorities (in the last elections, WH) that hinder the development of productive forces, exploit the people and undermine the nation. Such a policy can only be enforced for the time

being by banning parties, interfering with trade unions, muzzling the press and introducing the most brutal terror that Argentine society has ever experienced. [...]

Fifteen thousand disappeared, ten thousand prisoners, four thousand dead, tens of thousands of people in exile are the bare figures of this terror. Since the normal prisons are full, you are setting up virtual concentration camps in the country's most important garrisons, to which no judge, lawyer, journalist or international observer has access. The military secrecy surrounding the proceedings, which is cited as necessary for the investigations, turns most arrests into kidnappings, allowing for unlimited torture and shootings without trial. [...]

More than seven thousand habeas corpus petitions were rejected last year. In thousands of other cases of disappearances, appeals have not even been filed because it is known in advance that they are useless, or because no lawyer can be found who dares to file them after the fifty or sixty lawyers who had filed them were themselves abducted. [...]

Seventy shootings after the bombing of the Federal Security Agency, 55 in response to the bombing of the La Plata police headquarters, 30 for the attack on the Ministry of Defence, 40 in the New Year's Day massacre following the death of Colonel Castellanos, and 19 after the explosion that destroyed the Ciudadela police station. They are part of 1,200 executions in 300 alleged combat operations in which the enemy suffered no injuries and the forces under his command suffered no fatalities. [...]

The discovery of thirty-four bodies in Buenos Aires between 3 and 9 April 1976, eight in San Telmo on 4 July, and ten in the Luján River on 9 October were not made public. They form the backdrop to the massacres of 20 August, in which 30 bodies were found 15 kilometres from Campo de Mayo and 17 in Lomas de Zamora.

However, according to Walsh, the repression not only affected the political sphere, but also the standard of living of the population.

In one year, you have reduced workers' real wages by 40%, reduced their share of national income to 30%, increased the number of hours a worker needs to work to pay for a family's basket of goods from 6 to 18, thereby reviving forms of forced labour that no longer exist even in the last colonial strongholds.

They have frozen wages while prices are rising at breakneck speed, abolished all forms of collective redress, banned assemblies and internal commissions, extended working hours, raised unemployment to a record 9% and promised to increase it even further with 300,000 new layoffs. They have rolled back production conditions to the beginning of the industrial age, and when workers have tried to protest, they have branded them as subversives and kidnapped entire groups of delegates, who in some cases have turned up dead and in others have not turned up at all. [...]

Food consumption has fallen by 40 %, clothing by more than 50 %, and the

consumption of medicines has practically disappeared among the lower classes. There are already areas in the greater Buenos Aires area where infant mortality exceeds 30%, a figure that puts us on a par with Rhodesia, Dahomey or the Guianas. [...]

Half-lit cities, entire neighbourhoods without water because monopolists are plundering underground water resources, thousands of blocks of houses turned into a single pothole because you only pave military districts and decorate the Plaza de Mayo, one of the largest rivers in the world polluted along its banks because the partners of Minister Martínez de Hoz dump their industrial waste into it, and the only government measure you have taken is to ban people from bathing. You have also had no luck with the abstract goals of the economy, which you usually refer to as "the country". A decline in gross domestic product of around 3%, foreign debt of \$600 per capita, an annual inflation rate of 400%, an increase in money in circulation of 9% in just one week in December, and a decline in foreign investment of 13% are also world records, the rare fruit of cold calculation and gross incompetence. [...]

One billion eight hundred million dollars, equivalent to half of Argentina's exports, for security and defence in 1977, four thousand new jobs for federal police officers, twelve thousand in the province of Buenos Aires with twice the salary of an industrial worker and three times the salary of a school headmaster, while in secret the salaries of the military themselves are increased by 120% from February onwards, prove that in the realm of torture and death, the only sector of the Argentine economy where production is growing and where the price per guerrilla killed is rising faster than the dollar, there is neither frost nor unemployment ...

Walsh concludes, aware of his imminent murder:

These are the thoughts I wanted to convey to the members of this junta on the first anniversary of its ill-fated government, with no hope of being heard, with the certainty of being persecuted, but faithful to my long-standing commitment to bear witness in difficult times.

Walsh had been a member of the Montoneros since 1973 and survived to see his daughter María Victoria, also a member of the Montoneros, die during a street fight in 1976, six months after the military coup. His second daughter, Patricia, entered public life after the dictatorship as a left-wing Peronist politician, ran for the Argentine presidency in 1999 and 2003, and is a member of parliament and the Buenos Aires city government.

However, Walsh's claim that the actions of the Montoneros did not cause any casualties is not generally true of the attacks he mentions. From the spectacular assassination of Aramburú to the murder of trade union leader and Perón confidant Rucci, the Montoneros carried out significant assassinations, but also suffered casualties on their side in confrontations with the police and military. We will look at the

details later. The conservative trade union leader and Perón confidant Rucci had too much influence. Juan Gelman, a leading Montonero, explains in language unworthy of the great poet: “The thing with Rucci happened in the belief that putting a corpse on Perón’s table would balance his political game between the right and the left.”

Anti-Peronists In the 1950s, there was great hostility towards Peronism among liberal-conservative intellectuals and students. They founded the anti-Peronist “Comandos Civiles” (Civil Commando Units), in which radicals, conservatives, democrats, Christian democrats, socialists, left-wing intellectuals, Catholic nationalists and Catholic youth groups formed an anti-Peronist front. They came mainly from the upper and middle classes. Their role model was the French “Maquis,” that fought against the Nazi occupation. They revered death in battle, considered themselves the “vanguard of the revolution,” but were supplied with weapons, explosives, and military training by the military. They were organised in secret cells of 10 to 20 fighters, used aliases, secret printing presses and medical care, and were trained in the use of weapons, explosives and eavesdropping. When the military uprising against Perón began in 1955, the Central Committee in Buenos Aires carried out sabotage operations on eleven radio stations. In Córdoba, the epicentre of the military uprising, the *Comandos Civiles* were heavily involved in clashes with the police and government troops. There were reports of between 1,500 and 3,500 armed youths on the streets accompanying the rebel military units.

As early as 1946, leading representatives of the Sociedad Rural (Agricultural Society) of large landowners and the UCR in Corrientes plan an assassination attempt on Perón during his visit to this province, but it fails.

In 1951, a group of students planned an assassination attempt that was dramatically modelled on the execution of Nazi leader Heydrich in Prague and, because of their age (all under 20), was called “Operation Baby.” Many years later, one of the conspirators described the intellectual background in an interview with Aldo Duzdevich, a journalist, politician and later guerrilla fighter with the Montoneros:

In 1945, when Peronism emerged, we saw Perón as the reincarnation of Nazi fascism. It was almost a natural continuation of the European conflict. And if we were on the winning side, we couldn’t allow “the bad guys” to take control of our country. At university, I became involved in some anti-Peronist groups with the idea of overthrowing the government.

Perón was to be attacked on his morning drive to the government palace with a jeep loaded with explosives. The preparations were discovered and the group arrested. In 1971, the former conspirator visited former President Perón in exile in Spain. Perón appeared before the remorseful man like a familiar confessor, ready to forgive him: “I said to him, ‘I don’t know if you remember, General, but I took part in the Babies’

Conspiracy.' Perón patted me on the shoulder and replied, 'How could I forget, my son! When Jorsiomo, the son of a good friend of mine, was there! Boys' stuff! [...] Come in, my son, sit down!'"

In 1952, the police foiled a plot orchestrated by the military to attack the president's residence in Libertador and Tagle with armoured trucks. During the successful coup in 1955, naval aviators dropped more than a hundred bombs on the government district, killing and injuring several hundred people, as already mentioned. Among them were about 60 passengers on a public bus.

Over the years, many of these young anti-Peronist activists became radical Peronist activists and joined the Montoneros. One of them, Gustavo, told Aldo Dudzevich:

I belong to the circle of wealthy families or the oligarchy of the 1940s and was educated by the Jesuits. They sent me to Inmaculada de Santa Fe, where Jorge Bergoglio (later Pope Francis, WH) taught in the 1960s. It was a school founded by the Jesuits in 1610 and had a long tradition. I remember that when I was at Inmaculada, we marched in blue coats with muskets on our shoulders on national holidays. Although we were children of the oligarchy, the priests took us to hospitals and slums to help people. [...] Of course, the atmosphere at school was very anti-Peronist.

Just as the Inmaculada had formed "Comandos Civiles" in 1955, in the mid-1970s the "wealthy" families stopped sending their children to the Inmaculada because they considered it a "cradle of the Montoneros."

"When I went to university, all my friends were anti-Peronist," Gustavo continues,

[...] we were the children of the oligarchy, our entire family and social environment was very anti-Peronist. Perón was synonymous with everything bad, he was a thief, a dictator. [...] We were afraid that they would expropriate our fields. They were to be expropriated. [...]

I also remember that on the day of the bomb attack on 16 June, we gathered on a corner near the Plaza de Mayo, wearing white armbands; we didn't know exactly what was going to happen, but around 11 o'clock we were ordered to disperse.

In the days after the coup, I had to accompany the gendarmerie during a raid against a trade unionist in the suburbs; I remember how the women cried. Another time, during a bus drivers' strike, we were called together to drive buses; we went in pairs, armed with .45 pistols. [...]

I continued my studies, graduated and devoted myself to my profession. Perhaps because of the frustration over everything that followed the liberation revolution, I, like many other young people, began to change our perception of reality. This was not an individual act; several of my friends evolved in their thinking and un-

derstanding of history and politics. As for me personally, my profession brought me into close contact with workers. I began to discover the reality of modest, hard-working people; the difficulties they faced in supporting their families, the tragedies that many of them experienced. The Christian teaching of “putting yourself in the other person’s shoes,” which the Jesuits of the Inmaculada instilled in me in my youth, made me think and showed me new ways of thinking and acting.

Peronist Resistance The political landscape in Argentina is always confusing. Whether it’s the liberals of the UCR, the Peronists or the trade unions, they are always divided into different factions, more left-wing or right-wing. This is also the case for the military, who needed a failed coup attempt in June 1955 and another successful attempt in September to unite against Perón.

We have already heard that the intelligentsia, students, university staff and journalists were opposed to Perón and supported this coup. Anyone who wanted to be radical could not join the existing realpolitik Peronist movement, but had to clearly distance themselves from the Peronists in government. There was still the legacy of fascism from the 1920s to the 1940s. Walsh was also briefly a member of this group. From 1944 to 1945, he was a member of the extreme right-wing *Alianza Libertadora Nacionalista* (Nationalist Liberation Alliance).

When Perón is overthrown, the military bans the Peronist movement and elections are held in 1958, Arturo Frondizi from the radical wing of the UCR has the best chance of winning the presidency by agreeing with Perón to secure the Peronist vote in return for pursuing social policies that are acceptable to the Peronists. As the military retained control of political affairs during Frondizi’s presidency, it also successfully forced Frondizi to resign in 1962.

Meanwhile, a global shift to the left is taking place: the Cuban Revolution, the independence of Algeria after a bloody liberation struggle in 1962, and the decolonisation process with independence and guerrilla movements. These dominate the discourse on freedom and social justice. The first guerrilla group to refer to Perón was the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional-Movimiento Peronista de Liberación* (National Liberation Army-Peronist Liberation Movement), founded in 1959, which was popularly known as “Uturuncos” Los after the myth of the indigenous people in northern Argentina, a mixture of humans and jaguars. They caused a stir with a raid on a police station to seize weapons, but soon disbanded.

The Argentine and Cuban revolutionary and minister Ernesto “Che” Guevara contacted Frondizi to discuss an anti-imperialist front. In 1964, he founded the “Ejército Guerrillero del Pueblo” (People’s Guerrilla Army) in the Andes in northern Argentina. The first fighters of this unsuccessful guerrilla organisation were trained in Cuba and led by the Peronist Jorge Masetti, Guevara’s second in command.

Masetti had worked for the Latin American press agency Prensa Latina. In the mid-1940s, he was also a member of the ultra-right-wing “Nationalist Liberation Alliance,” as were Walsh and journalist Rogelio García Lupo, who worked with him at “Prensa Latina.”

Under the influence of the liberation movements, numerous right-wing radicals and anti-Peronists in Argentina switched sides in the 1960s and became left-wingers or left-wing radicals who joined the Peronist movement. Perón now had a movement behind him that consisted of several movements and increasingly ranged from the far right to the far left. As a military man and tactically astute politician, he generally held the guerrillas in high esteem. Anything that supported his Third Way was welcome. When Guevara was shot dead in Bolivia in 1967, he wrote:

It is with deep sadness that I have received the news of an irreplaceable loss for the cause of the peoples fighting for their liberation. Today, the most extraordinary figure of the Latin American revolution has fallen as a hero in this struggle: Commander Che Guevara has died. His death tears my soul apart, for he was one of us, perhaps the best.

Decades later, it emerged that the letter had not been written by him, but by a small group of left-wing Peronists. Perón, however, did not deny it.

In his critical book about the “armed arrogance of the Montoneros,” the journalist and democratic socialist Pablo Giussani, born in 1927, describes his enthusiasm for Mussolini as a young man:

At the age of 15, when Stalingrad, the collapse of the German-Italian forces in Africa and the coup d'état of 4 June 1943 in Argentina took place, I had a picture of Mussolini at the head of my bed instead of the Christ who presided over those of my friends: that classic and imposing profile with the tense jaw, the aggressive chin and the flashing gaze in the shadow of the black helmet.

My last words before going to sleep and my first words after getting up were the ritual “*saluto al Duce*,” which I uttered with my right hand raised and in a firm stance.

Not all right-wing extremist movements dissolved into Peronist factions. A legacy of fascism remained in the form of a nationalist student union founded in 1935, which in 1957 gave rise to the Nationalist Movement of the Tacuara. (Tacuara is a sort of bamboo lance used by the Guaraní people during their struggle for independence against the Spanish troops). The history of this movement is marked by changes of allegiance and shifting ideological positions. It operated in Argentina between 1957 and 1966 and included Falangists, fascists and neo-Nazis. It was closely linked to the Peronist movement, and its goal was to establish a national syndicalist state and combat communism and Judaism. To this end, it propagated a nationalist,

Catholic, anti-communist and anti-Semitic ideology and despised liberal democracy. Its members were mostly young people from the upper classes. One of the activists was Rodolfo Galimberti, who later became a member of the Montoneros. In this role, he kidnapped the twin heirs to Argentina's largest conglomerate Bunge & Born, and demanded a ransom of 60 million dollars.

The Nationalist Movement was responsible for numerous terrorist attacks, including bombings of Jewish institutions. Forty-three terrorist acts were recorded in 1963. Violence was deliberately used as a means of mobilisation. The programme adopted in 1958 stated that its goal was to form a revolutionary aristocracy that would use an uprising to establish a corporatist and Catholic state whose government would be appointed by the trade unions, thereby replacing parliament. The Catholic Church and the armed forces were to play a decisive role and promote a "warlike way of life" and "Catholic morality." Among the historical role models was the dictator Rosas, but not, of course, the Enlightenment figure Sarmiento.

In the 1960s, the movement experienced internal tensions and divisions. Some members began to turn to Marxism and left-wing Peronism, leading to the founding of the "*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario Tacuara*" (MNRT). This group distanced itself from the anti-Semitism and anti-Christianity of the original "Tacuara". One of its best-known members was Dardo Cabo, who became famous through Operation Condor, in which he and seventeen other activists hijacked an Aerolíneas Argentinas plane in 1966 to take it to the Falkland Islands and raise four Argentine flags. He became one of the most important leaders of the organisation "Descamisados" (The Shirtless Ones), who allegedly murdered trade unionist Augusto Vandor (Peronism without Perón) in 1969. Years later, he became editor of the magazine *El Descamisado*, one of the most important unofficial media outlets of the Montoneros at the time. Cabo was murdered in 1977 while in custody by members of the army.

Other former members of Tacuara collaborated with the right-wing Peronist death squads known as the Triple A (*Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*) in the 1970s or worked directly for the secret service during the dictatorship. These included Felipe Romeo and José Miguel Tarquini, the publisher and editor-in-chief of *El Caudillo*, the official organ of the Triple A.

At just 27 years of age, Juan Manuel Abal Medina was appointed secretary general of the Peronist Party (1972–1974) by Perón. In the 1960s, he was a member of the GRN, the Nationalist Guard of Restoration, which was even more aggressively reactionary and anti-Peronist than Tacuara. His younger brother Fernando surpassed him as the first leader of the Montoneros and murderer of General Aramburu, who had staged a coup against Perón in 1955.

In 1962, the Arab League sought cooperation with Tacuara to mobilise against Israel. Tacuara was suspected of being financed by the League, but participated in anti-Semitic smear campaigns.

Tacuara was involved in numerous violent actions, including the murder of Jewish activist Raúl Alterman. These events led to public outrage and a tightening of repressive measures. After its leaders withdrew in the 1970s, the movement remained in existence and left a lasting influence on right-wing extremist currents in Argentina. Finally, after several debates on the role of violence, with up to a hundred participants, the foundations for the founding of the Montoneros were laid in 1968 at a meeting of the magazine *Cristianismo y Revolución*.

Uprising in Córdoba The uprising of students and workers in the city of Córdoba, who demanded better working conditions and spoke out against the dictatorship, was a mythical event. It embodied the possibility of protest, the reward for courage, the alternative to decades of tolerance and oppression in a country that had only one answer to every question: violence.

At the end of the 1960s, social and political radicalisation increased. The “Cordobazo” was a two-day strike and with protests across society involving students, workers and trade unionists. It prompted the ruling Onganía dictatorship to prepare elections in 1970, leading to the return of Perón in 1973. Córdoba is the second largest city in Argentina and was growing rapidly at the time. As an industrial centre with a large automotive industry, it has a strong workforce, which in those days was led primarily by the legendary trade unionist Agustin Tosco.

The shift to the left in those years also included the Catholic Church’s turn to liberation theology and its work in poor neighbourhoods, so that the churches too demanded social improvements and the withdrawal of the military. All organisations were divided into moderate and radical groups, such as the legalistic “General Confederation of Labour” (CGT) and the minority of radical trade unions in the energy, printing and media sectors, “Luz y Fuerza” and “Gráficos”.

When an active strike was announced, many workers left their factories and headed for the city centre. The police tried to stop the marches and fired tear gas, and later live ammunition. Fires were lit to disperse the clouds of gas, and the police launched rapid attacks against the demonstrators, who in turn armed themselves with stones and tools.

The protests were further fuelled by plans to extend working hours and unrest with fatalities in other cities. The unions were coordinating their activities with each other and with students and local residents. The demonstrators armed themselves with ball bearings to throw at police horses, Molotov cocktails and “Miguelitos” (nails placed in rubber bands), as well as cats to distract the police dogs. A 37-hour general strike was called, and demonstrations from various directions moved towards the centre.

After just two hours, the police had lost control of the western part of the city and ran out of tear gas and fuel. The first person was killed. The dictator sent in the army, which imposed a curfew that no one obeyed, and set up a summary court. Civilians

also fired shots, presumably armed members of the “Tacuara”. On the third day, the population surrendered. 104 people were sentenced by the summary court, including Tosco to eight years. Thirty people were killed, 300 injured and two thousand arrested. The court martial imposed sentences of between three and eight months.

After 16 months, Tosco was released. He was one of the rare, fearless grassroots democrats for whom general assemblies were more important than representative bodies. His orientation was therefore anti-bureaucratic, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist. His opponent in the CGT was José Ignacio Rucci, about whom he says: “Rucci and his disciples are prisoners of their commitment to the powerful, prisoners of the guardians who provide them with the political apparatus, prisoners of a prison from which they can never escape: that of submission and humiliation.”

In the same year, Onganía granted an amnesty, but the union leaders were sidelined or, in one case, murdered. Tosco was threatened by the Triple A and did not dare to leave his hiding place to seek medical attention for an illness. He tragically died of blood poisoning.

Tosco was exceptionally selfless, transparent and free of any vanity or self-centredness, which is unusual for anyone in such a prominent position. He always saw himself as a representative of the grassroots. Aware that his end was near, he wrote a loving letter to his son, expressing his regret that he would not be able to bring him the football he wanted for his birthday.

Osvaldo Bayer met him at the CGT organisational congress in 1956:

A congress chaired by a navy captain, Patrón Laplacete, no less. No less. The armed forces with the arrogance to dictate the lives of workers. Argentine realities. But there was also this 26-year-old labour leader who said with such clarity and civil courage: No, gentlemen, this is not the way. Not with bombs, not with bullets, not with prisons, not with uniformed dictatorships. But with assemblies and marches through the streets. At the age of 27, he was already secretary general of Luz y Fuerza de Córdoba.

Such people deserve to be remembered with a monument, not dictators and perpetrators of genocide. “A staunch enemy of trade union bureaucracy. For him, that was precisely where the cancer of the labour movement lay: the lack of grassroots democracy, caudillismo, privileges, favours, in short, corruption,” recalls Bayer. “One of the most incredible and just rebellions in the history of our people.” When a group of guerrilla leaders managed to escape from a high-security prison in Rawson, “he refused. He believed more in the strength of his comrades in the factories, who would force the military dictatorship to finally release him.” Tosco’s return to Córdoba was a triumph. “He will remain a trade union leader who worked first and was a leader second, without extra money or a car with a driver. His line was clear: an alliance

with grassroots Peronists and a courageous rejection of the demagogic and corrupt populism of the Peronists.”

A thousand people attended his funeral. When the speeches began, the police fired on the mourners from the surrounding rooftops and streets, in the tradition of the “Semana Trágica” (Tragic Week). A living legacy of barbarism that had become the norm.

Where democracy can hardly ever fully develop, politicians are controlled by the military, and bureaucracy, corruption and class snobbery reign supreme, ultimately no one is responsible for anything and there seems to be no way out of poverty and economic hardship. Somebody like Tosco appears to be an unreal ideal figure from the another world. He stands up for his views and puts his life at risk for his values. In contrast with Tosco, the society is like a night that envelops us in darkness. Biblical, because there are no nuances. Because the focus is always on the whole, on domination and servitude, on life or death. The Enlightenment can illuminate the darkness as mere illusion. The fact that this Enlightenment contributes more to the liberation of thought than to freedom of movement is due to the effective political lack of freedom in which it arose. Kant still cloaked his sympathies with the French Revolution in vague terms. Tosco's radical practice – not just his point of view – towards bureaucracy, representation and domination, on the other hand, lights the way forward. The liberation of the military from its domination mentality, of politics from its corruption, and of backward entrepreneurs from their irresponsibility requires a civil society that presents practical alternatives.

A half-democracy is no democracy at all.

The commander who suppressed the uprising, General Lanusse, succeeded Onganía. His attempt to keep the upcoming elections within narrow limits by means of a “Great National Agreement” failed.

Rise of the Montoneros On the political level, the shift to the left in society led to the emergence of a left-wing “Revolutionary Tendency” (TR) within Peronism with the guerrilla organisations “Revolutionary Armed Forces” (FAR), “Peronist Armed Forces” (FAP) and “Montoneros,” named after the popular militias of the liberation struggles against Spain. In 1969/70, the Montoneros advocated the return of Perón and, at the same time, a return to the “original,” left-wing and nationalist Peronism of the early years.

Trelew A decisive event in the radicalisation of the guerrilla organisations and military forces was the Trelew massacre in southern Argentina on 22 August 1972, in which 16 prisoners, members of the Trotskyist “Revolutionary People’s Army” (ERP) operating in rural northern Argentina, as well as members of the FAR and Montoneros, were murdered by the military. Of the approximately 200 political prisoners, a group managed to escape from Rawson prison, including the leader of the ERP,

Santucho, and Vaca Narvaja from the leadership of the Montoneros. Due to communication problems, it was not possible to transport the originally planned 110 prisoners in three trucks to the nearby airport in Trelew. After a long wait, only six prisoners were finally able to escape, including the two leaders and Marcos Osatinsky, also a leader of the Montoneros, Enrique Gorriarán, co-founder of the ERP and involved in the assassination of the former dictator of Nicaragua, Somoza, Roberto Quieto, a leader of the Montoneros, and Domingo Menna, a leader of the ERP, took off by plane and fly to Santiago de Chile, where they were granted asylum by the Allende government. Nineteen other prisoners finally organised three taxis, but arrived too late at the airport. They informed representatives of the press and the judiciary and demanded that the military return them to prison without endangering their lives. The Peronist "Justicialist Party" declared: "We demand respect for the human rights of the political prisoners in the Rawson prison unit and take responsibility for their physical integrity, which is threatened by repressive measures."

Arguing that calm has not yet been restored in the prison, the group was taken to the "Almirante Zar" naval air base. Seven days after the breakout, the prisoners were led out of their cells at night and shot with submachine guns. Seven of them were still alive and were taken to a hospital, where they were not treated. The wounded were taken to another hospital and survived.

Tosco recalls:

At 5 p.m., it was practically certain that all nineteen comrades had been killed at the naval air base. Those were hours of great drama. We all crouched down and held on to the bars above the cell window facing the interior of the cell block. There were silent faces. Others cried in deep pain and anger. Some shouted and cheered for each of the fallen and for the guerrilla organisations, for the working class, for the revolution and for the country.

In the evening, a simultaneous guerrilla tribute was prepared in the six sections where the political and social prisoners were housed. Spontaneously, each of them recounted aspects of the lives, beliefs and personalities of the fallen until all were complete. Afterwards, several of them took the floor, condemning and denouncing the murder and holding the dictatorship and the system responsible for the crime. Then the names of each individual were called out loud, and each time there was a lively and unanimous response: "Present, until victory forever!"

The various party marching songs were sung collectively. Everything fell silent. The guards ordered everyone to go to bed. No one slept that night. The memory of the fallen martyrs, the image of each one, the heroic example of each one filled the imagination, stirred the emotions and gave further indication of the hard and glorious revolutionary path that the working class and the people will follow until their complete and final liberation.

Just as after the suppression of the uprising in Patagonia, the military officer responsible was shot dead in front of his house in Buenos Aires, in this case the counter-admiral responsible, Hermes Quijada, was shot dead in the centre of Buenos Aires by Víctor José Fernández Palmeiro of the ERP from a motorcycle. The military officer's chauffeur then shot the assassin.

Paco Urondo recounts the events in his book *La patria fusilada* (The Execution of the Fatherland). It consists of a long joint interview with the three survivors in 1973, nine months after the massacre. Perón's deputy, Héctor Cámpora, won the first elections after eight years of dictatorship, and granted amnesty to political prisoners. On the evening before their release, Urondo spoke in cell No. 2 in Villa Devoto from 9 p.m. until 4 a.m. the next morning, surrounded by euphoric prisoners who sang, shouted slogans, painted graffiti on the walls and made banners. The three survivors, now also released, are Alberto Miguel Camps, member of the FAR, María Antonia Berger, FAR, and Ricardo René Haidar, "Montonero". That evening, happiness was already tinged with tragic misfortune. They were determined to return to the FAR and the Montoneros and go underground. They had embarked on a path of disaster and continued to follow it. They did not live long: Camps was shot dead in a confrontation with the police in 1977, Berger disappeared in 1979 and Haidar in 1982.

And Perón sits in exile in Madrid. While reform-minded military leaders take power in Peru and Panama in the 1960s, his return to Argentina in 1964 fails. When Perón takes off, President Illia intervenes with the Brazilian government. They do not allow Perón to continue his flight after a stopover in Brazil and force him to turn back. Perón has to wait another nine years before he can finally return to Argentina. His hopes for a Third Way are then dashed.

Failure of the Montoneros The uncompromising revolutionary attitude attracts intellectuals in particular. Rudolfo Walsh, the writer Haroldo Conti, who is one of the first to disappear, the cultural politician Paco Urondo, the poet Juan Gelman, who survives in exile, and others. And also those with strong moral and religious convictions, such as Juan Manuel Abal Medina's brother Fernando, who became the first leader of the Montoneros, kidnapped and murdered Aramburu, and was killed shortly afterwards in a firefight with the police. Mario Firmenich is the new leader. Both men associated with the influential left-wing priest Carlos Mugica, whose focus was on fighting poverty. However, he strictly rejected violence, which did not protect him from being murdered, presumably by the Triple A.

During the mass demonstrations marking Perón's return in June 1973, violent clashes broke out at Ezeiza Airport between the left-wing Montoneros and the conservative wing of Peronism; approximately 500,000 people gathered there, and 13 people were killed and hundreds injured in a shootout. Until then, Perón had pursued a policy of vacillation, sometimes praising the Montoneros, sometimes condemning them. In response to a letter sent to him by the Montoneros via Rodolfo

Galimberti, he made it clear that he had no criticism of the newly formed guerrilla movement of young Peronists. On the contrary, he welcomed their uprising, writing: "I recommend what has been done." Juan Manuel Abal Medina recalls that:

Perón himself circulated a remarkable letter, which he sent to the Montoneros, explaining that it was completely wrong for him to have expressed his displeasure at an event that was supported by the vast majority of the Argentine people. [...] The only group that had contact with the general outside the organic structures of the movement were the Montoneros. They had direct contact with the general and had a lot to do with Isabel.

It was the great upsurge of ideas of social justice that prevailed in the world and gained strength in our country after the Cordobazo. At the national level, the majority of political and social forces had endured a long period of persecution and ostracism. These phenomena came together and led to the explosive 1970s, when the general demands in Argentina were reflected in more violence in a society that had been violated by military governments and civilian puppet governments of the armed forces and the oligarchy. Peronism lived through this period with the firm conviction that the cycle of prohibitions had to be broken at all costs. This created a favourable environment for the proposal of armed struggle.

At the same time, neither side wants to lose the other: the Montoneros do not want to lose Perón because of his popularity, and Perón does not want to lose the Montoneros because of the unity and clout they bring to all Peronists. In 1971, the Montoneros sent a letter to Perón asking for his support for the armed struggle:

We are concerned about some reports we have picked up that we are thwarting your immediate political plans. It goes without saying that it is not our intention to hinder your leadership of the movement as a whole, which you exercise for the better progress of the movement as a whole. Unfortunately, our actions are aimed at demonstrating the only strategy we believe to be correct, without generally having tactical links to other sectors of the movement.

We believe that your clarifying statement about this hypothetical contradiction between your plans and our actions is necessary not only for us but for the entire movement.

The Montoneros declared that they thought little of an electoral strategy. "We will remain active in order to demonstrate that the armed struggle is the only strategically correct method of seizing power, and we therefore believe that it would be appropriate for the various fronts of the movement not to interfere in the presentation of the armed struggle as a strategic option."

Perón responded: "I agree completely with everything that has been done and recommend it to the Montoneros," without addressing the question of the murder

of a traitorous comrade or the murder of trade union official Alonso, which was allegedly falsely attributed to the Montoneros. According to the Montoneros, this had found broad support among the population and was therefore justified. Perón encouraged the Montoneros to view the weakness of the military in a positive light:

The dictatorship may be very strong, but its real danger lies in its inherent fragility [...] in today's army, the majority of non-commissioned officers are on our side. In the officer corps, twenty percent are well disposed towards us and twenty percent against, the rest are indifferent.

Perón then makes his perspective on political action clear and seems to differ little from the Montoneros:

As in the all-round struggle we are waging, we must not miss the opportunity to push this factor forward in order to ensure that the surface organisations, which also have their importance in the eyes of public opinion and contribute to the struggle with activities that cannot be ignored, especially in the situation in which the struggle is taking place, also contribute to the "revolutionary war" so that, as I say in the assessment, everyone fights as they are able to fight. If you read the assessment, the resolution and the considerations, you will see that we are basically in complete agreement; it could not be otherwise. That is why our movement has an organisational structure that broadly meets these requirements: a surface organisation that also wages the struggle on the surface through the Peronist party for men and women and the trade union branch, through the actions that can be carried out. This requires a plan of provocation, a plan of intimidation, a plan of boycott and, finally, a plan of sabotage. These plans involve all elements of the surface organisations of the Revolutionary Workers' Movement, such as the activist groups that wage the "revolutionary war." The organisations responsible for the "revolutionary war" have absolute independence in their leadership and are coordinated more than anything else by their goals. It is obvious that everything can function better if there is at least some coordination in favour of the unity of action that every struggle needs.

However, shortly afterwards, the contradictions between the Montoneros and Perón, who had shifted to the political right, increased and finally led to their public expulsion from Peronism by Perón on 1 May 1974. The reason: "stupidity and idiocy," from which Peronism had to free itself. "A liberation, not only from colonialism, which has plagued the republic for so many years, but also from these infiltrators who work from within and are treacherously more dangerous than those who work from outside, not to mention that most of them are mercenaries in the service of foreign money." In response to these insults, the Montoneros withdrew from the May rally to avoid violent confrontations. This emptied half the square.

When Perón and others visited Perón in 1973, he told the following story: "It's about the owner of a bazaar who gives his son a gift, but instead of handing it to him, he leaves it on a mezzanine floor. The son climbs a ladder to reach it, and when he is at the top of the ladder and reaches out to grab it, the father pulls the ladder away from him." Perón ended the story with the words: "As you can see, you can't even trust your own father." He gives no explanation for this, but it is easy to imagine him as a father and the Montoneros and other organisations as his sons.

The shift to the right is accompanied by a wave of terror sweeping through the country. Between July and September 1974, there are 220 attacks by the "Triple A" – almost three per day, 60 murders, one every 19 hours – and 44 seriously injured victims. In addition, there are 20 kidnappings, one every other day. The armed forces remain neutral towards these acts, but are already preparing for the "dirty war".

The struggle for hegemony and majorities within Peronism gave public appearances, slogans and chants their special significance. The photos in the newspapers of the "Montoneros," "El Descamisado," "La Causa Peronista" and "Evita Montonera" mostly show singing demonstrators accompanied by a row of large drums, whose muffled sound is amplified in the street canyons and gives the demonstrations a mystical undertone.

This goes far beyond simple populist rhetoric about the "Peronist people." In the form of the Montoneros, this group enters into a kind of public dialogue with Perón, offering praise or criticism, especially at public rallies. responds to his criticism with the declaration of loyalty "Juventud presente. Perón, Perón o muerte" (The youth association is present. Perón, Perón or death). "Vamos a hacer la patria peronista, vamos a hacerla montonera y socialista" (Let's make the fatherland Peronist, let's make it Montonero and socialist). The left-wing Peronists propagate an alliance with Chile and Cuba, "Fidel, Perón, un solo corazón" (Fidel, Perón, one heart), and invoke the mystified legacy of Evita, "Si Evita viviera sería Montonera" (If Evita were alive, she would be Montonera). "Evita está presente en cada combatiente" (Evita is present in every fighter). Nationalism is more important than democracy: "San Martín, Rosas, Perón para la liberación" (San Martín, Rosas, Perón for liberation), here the independence fighter, the dictator and the populist stand together in a united front.

Over time, Perón's shift to the right hardened the demands against the growing power of the right wing within Peronism. "Qué pasa, qué pasa General, está lleno de gorilas el gobierno popular" (What's going on, what's going on, General, the people's government is full of gorillas). "Vea, vea, vea, qué manga de boludos, votamos a una muerta, a una puta y a un cornudo" (Look, look, look, what a bunch of idiots, we're voting for a dead woman, a whore and a cuckold) – Evita, Isabelita, Perón. "Isabel presente, el pueblo está caliente" (Isabel, present, the people are hot). – "Rodrigo, boludo, buscate otro laburo" (Rodrigo, you idiot, find yourself another job (Celestino Rodrigo, Minister of Economy)). "Se va acabar, se va acabar la burocracia sindical" (We're done with it, done with it, the union bureaucracy). "Rucci, traidor, saludos a

Vandor" (Rucci, traitor, greetings to Vandor). Vandor had already been murdered by the Montoneros, Rucci soon followed him. And "Montonero, el pueblo te lo pide, queremos la cabeza de Villar y Margaride" (Montonero, the people ask you, we want the heads of Villar and Margaride). Alberto Villar and Luis Margaride are police officers and lead the "Triple A".

After Perón's death in 1974, the Montoneros went underground again and fought against Isabel's government and then against the junta that seized power in March 1976. The Montoneros suffered heavy losses, and their leaders went into exile.

By 1978, the Montoneros had largely been destroyed. When the leadership called for a return to the country and a resumption of the struggle in 1978, there was fierce controversy among the exiles. Galimberti and Gelman rejected the "counteroffensive" as suicidal. As a result, they were sentenced to death by the Montonero leadership using tried-and-tested Bolshevik methods. Gelman left his exile in Europe and moved to Mexico, where he was granted citizenship, effectively entering a second, double exile. The sentence was not carried out. Many of those who followed the call for a counteroffensive were killed. Some of them had previously placed their children in a kindergarten in Cuba.

Programmatic goals were meagre and took a back seat to the orientation toward violence. This was also the case in Cuba, it is explained apologetically, as the conquest of power was more important than preliminary considerations about the future society. Since Peronism seemed to provide guidance to all groups, it could easily operate with a vague idea of socialism, opting for either a vague nationalism in view of long-standing foreign dependencies or corporatist socialism. This leads back to an authoritarian state. The Montoneros therefore tried to win over circles within the military, such as the commander-in-chief of the army, General Jorge Carcagno, who led the suppression of the Cordobazo but maintained a distance to the United States.

In order to awaken a "patriotic conscience" in the military in a practical way, the Montoneros together with the First Army Corps carried out the so-called "Operativo Dorrego" for three weeks in October 1973, during which 800 members of the "Peronist Youth" (in which the large majority of Montoneros were members) and nearly 4,000 military personnel carried out clean-up work after devastating floods in the province of Buenos Aires. Military circles supported the idea of civil-military convergence in order to overcome the Cold War mentality and the national security doctrine. However, this did not overcome the existing and increasingly accelerated spiral of violence. In 1973, the ERP alone carried out 185 assassinations.

When the military staged another coup in 1976, some Montoneros considered supporting it, but they soon realised that the insufficiently studied conditions of the Cuban and Chinese revolutions could not be replicated and that cooperation with the military would not be well received.

While initially the focus had been on the "people," it later gave way to the "nation." The latter is the subject of a grandiose and illusory alliance policy with the mil-

itary and parts of the bourgeoisie, as well as illusory geopolitical ideas according to which a distinction must be made between American and European imperialism in the struggle for national liberation. Argentina could receive European support for national reconstruction in the event of a possible triumph of European imperialism over American imperialism.

Marx and Arendt were aware that one cannot “make” a revolution. For Marx, the contradictions between productive forces and production relations intensify until they finally tip over (with a little help), enabling the development of a new social order. For Arendt, it is not the coffeehouse revolutionaries who establish the new society, but the actors without authorship who spontaneously set themselves in motion and institutionalise their actions in the form of councils. In the best case, the communicative formation of power that takes place in the process resists violence. Such a development is rare, albeit spectacular and memorable, as in the case of the founding of freedom in the United States or temporarily during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. However, the vast majority of liberation movements in the 20th century increasingly followed the example of the French Revolution, which descended into boundless violence, or the avant-garde rule of the Bolsheviks, who liquidated all those who acted spontaneously in a council revolution. Violence triumphed over power. The 20th century was a century of violence and wars, with the accompanying theories of violence by Sartre and Fanon, not by Camus or Arendt. Violence and wars constitute the fundamental experience of the generation of 1968, and thus also that of the “Montoneros.” The social orders established by violence are ones of violence that no one wanted except those who envisioned their future as violent rulers. First glorified as emancipatory, but in the end they are still dictators like Castro or Ortega in Nicaragua, for whom the former leader of the Montoneros, Firmenich, now works, not as a revolutionary, but as an economist, and not out of revolutionary zeal, but because he receives no pension in Argentina or Spain, where he worked for only a few years until retirement.

Roberto Perdía, No. 3 in the Montonero leadership, wrote an 800-page work shortly after the end of the dictatorship and the Montoneros, in which he primarily recapitulates the events in order to provide historians with eyewitness information. It is well known that such testimonies, despite all efforts at objectivity, remain subjective and require further perspective. He makes some self-critical remarks in the volume, but these remain very mild compared to the much more critical stance taken by Juan Gelman in a long interview.

Perdía considers the decision to go underground in 1974 to have been a mistake because it did not lead, as hoped, to an “accelerated revolution”. Furthermore, the self-image as an avant-garde overlooked the consequences of isolation. In view of the heavy losses, which left only a small minority of the leadership alive – 27 people from Vaca Narvajas’ family alone were killed – 20 members gathered in Mexico to discuss issues of self-criticism. In Bolshevik parlance, this involves increasing indi-

vidual performance in line with party tasks and subjugating individual party members. But in Mexico, it was certainly about the line of the organisation. In the Bolshevik leadership model of democratic centralism, a line is formulated by the Central Committee and then returned with slight changes after consultation with the individual levels and finally adopted in plenary.

In a study of critical discussions in four Peronist groups of different orientations, Daniela Slipak finds points of criticism that coincide with those of Perdía and Gelman: a self-isolating avant-gardism, the immobility of a bureaucratising apparatus and a militarisation that overshadowed all politics.

In view of the losses, Perdía also rejected the 1978 counteroffensive, at least in retrospect years later. In a macabre move, the Montoneros offered to support the military in its campaign against the Falkland Islands, which belong to Great Britain. Once again, the strategy was to ally themselves with parts of the army and the bourgeoisie against imperialism. No one cared that the attack was contrary to international law.

Gelman's precise criticism is quite different. Perhaps this is because, like Walsh and Urondo, he is a journalist and therefore knows how to analyse issues critically and strip characteristics and constellations of their superficiality. Gelman also criticises the isolating avant-garde, and as a former member of the Communist Party, he notices that even among the Montoneros, there is hardly any reflection on strategy and tactics alongside an authoritarian, dictatorial life within the organisation. But dogmatic omniscience coupled with ignorance is a sure path to defeat.

Gelman cites the example of a popular worker in a large company who represented his colleagues and could call for powerful strikes when necessary. Eventually, he joined the Montoneros and found himself in the initiation phase. His superior in the Montoneros asked him to prepare a strike. The worker knew the mood was not right for this. He refused. For the worker, the other workers were colleagues, subjects; for the "Montonero", on the other hand, they were pawns in a game.

Added to this is a superficial knowledge of the revolutionary movements that are taken as models. For example, the mistaken assumption that Castro conquered Cuba with a few men from the Sierra Maestra. This not only led to voluntaristic action, but also maintained a fatal superficiality, believing, according to Gelman, that whoever had the tanks also had the power. In such cases, there is a lack of understanding of what power actually is.

Such thinking is characterised by superficial study and a "bureaucratisation of thought" that stops at nothing, no matter how absurd. A friend and member of the Communist Party told Gelman how party members in the 1930s talked about the task of establishing Soviets. The model was the Russian navy, but where were they supposed to find sailors in the interior of the country near the Andes? "This friend was a fighter in Mendoza, and he explained to me the big problem he had. 'You know what that meant, for us' he said, 'because there were workers, few, but there were

some. Farmers, many, soldiers too, but sailors, where the hell were we going to get them, stuck as we were in the Cordillera?" We must not only learn, says Gelman, but also unlearn, overcome bureaucratic thinking. This, combined with inexperience and lack of preparation, has always led to fatal actions.

Finally, there is a cultural influence that determines the actions of individuals. In Firmenich's case, it is his Catholic upbringing, which gives him a mission, without further explanation. Gelman refers only to Thomism, according to which the spirit triumphs over the body. In this context, that would mean sacrificing bodies for the unexplained goals of socialism. "St. Thomas spoke of individual salvation and lifted the soul out of the sacrifice of the body, and people like Firmenich formulated a similar concept, but on a revolutionary level that focused on the hallucination of pretence in order to forge fighters of steel, revolutionary fighters on a completely individualistic and, as you said, messianic basis."

If we now combine all the critical aspects of the behaviour of the Montoneros with Slipak's observations, we can discover a constellation: the particular form of authoritarianism of the Montoneros in society. This authoritarianism is expressed in the special role of obedience: "We are not here to discuss, but to obey," and here we encounter the special role of violence. This is consistent with bureaucratic thinking, which corresponds to the formal logical thinking of the motto "whoever says A must also say B". The rules must be followed; after all, the Montoneros are an army.

Humour When a group of revolutionaries decides to take up the fight against a dictatorship or authoritarian government, it is striking that the more violent and terrifying their repertoire of action is, the more humourless and serious they are about their work. Where they rob people of their dignity, their freedom and their lives, they present themselves as judges or avengers over the human community. There, they cannot play a humorous role; it is a matter of life and death and, of course, authority. Anyone who laughs at this undermines the seriousness of the situation and the chances of success of the action, and is therefore condemned to death and executed. The small West German terrorist organisation "Red Army Faction" (Baader-Meinhof Group) killed and was decimated in firefights. Hardly anyone supported them. They were therefore powerless and inevitably lost the power struggle with the state. Collective suicide was their last autonomous act of violence, directed only against the actors themselves. In the world of terrorism, humour can only be imagined as cynicism or schematism.

If a regime loses support, then power shifts to the population, and this shift can be accelerated by humour. The Czechoslovakian writer Vaclav Havel wrote critical plays and eventually penned an existentialist proposal for resistance in the form of non-conformist action and non-conformist speech. No violence, no attack on the government, but simply an "attempt to live in truth." That was his recipe, the act

of doing nothing, of following one's inner voice, of not doing what the authorities demanded.

Such behaviour, in its openness, does not follow any logical consequence. It provokes astonishment, judgement and laughter, reactions to unexpected contradictions. Laughter based on the recognition of a situation under circumstances other than the usual ones. The joke as a sudden realisation. Etymologically, the word 'wit' is related to wisdom. The joke is a form of insight, and a good joke has something of wisdom in it.

Humour, on the other hand, is a moderately critical mood that includes laughter, shapes comedy and is detached from all forms of inevitability of logic and execution. Independent judgement is an indispensable activity in this context. It is difficult to imagine a violent revolutionary as a humorous person. What would someone like Che Guevara, who publicly advocated the use of nuclear weapons, laugh about? He would be accused of frivolity and endangering the cause by his comrades and excluded from the revolutionary process.

Humour and wit destabilise dictatorship by pluralising opinions and ensuring they are positively received by the population.

During the dictatorship in Argentina from 1976 to 1983, some critical intellectuals continued to work despite the terror and general threat to magazines, including the magazine *Humor*, founded in 1978. In its founding year, around 150,000 copies were sold, in 1980 around three million and shortly before the defeat of the dictatorship in 1982, four million. The magazine is not affiliated with any party; it addresses issues in a way that, in retrospect, can only be described as bold. It denounces censorship and the banning of artists and provides a platform for threatened culture. The front page is adorned with a caricature, often of a ruler of the junta, accompanied by a critical statement. Humour defied the ban on discussing politics and reported on politicians who criticised the junta's actions and called for a return to constitutional order. It also anticipated the discourse that the media would use in the case of the attempted conquest of the Falkland Islands only after it had failed.

Under these difficult circumstances, the magazine relies on the support of its readers. "Humour is the counterweight to so much madness, despair and death," says Mona Moncalvillo, who is responsible for the reports. An editorial states: "This magazine is made by comedians. Not by politicians, not by social activists, not by money-hungry chroniclers. Simply by humourists who praise what they think is good and attack what they think is bad with their only weapons: the typewriter."

Journalist Norberto Firpo explains: "The history of humanity shows that it is not the media that bring down governments, but their own incompetence, the lack of professional commitment of their leaders and their tendency to use their gift of authority in a corrupt and all-encompassing manner."

There are numerous cartoons in the magazines, as well as humorous comments and jokes. For example, in the first issue in 1978, the same year as the World Cup in

Argentina, there is the imaginary notebook of coach César Menotti. In addition to the multi-page stories, there are also numerous short texts, such as the one on “The lesson of the German people: Life, books, films, television, radio and television have given us examples – excuse me, I forgot to mention magazines – of perseverance, effort and sleepless nights (but with the desire to sleep) in search of a better future and a happy tomorrow. The German people, so self-sacrificing and hard-working, once had to change their mentality in order to rebuild a country in ruins. This is how the German miracle came about. And thanks to the German miracle, Germany became what it is today.”

During the dictatorship, around 35 trials were brought against “Humor,” but surprisingly, the same number of trials were brought during the democratic government of Menem later on. “Menem’s friends sued me for libel and slander, and so I spent most of my time in court,” recalls Andrés Cascioli.

“Would you make that choice in this hypothetical election of life?” (Jorge Garayoa)

The magazine is not censored, even though it says, for example: “What if one day fate confronted us with the long-awaited ballot box waiting for our votes? What if there were no more repression, I mean, no more absurd prohibitions?”

There are repeated complaints about the economic misery: “If yesterday the baker’s children around the corner could become teachers, today, through a strange symmetry of national economic ups and downs, the children of teachers can, with a little luck, become bakers.” (Guillermo Saccomano)

But it also states bluntly:

We must talk about those who have disappeared. Those who fall into the mud must be punished. Police or military officials who have gone too far in the repression must go to prison for such excesses that violate human rights. And they must bear witness so that the collective pain of the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo does not continue to circle around the pyramid on Thursdays in the future democracy. A government of the people does not deserve to inherit the pustules of the military government.” (Enrique Vázquez)

Peronism and the radicalism of the UCR are criticised in equal measure. An appeal is made to the personal responsibility of each individual.

Is democracy possible in Argentina? We must begin to answer yes loudly. Even if that means locking ourselves in the bathroom to shout yes. I believe that to make democracy possible, we must dare to be ourselves again and not what others expect of us. We must start walking on our own two feet, without stepfathers, without appeals to dead leaders, without claims about strong presidents or similar nonsense. We must break once and for all with the deeply rooted stupidity that Argentina needs a leader. (Enrique Vázquez)

A magazine like *Humor* was also read by younger people, such as the future writer Sergio Olgún, when the military attacked the Falkland Islands.

The new issue of *Humor* came out, and there was an article by Jorge Sábato entitled “El patrioterismo” (jingoism, WH) or something like that, and it was like a revelation, and I realised that something was happening here that didn't exactly correspond to what the media was selling me at the time. I was 15 years old, and it was very important for me to understand this. It was also the beginning of my understanding of how so many things work, politics on the one hand, the media on the other, the possibility of thinking differently from the masses, and that was largely what the magazine *Humor* published.

There are serious texts that criticise the dictatorship. But there is also humour that lets off steam. The atmosphere is relaxed, less so the jokes that ridicule the authorities. Havel's motto, to try to live in truth, meant, for example, that the owner of a vegetable shop no longer complied with the requirement to hang a banner in his shop window on 1 May with the slogan “Proletarians of all countries, unite!”. He himself no longer believed in the content or the meaning of the act. But since the authorities no longer believed either, the act went unpunished. The unexpected courage of the ordinary man, the clear call to follow one's own truth, and finally the simple act with a great effect can make us laugh and already engage in dialogue with our own truth.