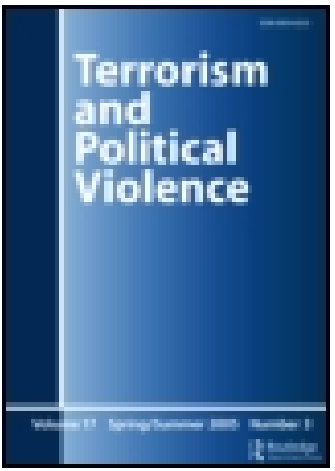



Terrorism and Political Violence

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftpv20

# Political crises, strategic choices, and terrorism: The rise and fall of the Uruguayan Tupamaros

Fernando Lopez-Alves [a]

[a] Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science , University of California , Santa Barbara

Published online: 21 Dec 2007.

To cite this article: Fernando Lopez-Alves (1989) Political crises, strategic choices, and terrorism: The rise and fall of the Uruguayan Tupamaros, Terrorism and Political Violence, 1:2, 202-241, DOI: 10.1080/09546558908427023

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546558908427023

# Political Crises, Strategic Choices, and Terrorism: The Rise and Fall of the Uruguayan Tupamaros

Fernando Lopez-Alves



## Introduction[1]

Why does a given group adopt terrorism? Can one use terrorism, and abandon it afterwards? Are times of crisis and popular discontent propitious for the rise of terror? What are the limits of popular support for terrorism in societies where the community, at least in the early stages, sympathizes with the goals of terrorists if not with their methods? My study attempts to answer some of these questions by focusing on the strategy, evolution, and demise of one urban guerrilla movement, the Uruguayan National Liberation Movement (Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional, MLN), better known as the Tupamaros.[2] It treats the Tupamaros' perception of politics, class conflicts, and social crisis in their country from the late 1950s until the dissolution of parliament in June of 1973. It also examines the reasons why the group engaged in different forms of collective action.

My understanding of the terms 'guerrillas' and 'terrorists' should be made clear from the onset, for they are frequently used interchangeably with regard to the Tupamaros. As defined by scholars of political violence, guerrilla war is a special kind of activity against armed forces that favors hit-and-disappear tactics over more conventional types of armed combat. Tupamaro action, no doubt, fits this description. Terrorism, on the other hand, falls outside the limits that define guerrilla actions. As David C. Rapoport has argued, precisely because terrorism admits no boundaries or conventions in confronting the enemy its use has effects that go beyond the acts of bombing or killing; it seeks to manipulate the feelings and reactions of an audience by using extraordinary means.[3] In this article, the Tupamaros are treated as guerrillas who adopted terrorism for a time in order to gain public recognition and to fight a government in the urban environment.

From about 1956 to 1967 the group struggled through a series of phases before it adopted terrorism. These phases are defined and discussed in part I of the essay. In its early years, the MLN was a political organization focusing efforts on the mobilization of rural workers. Frustrated with the resistance of government, landowners and the urban population to

its efforts, the group formed an underground military organization, the Tupamaros. In the beginning, the Tupamaros engaged primarily in bank robberies, the seizure of arms from military bases, and the illegal diffusion of political propaganda. Such urban agitation was an adaptation of rural guerrilla operations to the urban environment. What I call the terror phase – characterized by kidnapping and assassination of police and military personnel – was a short but highly publicized period (see parts II and III). It went from early 1967 to the end of 1971. During 1970 and 1971, selective terror gave way, although never completely, to some random actions that expressed the initiative of dissident 'columnas' (columns) in disagreement with the 'too cautious' strategy of the central committee. By the end of 1971, however, terrorism for a number of reasons was gradually forsaken and replaced with urban guerrilla warfare which became the overall strategy of the movement until its demise (this is discussed in part IV).

The Tupamaros never described themselves as terrorists; the term had too many negative implications. But members believed that rebellion was sometimes compatible with kidnapping and armed insurrection and saw the use of discriminate terror as a tactic that could contribute to acquiring some desired results, such as the creation of revolutionary conditions. They accepted terrorism as a strategy with a clear awareness that it must be ultimately abandoned afterwards. In short, terror was a tactic that provided the organization with an effective way to wring concessions from the authorities. Not only would its use supply conclusive proof as to the possibility of struggle; it would work, the Tupamaros argued (as many had before them), to publicize the cause.

Despite different circumstances, the way the Tupamaros debated terrorism resembles the experience of nineteenth century Russian terrorists, as described by Zeev Ivianski.[4] Just as the organizations 'The Will of the People' and the 'Socialist Revolutionary Organization' after it, the Tupamaros endlessly debated the specific limits to their terrorism. How much violence and murder could the revolutionary cause justify? How was the group to select real representative targets and how was it to treat hostages? How could terror be used without the group becoming engulfed by it? How could a good 'moral revolucionaria' (revolutionary morality) be instilled in the members of the movement when engagement in terror was so clearly detrimental to their moral principles? As interviews reveal, one way was to resort to the force of personal example that, as Ivianski points out for Narodnaya Volya, was needed to promote morality not just in speech but in action. Also similar to the Russian groups, the Tupamaros tried to avoid unnecessary violence. Indeed, no person (besides targets) was ever harmed in any MLN operation, even during the terror phase. The Tupamaros strengthened organizational control, discipline, and a strong commitment to the cause in order to build a dam against becoming 'just terrorists'.

The awareness that terror could become harmful for 'the revolution' never left them. In fact, the 'viejos', the 'old' leadership, developed ideological justifications for terror in which terrorism was perceived as one link in a broad, general revolutionary strategy, as a step that could not be avoided given contextual circumstances but that, in itself, was nothing commendable. All of this debate speaks of organization, steady goals, discipline, and rationality.

The Tupamaros are taken here as rational actors trying to maximize their interests in a context of changing opportunities. What makes a choice rational? This problem has been subject to lengthy mathematical and formal treatment by decision theory, game theory, and the theories of social choice. My view here very simply put is that an individual's action is rational if his/her conduct is determined by the endeavour to relate means to ends as efficiently as possible, and if his/her goals are consistent. Thus, one way of being irrational is to choose inefficient means with higher probability of failure. This can occur when psychological distress or any other factors that are not directly related to the accomplishment of the goal sought interfere with the decision-making process. A second way of being irrational is to have inconsistent ends. The theory makes no assumption about people's goals, but stresses the aspect of consistency as central. As R. Rogowski has put it

> we do not assume that an individual will seek to maximize income, power, votes, or any other particular 'good'. Hence, no goals that are pursued with tolerable consistency can be called 'irrational'; if a person seeks above all else a life of poverty and abnegation, and if he pursues that goal consistently and efficiently, his behavior is rational in every generally accepted meaning of the term.[5]

It is also important to remember that the theory, in the way I use it here, does not suppose that all rational decisions are right ones. The most efficient use of means at a particular point in time does not always accomplish the desired end. Means are chosen rationally when, in response to changes in context, the actor's decisions are made after careful cost-benefit calculations, and the means chosen seem optimal to accomplish the desired end. Hence, rational choice is also concerned with the relation between time and choices; for example, to choose a good now, all other things being equal, may be more rational than to choose it later. As we shall see, this definition is quite distinct from accounts of human action that have imported, principally for psychological work on frustration-aggression theories, too many assumptions about political action.

The Tupamaros' behavior is considered rational because members tried to achieve their goals by choosing the strategies and tactics that would

maximize their interests in the most efficient way. The Tupamaros' case furnishes evidence that rational choices do not have to be incompatible with ideology and political loyalties, provided that, at given points in time, they do not impede the best possible attainment of objectives. I submit that each change of tactics can be interpreted as a rational response to new conditions.

This interpretation is grounded not only in detailed analysis of the movement's evolution and behavior and as witnessed in the testimonies of the Tupamaros themselves, but also in a keen awareness of the Uruguayan social and political milieu of the period. Specifically in relation to the use of terrorism, it is supported by data gathered through interviews, testimonies, and public declarations of Tupamaro leaders. Analytically, this may still not be convincing to many, precisely because insights of militants are more often than not distorted, for example, the MLN itself was many times deluded about its might and its impact on the community.[6] Needless to say, this article does not intend merely to reproduce and take at face value the Tupamaros' perception of reality; but, rather, to examine these testimonies in light of their behavior within the existing political and social context.

The approach I have chosen borrows from the two most commonly used procedures in the study of social movements. One is to turn to the structural situation that surrounds a movement incorporating a number of factors of different sorts in the explanation, such as a movement's composition and structure as well as contextual variables – cultural traits, geographical regions, the world system, the national question, social classes, local economies, etc. The second is to adopt a Weberian approach and assume that the key to explaining a group's formation and evolution lies in the compelling power of ideas around which the group emerges.[7] Adding to ideology the internal politics of organizations makes this perspective a more attractive combination; the result comes very close to what Martha Crenshaw has designated the 'organizational perspective'.[8] From this perspective, structural determinants may occupy a secondary place or be neglected altogether. Yet these approaches are not necessarily contradictory. The analysis below resembles more the first (structural) than the second (emphasis on ideas and organizations) approach, but perhaps better yet, this discussion attempts to bridge the two. For the most part, the explanation offered is 'structural' or similar to what Martha Crenshaw has called 'instrumentalist'.[9] Terror, as used by the Tupamaros, expressed a clear response to governmental actions, was geared to cause changes in the environment, and, when the cost was too high, was abandoned for what seemed a more suitable strategy. When confronted with the question of why was it that terrorism in this case was considered 'just another strategic choice' and did not become the flesh and soul of the movement, I argue that the adherence of the MLN to a long-run political strategy – that included,

as its ultimate goal, revolutionary change and the seizure of political power – helps explain why terrorism was both used and forsaken.

Ideas and convictions, therefore, provide good material for analysis. The overall political strategy of the Tupamaros ought to be understood within the context of a long-standing debate that sought to reconcile political and military action. The group conceived itself as an organization that had to keep a balance between its military and political nature, an issue that became both a source of cohesion and division.[10] It was the commitment of the group to become the 'armed vanguard' of the Uruguayan left in its road to power that contributed to the view of the use of terror as just one – among other – available tactics. Tellingly, it was toward the end that the abuse of terror became a serious concern of the central committee because of the awareness that terror had not brought about revolutionary change. In short, without the cohesiveness provided by a common strategic objective, the handful of factions that composed the Tupamaros at that time would not have been able to remain together, shift gears, and change tactics. Hence, in 'Weberian' fashion, this claim acknowledges the power of ideas *as general goals* that promote group consensus.[11] But, in contrast to interpretations of Tupamaro behavior that see their actions as the result of an inflexible revolutionary creed (see immediately below), I argue that ideological fervor gave way to utility maximizing and cost-benefit analysis in the face of contextual circumstances; these last experiences made up the daily life of the movement.

For the sake of parsimony the argument made here selects just a few variables from the numerous factors the structural and Weberian approaches suggest. Both are no more than two bodies of sweeping propositions about the causes of terrorist activity. As such, they are too general and do not offer a theory of group behavior since there is no ranking among the different factors responsible for an explanation. For instance, if one is to choose the structural approach, one is bound to answer the following questions: Was Tupamaro behavior purely a result of cultural traits? How was rational strategic planning related to culture? Was the group's behavior a reaction to changes in the local urban polity and economy, or was it triggered by changes in the international environment? Was it the sociological make-up of members and their class extraction that better explained Tupamaro actions, or is there no correlation between their actions and class background? And, if contextual changes explain behavior, why was it that at times the Tupamaros reacted quite rapidly to these changes, and sometimes they did not? It is quite apparent that all these questions seek different theoretical explanations. To argue simply that terrorist acts result from strategic choices, does not help us understand the 'why' of the group's actions when other competing explanations – frustration-aggression behavior, mental illness, or fanaticism – are available and plausible.[12]

Similar limitations apply to what I have called the 'Weberian perspective'. To argue that the internal characteristics and resultant dynamics of organizations (division of labor, methods of operation, ideology, rules and procedures, decision-making, centralization, structure, etc.) explain terrorist behavior falls short as well. We would still have to evaluate and rank all the variables that identify these groups in order to elaborate a *theory of terrorist organizations*; not least of all would remain the titanic task, nowhere yet successfully accomplished, of isolating the issues of organizational characteristics from the issues of context.[13]

By way of solution, I have selected a reduced number of variables from each approach. Stressing the rationality of choices, I argue that, in the case of the Tupamaros, the use of terrorism was a strategic choice that *resulted from an overall political strategy designed in the light of domestic contextual circumstances* (as opposed to organizational or psychological variables, such as internal group dynamics, personal needs, frustration-aggression behavior, overseas influence, or cultural traits).[14] These 'domestic contextual circumstances' allude to changes in the urban economy and in the political system, and will be elaborated further on.

This essay differs from other accounts of the Tupamaros in five major aspects. First, it attempts to address the question of why the group used terrorism only to abandon it at a later stage. Surprisingly, this question has not been asked. Second, it does not explain the evolution of the movement as the sole result of the middle class origins of most of its members. Although I acknowledge that the composition of the MLN provides an important variable to better understand its organizational characteristics – the higher education of members, for instance, helps explain the group's excellent organizational performance – I do not attribute the particular type of political behavior that characterized the Tupamaros exclusively to its class composition.[15] There is no doubt that most militants came from a middle class background, and that recruitment was most successful within this group. But in general there seems to be no substantial correlation between middle-class membership and group propensity to use terror, as 'Sendero Luminoso', or Shining Path, in Peru has made apparent. The composition of the Peruvian group shows a majority of landless peasants and recruits coming from marginal sectors of the rural and urban economies, together with a minority of middle class members. On the other hand, middle-class membership has been equally prominent in radical organizations that neglect terror. This very fact leaves unsettled the issue of a direct correlation between the class origins of political actors and their engagement in radical politics.

Third, as indicated, this explanation of Tupamaro activity does not rely exclusively upon the ideological convictions of Tupamaro leaders to explain the evolution of the movement or its use of terror. The consistency of their

overall strategy notwithstanding, the leadership made decisions rationally – as described above – and when reality did not fit ideas, the latter were sacrificed in order to behave efficiently according to the former.[16]

Fourth, although the argument that one can account for violence in Latin America by pinpointing some presumed unique features of the Latino culture ignores the findings of most serious political and sociological research, such claims do exist; and it is sometimes worthwhile to tangentially respond to them. This analysis of Tupamaro activity, again, demonstrates the inadequacy of such claims. An argument of this sort has been advanced by M.S. Radu.[17] All evidence presented here contradicts Radu's contention that this revolutionary movement had almost no rationale (or strategy) at all.[18]

Fifth, some authors have perceived the Tupamaros as international actors connected to the wave of international terrorism that started in the 1960s, but I shall argue that the international connections of this organization were scarce and feeble.[19]

It is worth noting, too, that an understanding of the Tupamaros' terror challenges interpretations that have concluded that terror is the outcome of mental illness. C.V. Hassel, for instance, has argued that the sense of mission and the dedication found in terrorists is related to paranoia.[20] Hassel does not present any concrete supporting evidence for this claim, and other similar studies as well have failed to do so. The evolution of the Tupamaros becomes impossible to explain from this perspective.[21] If the use of terror were to result from the paranoid personality of Tupamaro members, we would have to accept the possibility that all guerrillas were suddenly cured by 1971, when terrorism was abandoned.

This is not to say that psychology has nothing to say about terrorist groups, only to suggest that this approach seems inadequate. The case of the Tupamaros contradicts explanations of terror narrowly based on the disturbed personality of group members. J.M. Post, for instance, observes that terrorist groups 'draw their membership from marginal, isolated, and inadequate individuals from troubled families, so that for many, belonging to the terrorist group is the first time they have truly belonged to any group'.[22] But the fact is that Tupamaro leaders belonged, as a general rule, to normal families and the group interaction they experienced as part of the MLN members was only secondary to their prior group experience as political militants and recognized members of the community. Tupamaro members drew from the Socialist, Blanco, and Colorado parties and, in addition, a large number of leaders were professionals of high repute in the community with ample participation in other organizations. If, as Post argues, the act of joining the terrorist group represents just 'an attempt to consolidate identity and, most important, to belong', a great majority of Tupamaro leaders (indeed, most of the founders) most likely would never

have entered the 'organization', since their sense of 'belonging' was more than developed *before* their affiliation.[23] And this not only applies to the Tupamaros, but to other groups as well (the Argentinean 'Montoneros' or the Venezuelan 'Red Flag' come also to mind).

Post, and others in this school, have also argued that a characteristic of the terrorist mind is a 'splitting mechanism' that divides the world into two camps, enemies and friends, and assumes that those who are not with are against us.[24] While these considerations may grossly characterize either army generals or high corporate executives, the conclusions reached by Post and others seem too weak. Based on interviews (we do not know how many) conducted with terrorists in industrial societies, Post deduces that terrorist groups are formed by disrupted, 'failed youth in the margins of society' who seek to find external causes to satisfy their (personality) problems. Indeed, the argument goes, they are caught in a 'it's not me, it's them' syndrome that expresses their 'angry paranoid' personality. To be sure, it may very well be that in a number of cases it is not only a matter of paranoid youth accusing society, but also a matter of society not being paradise. Any member of unfavored groups in Africa, Latin America, or even in the societies Post mentions, might echo similar statements without being paranoid or a terrorist. Secondly, one must question the sample upon which these conclusions are drawn. Surely, some members of terrorist organizations may possess some of these clinical characteristics, but, as mentioned, so may members of almost any other organized group in society. Third, many war prisoners, who were not terrorists, or many criminals, who were not paranoid or terrorists, have also suffered, by this criterion, from a 'splitting mechanism'. The specificity of the terrorist personality again eludes us here.

The psychological perspective attempts also to prove the deviant behavior of these groups by resorting to the analysis of their political discourse. The problem, is, first, that we are given no reason to think that the discourses chosen are representative. Second, even if they were, mental illness would be hard to prove by discourse analysis, since the motivation behind discourses varies greatly. Post quotes the following as a model of terrorist discourse: 'Shit on this society of semi-old men and taboos. Go wild and act out of beautiful things. Have a joint. Whatever you see and dislike, break it up! Have the courage to conquer!'[25] Although this may be true of some groups (we have no way of knowing, because Post never identifies the source of this quotation), it is completely alien in style and content to most terrorist groups, at least in Latin America. Neither does it fit Russian terrorists or most Third World liberation fronts.[26]

In this connection, psychological interpretations of practitioners of terror confront the difficulties of distinguishing between pure ideological conviction and paranoid or narcissist behavior. Under which criterion can one

distinguish one from the other? How do we know if action Y, following an event X, is the product of mental disease or mere ideological motivation? For all of these: heroic behavior, determined actions, consistency and, most of all, the apparent absence of moral dilemmas and the stubborn persistance of a code of honor, can be taken as signs of paranoia as much as political shrewdness can. Rational choice theory, with its emphasis on efficiency, consistency of goals and, above all, contexts, avoid these complications.



## I. Origins: Rural Labor and Middle-Class Intellectuals

What is perhaps most astonishing about the rise and decline of the Tupamaros was the rapid pace of these two processes. The MLN strongly influenced political events in Uruguay from the mid-1960s up to the early 1970s developing, in less than five years, the best-organized and best-known urban guerrilla movement in Latin America. Yet its disintegration was quite rapid too. The reasons for the group's brisk demise were closely related to the failure to consolidate support amidst large segments of the Uruguayan urban middle and working classes. Likewise, its successful ascent can also be explained by changes in contextual factors and windows of opportunities that, in the Uruguay of the early 1960s, facilitated the articulation of radical and different political demands. The importance of contextual factors in both the rise and the decline of the Tupamaros were paramount.

The Tupamaros originated and evolved in a country that, economically, had been suffering from serious setbacks almost since the end of the Second World War. Uruguay had adopted, by Latin American standards and considering the smallness of the country, an unusually closed economic arrangement.[27] The economy's backbone was export industries dominated by the livestock sector; yet its degree of industrialization, although lower than that of neighboring Argentina, was still higher than most countries in the region.[28] Unfavorable shifts in the international market for Uruguayan agricultural exports (hides, beef and wool) and the exhaustion of the import-substitution industrialization model (ISI) contributed heavily to the rapid decline of the Uruguayan economy shortly following the end of the Second World War. Among other things, the authoritarian interlude of 1973–84 represented a response to an endemic economic stagnation that, starting in the mid-1950s, has periodically triggered social unrest finally provoking the collapse of democracy.[29]

The polity from which the Tupamaros emerged was characterized by a rather stable two-dominant party system, parliamentary rule, a well-organized labor movement, strong predominance of urban politics, and a welfare state deeply involved in the economy. As in Colombia or Chile, the evolution of major parties tells much about the country's political history. Since early 1900 to 1957, the Colorado (Red) party, primarily

under the Presidency and leadership of Jose Batlle y Ordonez (1903–7; 1911–15), established its political supremacy with the urban population concentrated in the capital, Montevideo. During most of this century the Colorado party has dominated the political scene; second in importance has been the Blanco party (Whites) which predominantly represented the interests of the agricultural sector. These two parties, to be sure, were highly factionalized catch-all parties that did not aggregate purely urban versus rural interests; their overall composition, however, did show a major presence of urban elites within the Colorados and rural elites within the Blancos.[30]

Resembling somewhat Lijphart's 'consensus model' of democracy, these two parties shared executive power, gave the legislature ample leverage, adopted balanced bicameralism, minority representation, and a written constitution which could only be changed by special majorities.[31] Access to power was gained through regular national elections and urban labor was early in the century incorporated as a political actor (although the labor movement remained for most part independent); these arrangements remained stable until the 1950s. At that time, frequent increases in the cost of living, decline in real wages, industrial conflict, popular discontent, dissatisfaction on the part of capital, and growing unemployment, all worked against Colorado administrations in power and provided the Blanco party with its first post-Second World War victory in the 1958 national elections. The Blancos held office from 1959 through 1966; the Colorados governed in the wake of the Blanco's failure to resolve the same issues the remaining years until the 1973 coup. Throughout this entire period attempts to revitalize the economy were futile, resulting in weakened consensus and important shifts within established governmental coalitions. In this changing political landscape during the early 1960s, a new threat to Blanco and Colorado Administrations emerged: an urban guerrilla movement (the Tupamaros).

I want to stress that the MLN emerged precisely at a time in which political and economic crises threatened the permanence of the existing political system. The rise and evolution of the Tupamaros coincided with a phase of deep factionalization within the two major political parties. The movement was spawned during a period characterized by intensive mobilization of what Guillermo O'Donnell and others have called the 'popular sectors'.[32] Militancy and engagement in collective action were no doubt a feature of the times. For example, in 1962 the Communist-led Uruguayan labor movement achieved unity creating a powerful labor central (CNT). In addition, beginning in the late 1960s, most of the discontented concentrated efforts on successfully organizing an electoral coalition (Broad Front) that menaced the predominance of the Colorados and Blancos.[33] To be sure, important factions belonging to these latter parties did indeed defect to

join the Broad Front.[34] Nevertheless, – and this is perhaps one of the most interesting riddles of this period of Uruguayan history – despite the fact that the ongoing economic crisis created a growing sense of relative deprivation in most of the population, neither the Tupamaros, nor the well-organized coalition of Christian Democrats, Communists, Socialists, and Liberals that formed the Broad Front, could significantly capitalize on what Debray, Guevara, Lenin, Marighela, and others have defined as 'propitious conditions'.[35]

*The Red–Green Alliance*

The first strategic step taken by what was going to become the 'older' Tupamaro leadership, was to unionize seasonal rural workers. During the mid-1950s Raul Sendic, a law student, along with other Socialist Party cadres, concentrated on the organization of one of the most impoverished sectors of rural labor: the sugar workers. These included cane cutters and sugar beet workers. Later, they would attempt unionization of rice workers in the central region. As with most guerrilla groups in the Third World, the Tupamaros believed that there was a 'revolutionary potential' in the peasantry that might develop under a red-green alliance, that is, a coalition of middle class elements, peasants and urban workers, such as those that flourished in Spain, Italy, Colombia, or Venezuela between the 1920s to the 1940s.

It was assumed that this political terrain was 'virgin' and promising since the Uruguayan left had shown no real interest in organizing these agricultural workers who had been largely excluded from political participation by the urban bias of Uruguayan politics.[36] Lastly, it was deemed necessary that laborers in the rural sector be unionized, precisely because of this sector's importance to the economy. Although large peasantries and the pace of modernization that are associated with S. Huntington's concept of 'green uprising' were missing in Uruguay, these Socialists tried to develop alliances comparable to those described in *Political Order in Changing Societies* where the peasantry is incorporated into the political process through contact with an urban-based political leadership.[37] There was nothing peculiar about this move: the Venezuelan group Bandera Roja (Red Flag) pursued a very similar strategy during the late 1950s.[38] And, since 1962, the same can be argued of Peru's Maoist guerrillas 'Sendero Luminoso' (Shining Path).[39] Communist guerrilla movements in Southern Asia have also found unionization of rural workers a promising tactic leading to rural guerrilla warfare.[40] What really differentiated the Tupamaros was that Uruguay had almost no peasantry and scarce rural labor; indeed, 88 per cent of its population was concentrated in rural towns and in the capital.[41]

The reasons behind this strategic choice were not, in reality, to embark

in rural struggle; rather, the goal was to have an impact on urban politics by organizing excluded rural sectors. Somewhat in a liberal vein, leaders believed in the power of public opinion: increased public awareness of the hardships of excluded sectors under a political system that claimed democracy and equity would sooner or later undermine the legitimacy of government. This should not come as a complete surprise; as we just discussed, the MLN was born and raised in the context of liberal democracy. This contributed heavily to its faith in public awareness and the importance of parliamentary politics; it also encouraged the group's underestimation of the army as a political factor in these early times. Indeed, even after creating the MLN and embracing an urban guerrilla strategy in late 1963, the leadership was still convinced that exposure of corruption and inefficiency among the political and economic elite would trigger popular discontent and create favorable 'revolutionary conditions'.[42] The organization and mobilization of rural labor was intended to expose the blatant social injustice of a corrupt political system hidden behind a democratic facade. Clearly, the organizers' political goal was to consolidate an alliance of urban and rural workers, and to capture the sympathy of the urban middle class (interviews). Neither of these objectives was achieved. Leaders were forced to react to these deficiencies by changing strategies; their political goals became more daring, and their tactics more military-like.

*The Shift to Urban Guerrilla Warfare*

The red–green alliance was, to a certain extent, successful. Its success lay in the positive response of rural workers. As the work of C. Bergquist on Chilean and Venezuelan labor suggests, workers in isolated enclaves of production appear more inclined to mobilize in a radical fashion.[43] After scarcely two years of union organizing, cane cutters in Artigas and sugar beet workers in Paysandu (see Map) went on strike – at the peak of the season – for the right to grow their own food produce close to their shacks, for better living conditions, minimum wages, and compensation for sickness as well as other fringe benefits. Very soon they were demanding agrarian reform – expropriation of 30,000 hectares left fallow by absentee landowners.

The workers organized into two rural unions: 'Union Remolacheros del Este' (Sugar Beet Workers' Union, URDE), and 'Union de Trabajadores Azucareros de Artigas' (Sugar Workers' Union of Artigas, UTAA).[44] In 1962, the first rural workers' demonstration for land reform took place in the capital. After walking about 350 miles, these rural workers reached Montevideo and expressed their demands.[45] They were warmly received by the academic community and groups within the left, but the government was for the most part insensitive (although it conceded the workers the right to organize in spite of pressures from landowners). The population at

MAP
URUGUAY: RAILWAYS AND POPULATION CENTRES, 1963


large (including blue-collar workers) remained indifferent, and no alliance resulted with the strongest (Communist-led) trade unions. These highly motivated workers walked toward the capital three more times in 1963, 1964 and 1965. Yet, soon it became apparent to the MLN leadership that labor mobilization would cause no major breakdown in the political system; tellingly, after mid-1963 Raul Sendic had no further official connection with these unions. During this year, having confronted police repression in the capital plus landowners' harassment in the countryside, he and other union leaders decided to form an underground military organization (MLN).

The timing and characteristics of this strategic shift merit some analysis. Based on the experiences of terrorist movements in Algeria, Cyprus, Israel, and the United States, David C. Rapoport has suggested that this type of

strategic decision must be preceded by a preparation period of about 18 months to three years in which an appropriate organizational infrastructure is made ready, and basic training provided.[46] This seems to be also true for the Uruguayan Tupamaros; three years later, in 1967, the group was fully organized in urban guerrilla fashion and carried out its first terrorist operations. Although the final decision to create the MLN was taken in late 1962, after the bitter experiences of the first 'canero' march, the idea of creating an underground armed militia had been in the minds of a number of leaders before, when resisting landlords' opposition in the countryside. Nevertheless, opinions were divided as to whether, in the early 1960s, armed struggle was a viable strategy in Uruguay. The decision was to 'give the political system a chance to reveal its authoritarian nature' by rallying support for the sugar cane cutters among the urban population, and to test the possibilities of recruitment for a future and different type of political organization (the MLN). By 1963, the lessons seemed clear, and the Tupamaros was the result.

The novelty of these moves should be noted. First, by choosing to organize agricultural workers during the late 1950s Tupamaro founders had deviated from the prevailing line of thought within the Uruguayan left. Second, from 1963 on they broke even further away from orthodox Marxist-Leninism, adopted Guevara's '*foquismo*', and turned to urban armed struggle. This happened to be a very innovative choice indeed, in the context of the Uruguayan political system. For instance, the Tupamaros' rejection of the role of the political party in revolutionary processes set them apart; in addition, their professionally-planned operations and the absence of revolutionary rhetoric contrasted starkly with the rest of the Uruguayan left, earning them a reputation of being determined, serious, and realistic. All these innovations resulted from changes in the political context and a trial-and-error response to these changes.

Can this shift to an urban guerrilla strategy be explained by psycho-cultural components, such as the typical impatience of middle-class intellectuals? Although factors of this sort no doubt played a role in this decision, they alone do not seem to suffice; rather, this option stemmed from a cost-benefit appraisal of failures and accomplishments. The lessons to be learned appeared straightforward enough: on the negative side, it was apparent that the adopted strategy had not shaken the 'dormant' consciousness of bureaucrats and blue-collar workers in the capital as much as the leadership had hoped. In addition, the political system had proven itself solid enough to ignore minimal demands from excluded sectors. On the positive side, sympathetic reactions on the part of the middle-class, students, groups in the left, and some elements within the two major parties indicated that some class 'fractions' were 'ready' to be recruited if a different sort of organization – a political alternative to those already established by the

left – were to be created. Most important in explaining these developments was the positive response of rural labor to the Tupamaro leadership's call for better wages and social justice, since it demonstrated that 'the masses' could react positively if approached with the right strategy.[47]

To what extent was this strategy shaped by external influences? Were Tupamaro actions in urban centers part of an international terror network? Contrary to what has been suggested, overseas influences had little impact on the group and its evolution.[48] The Tupamaros developed feeble international connections; most contacts were made opportunistically with neighboring guerrillas in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia and Chile. There was, of course, the influence of the Cuban revolution.[49] Uruguayan military intelligence has provided evidence that some Tupamaro leaders traveled to the island during the 1960s and were very well received by the Cuban government.[50] But there were geographical as well as logistical reasons why foreign military aid and training for the MLN were very difficult to obtain. In addition, and not surprisingly given the characteristics of both countries, Tupamaro leaders regarded the Cuban context as radically different from that of Uruguay and that their country was 'unique'.

There are a number of reasons why the MLN did not give the international dimension priority, while a host of other groups, starting with Narodnaya Volya (The Will of the People), placed great importance in international connections and audiences.[51] Simply, the MLN had no hope of attracting material support from neighboring governments – with the exception, perhaps, of Cuba, and we have noted the difficulties there. The political situation in the Southern Cone and the rest of Latin America could not be less propitious for this kind of approach, since the Right in these countries was becoming more and more dominant in government. Revolutionary organizations in the area were, similarly to the Tupamaros, closing ranks and trying to reorganize precisely in order to respond to domestic crises in most of the continent. They were in no condition of offering material – or even moral – assistance to the Uruguayan guerrillas at this early stage; rather, the situation turned out to be the opposite, during the late 1960s the Tupamaros providing some basic training to Bolivian guerrillas.[52] Third, the MLN conceived its struggle as one led by Uruguayans for Uruguayans. Foreign constituencies, although considered important, were too far away to be reached and their influence on the Uruguayan conflict seemed minimal. And there was not, as in the case of many other groups, an emigrant or diaspora constituency to be won.[53]

In conclusion, outside influences were very limited, and international involvement minimal and inconsequential for the Tupamaros. True, the Tupamaros set a model for others (for example, the Italian Red Brigades, and the Tupamaros of West Berlin) but they did so without actually engaging in any contact with these groups which, anyway, were not the

Tupamaros' contemporaries.[54] Thus, it can be argued that contextual domestic factors weighted most heavily in the Tupamaros adoption of urban guerrilla warfare and terrorism. Even the ill fate of other Third World armed groups did not stop the MLN from adopting this strategy. For example, while the Tupamaros were embracing urban guerrilla warfare and considering the use of terrorist tactics, the FLN had apparently lost in Algeria and, in 1962, urban insurgents in Venezuela (the Armed Forces of National Liberation; FALN) were defeated.[55]

Lastly, a quick glance into its ideology will stress the domestic character of the Tupamaros. While some movements in Western Europe found the intellectual roots of their thought in foreign lands, the Tupamaros' succinct ideological discourse was rather parochial and focused on very concrete local issues.[56] Although Guevara's writings served as lessons,[57] as did the Chinese experience and that of the Vietcong, the adoption of rural guerrilla warfare in Uruguay was out of the question. Moreover, Guevara's *foco* theory had to be defined anew to be useful in the urban environment. The Fidelista triumph inspired hope in the Tupamaros, hope that correct strategic choices might predominate over adverse 'objective' conditions. Again, these influences only reinforced the experiences gained by the group itself through the unionization of sugar workers.



## II. The Urban Strategy: Choices, Recruitment and Structure

MLN urban strategy stemmed from an evaluation of the limited value of current strategic paradigms accepted by the left in Uruguay and from an evaluation of perceived 'contradictions' within the ruling bloc. Moreover, the organization of the group was shaped by these choices.

First, there were the lessons to be learned from the rest of the Uruguayan left. As was the case with most communist parties in Latin America, the well-organized Uruguayan CP pursued a 'peaceful road' to a 'democratic government liberation'.[58] As far as the Socialist party and most other groups in the left were concerned, this line (with slight variations) was considered the 'correct' way to approach the political question. The presence of the Tupamaros in the early 1960s brought the issue of armed struggle to the center of attention, and initiated a bitter debate that would divide the Uruguayan left for years to come.[59]

The movement argued that in a highly urbanized country such as Uruguay, the creation of an underground military organization provided a structure toward which discontented urban sectors could turn 'in order to channel their revolutionary potential'. Since Uruguay has neither mountains nor jungle, they dismissed rural guerrilla warfare; and analysis of urbanization in Montevideo convinced them that they had to incorporate the urban environment in their struggle.[60] The strategy seemed to make

sense especially during a period of growing popular unrest because it was designed to provide 'public employees, retired citizens, and blue collar workers' (groups that certainly felt the impact of the ongoing economic recession) access to a well-organized 'revolutionary organization'. Thus, the MLN made it clear that not only the proletariat, but the petite bourgeoisie and white-collar workers had a role to play in revolutionary change.[61] These assumptions were not entirely erroneous. Tupamaros' views on these matters stemed from the high rate of mobilization exibited by white-collar workers, teachers, professionals, and other sectors belonging to the middle class. These peceptions did not, however, prove true enough to accomplish the Tupamaros' objectives.

Why did the urban strategy fail? This strategy resulted from modifications of the 'foco' theory to include terrorist actions in the urban environment. Tupamaro leaders based their revolutionary plan on a number of assumptions resembling those of relative deprivation theory and Maoist thought: for example, MLN leaders believed that mass discontent (due to a progressive decline in real wages), would lead to social conflict and high degrees of mobilization in urban centers. And, since conflict alone could not create revolution, a leading military-like organization was needed because the existing left seemed incapable of capitalizing on the crisis transforming it into a revolutionary situation. As many groups before and after did, they emphasized that revolutionary actions, as opposed to revolutionary discourse, would create favorable revolutionary conditions and that the credibility of a revolutionary group as such (as well as its capacity to draw popular support), ought to be based upon its proven efficiency. The goal, of course, was the progressive isolation of government through high levels of guerrilla activity in urban centers; again, the Tupamaros thought this strategy suited the 'objective conditions' of their country.[62]

The anxiety of leaders to 'accelerate the revolutionary process' cannot be discarded as a compelling factor. But this move cannot be seen exclusively in the light of purely ideological theorizing or middle-class anxiety. The characteristics of mass mobilization at the time, the ongoing crisis, and the features of urbanization in Uruguay constituted heavily weighing factors. The Tupamaros argued, as many modernization theorists do, that the engagement of ordinary people in collective action greatly increases with urbanization, and that (analogous to mass society arguments) repression works only for a while because sooner or later people become so frustrated and segregated that they snatch at any chance to rebel. It is interesting that, in spite of its initial success, the experience of the MLN proved these assumptions to be seriously flawed. An overview of the movement's composition illustrates this point.

Data on the Tupamaros' composition in terms of occupation is scarce.[63]

Based on available data and interviews, Table 1 attempts to show the group's composition from 1966 to 1972.

Table 1 suffers from a number of shortcomings; nevertheless, it provides a portrait of the evolution of the MLN in terms of the participation of different social groups in Tupamaro membership and the percentages of female/male members. Data of marital status, available for 1969 and 1972, also add to a picture of the composition of the organization. Despite the fact that in data samples of captured Tupamaros for these years the criteria for differentiation between, say, students and professionals, or white- and blue-collar workers, is not clear, some conclusions are readily apparent. First, it is obvious that middle-class elements (students, white-collar workers, professionals) were certainly over-represented.[64] The participation of students, in particular, increased as the Tupamaros' organization deteriorated (while in 1969 they represented 24.4 per cent, their numbers increased to 44.1 per cent in 1972). This coincides with data gathered through interviews in Mexico and Venezuela. Second, it is also clear that the popularity of the Tupamaros among blue-collar workers was very modest (see Table 1). Third, it is interesting to see that the percentage of female (77 per cent in 1972) and single members significantly increased toward the end. The numbers of female members in the Tupamaros were well above the average for other groups (such as the Argentine Montoneros, the Venezuelan 'Red Flag', or the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine). Yet, as in these last groups and others, women in the MLN mostly tended to play support roles.[65] What was distinctive about the Tupamaros was the large number of married members (33 per cent to 42 per cent, see Table 1). In most other terrorist groups, only slightly over 20 per cent of members were married.[66]

TABLE 1
THE COMPOSITION OF THE MLN: 1966–72

| year | % Students | % Professionals | % White-collar Workers | % Blue-collar Workers | % Female | % Male | % Married | % Single |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1966 to 1968 | 30.0 | 22.0 | 20.0 | 4.0 | 39.0 | 61.0 | 42.0 | 50.0 |
| 1969 | 24.4 | 20.5 | 29.7 | 5.2 | 39.0 | 61.0 | | |
| 1970 | 35.1 | 23.4 | 30.0 | 7.0 | | | | |
| 1972 | 44.1 | 18.9 | 22.0 | 5.0 | 77.0 | 23.0 | 33.0 | 67.0 |

*Note*: Table 1 has been composed on the bases of different, sometimes contradictory sources of information. Often, percentages do not round 100 due to lack of data. Categories such as worker, or employee, are confusing in the sources and therefore I had to reclassify the information to be able to use that data; thus, these figures should only be taken as rough estimations.

*Sources*: S. d'Oliveira (1973); A. Porzecanski (1973), p.29; O. Costa (1971); and interviews.

What does this table tell us about the success of the MLN strategy? Perhaps more important, what does it indicate about political recruitment? Seemingly, Table 1 would reflect a correlation between MLN membership and groups most affected by the dissolution of the welfare state characteristic of the pre-1957 period. At first sight, the argument of relative deprivation (that people rebel when a gap arises between the valued things and opportunities they feel entitled to, and the things and opportunities they actually get), could apply nicely here. The middle class was the most affected by the crisis,[67] and no doubt formed an important source of Tupamaro recruitment. Higher levels of education (than those of blue-collar workers), sharpen middle-class perceptions of the discrepancy between 'value expectations' and 'value capabilities'.[68] The MLN's composition, however, does not allow for a general correlation between middle-class dissatisfaction and its willingness to embark in revolutionary collective action.

Although Table 1 indicates that part of this group did organize in a radical fashion, the Uruguayan middle class as a whole remained far from being able to channel its discontent in a revolutionary direction. In reality, this group was deeply divided politically, that is, the urban middle class also constituted the largest electoral target of, and provided a strong base of political support for, different liberal and conservative (even pro-military) factions within the Colorado and Blanco parties.

Why did the Tupamaros not recruit as much as they expected in an increasingly discontented population hurt by inflation and a rapid rise in the cost of living? The question is important not only to explain the evolution of this group, but also for theories of collective action.[69] That most of the population was strongly affected by the economic recession is clear enough in Table 2.

TABLE 2

AVERAGE ANNUAL RATE OF INCREASE IN CONSUMER PRICE INDEX.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1946–50 | 5.5 |
| 1951–5 | 11.1 |
| 1956–60 | 23.4 |
| 1961–5 | 30.7 |
| 1966–70 | 66.1 |

*Source*: Finch, op. cit., p. 229.

*Note*: In 1962 the rate of inflation fell ten per cent as a consequence of the IMF stabilization programs, but the economic reform failed and inflation accelerated to 125 per cent in 1968. To complete a familiar picture, and although the lack of regular data on unemployment is startling in the case of Uruguay, massive unemployment was a defining feature of the 1960s (Finch, M.H., 1981, p. 227; R. Gutierrez Alteaga, 1981, p. 68).

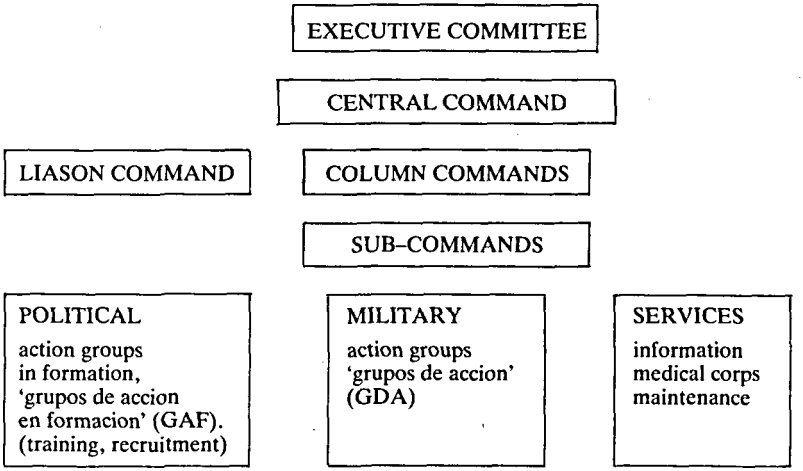
Table 2 indicates that most lower class sectors suffered sharp declines in real wages as a result of inflation. These, not surprisingly, were the reasons

behind the intense discontent and frustration of the popular sectors during the period under consideration.[70] And it is also true that several classes, besides the middle class, engaged in collective action, although this last group remained a large majority in the movement.[71] Urban groups in particular, as the MLN had foreseen, suffered 'progressive deprivation', fitting the Uruguayan case nicely into James Davies' 'J-curve' hypothesis, that is, that revolutions are 'most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal'.[72] 'Opportunities' to engage in mass mobilization and revolutionary violence abounded: they were provided by unions, the Broad Front, and the Tupamaros. Yet, most of the population preferred to express discontent either by turning to more conservative political choices (the military, or several factions within the Colorado or Blanco parties), by migrating, or by withdrawing from the political scene altogether. The reasons were simple: the political system had not yet exhausted its capacity to absorb and channel citizens demands, the strong clientele networks of both Blancos and Colorados were still intact, and the presence of the military in parliamentary politics was viewed by many as a chance of restoring law and order, as well as stopping governmental corruption.

A question that intrigued the MLN here was why were deprived blue-collar workers, for instance, much less prone to radicalization than other groups? As indicated, perhaps the answer was that the intensity of relative deprivation was different for each group with respect to each 'class of values'.[73] Yet this still leaves unexplained why large sectors of the middle class adopted similar attitudes to those of blue-collar workers in the context of different expectations, or why the working class, while highly mobilized at the level of trade unions, persistently adopted a conservative political behavior.[74] How can we explain the overall indifference of the working class to MLN's recruitment efforts? Can we generalize from the Tupamaros' experience and maintain that, overall, urban blue-collar workers resist recruitment by guerrilla groups?

In the case of Uruguay and the Tupamaros, two answers seem possible. First, workers' rejection of armed struggle might have been a consequence of the influence of Communist labor leaders (the Uruguayan urban working class was strongly unionized along Communist party lines). Communist Party leaders perceived in the Tupamaros a manifestation of petit bourgeois 'infantile leftism'.[75] However, this answer is not satisfactory. The National Convention of Workers (CNT) had little influence on the political behavior of union members; that is, they were never able to overcome the disjunction between labor militancy and the more conservative leanings of the working class, as well as to be able to prevent some union members from collaborating with the guerrillas. The behavior of white-collar workers in large state bureaucracies (who were also organized in Communist-led

FIGURE 1
STRUCTURE OF THE MLN




*Source*: Interviews; see also MLN (1973), p. 17.
*Note*: Sub-commands were carried by cells, each cell having no more than seven members. Command leadership could count about 20 members. Cells could have relative autonomy from commands and could not make *ad hoc* decisions in emergencies; they could also decide on military actions if required. Columns were distributed according to geographical region. Liaison commands were in charge of communication between different sub-commands, and between sub-commands, columns and the executive committee. Their training bases were located close to the capital and were equipped with small hospitals. The group also established a network of hideouts in Montevideo, and several 'peoples' prisons' where hostages were kept captive in some cases for over a one-year period.

unions) illustrates this last point, because these workers responded more positively to the Tupamaros (see Table 1).

Second, scarce participation of blue-collar workers in the MLN might have reflected the fact that there were no visible gains for workers in joining the group.This seems much more plausible. The MLN promised the working class no more than long-term rewards, a code of ethics, and nationalist rhetoric. This made recruitment very difficult indeed, since the MLN offered few selective incentives in exchange for workers' participation. To become a member or supporter would have meant to risk the position labor had already conquered in the existing political system for the pursuit of a better future society. Gains obtained by labor through party politics in the past were still a very fresh memory in the minds of the working class; therefore, blue-collar workers (and most of the middle class), remained loyal to the two major political parties. At bottom, the option the Tupamaros offered was not appealing to urban groups who strongly believed in reform elections. In this context, when terror was used, it increased the gap between the Tupamaros and their potential contituencies.

## III. Environment, Organizational Structure, and the Use of Terror

Despite the Tupamaros' failure to transform a crisis into revolutionary change, from 1963 to 1969 the movement became the center of public attention without resorting to major terrorist acts. It was from 1967 to 1970 that the MLN's underground organization was structured and consolidated; the group started using terrorism by the end of this phase. The structure of the movement is represented in Figure 1.

During 1963 to 1969 the MLN was considered by some as 'the leading actor' in the Uruguayan political scene.[76] At the level of the state, Tupamaro actions soon caused some visible effects: special parliamentary commissions were created to investigate corruption among high-ranking officials and the movement became the center of political debate. Although it did change the rules of the political game, terrorism did not generate revolutionary conditions or directly benefit the Tupamaros.[77] H. Handelman has argued that each escalation in state repression represented a response to industrial conflict.[78] Be that as it may, it was also the guerrillas who constituted a central concern of the government. Table 3 attempts to show a possible correlation (from 1960 to 1972) between periods in which the Tupamaros were highly active and governmental measures to increase the coercive capacity of the state. Armed forces military build up and counterinsurgency actions appear to coincide nicely with Tupamaro activity more than with any other manifestation of dissent.

The government response to Tupamaro terror was, all in all, very unimaginative; it relied on simple coercion. Coercion emerged as a quick crisis response that exceeded constitutional norms, and involved foreign and national resources; yet, for some time, it remained rather ineffective. By reacting so ferociously and incompetently (see Table 3) the state enhanced the image of invincibility the group had of itself, contributing as well to the popular conviction that the underground movement was almost invulnerable. Perpetuating this image of invulnerability, however, also resulted in some concrete gains for the military. The Uruguayan Armed Forces encouraged the perception of the guerrillas as 'super-revolutionaries' because by so doing they were able to demand increases in military expenditures (see Table 3), request special systems of promotion, and counter-insurgency training for their troops. Indoctrination of cadres in the military school and the police academy, for example, magnified the strength of the MLN, and encouraged a collective anti-Tupamaro paranoia among the rank and file.[79] The media, alternately impressed, enamored, or alarmed by Tupamaro performance, also enhanced this reputation.

TABLE 3
STATE RESPONSES TO GUERRILLA ACTIVITY, 1960–1972.

| Year | Military Expend. | Military Expend. as Share of GDF | Arms Imports | Censorship of Media | Suspension of Constitutional Rights | No. Political Prisoners |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1950–1960 | – | – | – | | | |
| 1961 | 23.3 | 1.1 | 1.1 | | | |
| 1962 | 24.8 | 1.2 | – | | | |
| 1963 | 34.0 | 1.6 | 1.4 | | | |
| 1964 | 33.4 | 1.6 | 1.3 | | | |
| 1965 | 37.5 | 1.7 | 4.0 | | | 150 |
| 1966 | 35.9 | 1.5 | 5.1 | | Habeas Corpus suspended | – |
| 1967 | 41.9 | 2.0 | 1.2 | Reports on MLN prohibited | | |
| 1968 | 31.5 | 1.5 | 1.5 | Closure of 4 newspapers | The Socialist Party and other groups (FAU, MRO, MIR, MAPU) are banned | 2.700 |
| 1969 | 43.3 | 2.0 | 2.3 | Closure of 8 newspapers | | 5.616 |
| 1970 | 44.0 | 1.8 | 5.4 | Closure of 2 radio stations | Temporary suspension of all constitutional rights | 7.100 |
| 1971 | 38.7 | 2.6 | 13.4 | Closure of 5 newspapers | Temporary suspension of all constitutional rights | 8.566 |
| 1972 | 80.4 | 3.3 | 6.0 | | State of siege | 12.900 |

*Sources*: James Wilkie (ed.), *Statistical Abstract of Latin America, UCLA Latin American Studies Center*, Vol. 17 (1976), pp. 246–249, and Vol. 19 (1978), p. 141; Omar Costa's chronology of daily events throughout the pre-coup period (1970), pp. 90–9

*Note*: The dash ('–') means that data are not available. Military expenditures are estimated in US million constant dollars of 1972. Figures for political prisoners are rough estimates since data is scarce and contradictory. Overall, Table 3 indicates that, starting in the early 1960s, the state substantially multiplied military expenditures while curtailing constitutional rights. State policies, of course, also responded to increasing mass mobilization; yet their main target was the Tupamaros. For example, the budget devoted to arms imports noticeably increased during the years in which the MLN started operating in the urban environment (1965–66), and reached $13.4 million in 1971, when the army was preparing to assess the last, fatal blow on the group. There is as well little doubt that media censorship and most suspension of constitutional rights responded to both labor unrest and guerrilla activity. Tellingly, military expenditures reached a peak (and the government imposed state of siege) during the year of the Tupamaros' 'last offensive' (1972). In the same year, military share of GDP rose to $3.3 million and military expenditures escalated from $38.7 (1971) to $80.4 million.

TABLE 4
TUPAMARO ACTIVITIES, 1964–1972

| | |
|---|---|
| Armed Confrontations with Police and Army | 50 |
| 'Executions' of Hostages | 1 |
| Bank Robberies | 20 |
| Bombings | 13 |
| Assassination of Death Squads and Counterinsurgency Personnel | 8 |
| Kidnappings | 10 |
| Large Military Operations | 5 |
| Prison Evasions | 9 |
| Total of Tupamaro Actions during this period | 116 |

*Source*: Omar Costa (1971), p. 233; FBIS Daily Reports; Uruguayan and Brazilian press accounts of the group's activities, and interviews.

*Note*: It should be borne in mind that Montevideo, the base of these operations, had a population of 2,890,000 within an area of 664 sp. miles. Table 4 does not include seizures of radio stations and small raids.



Most importantly, this image enormously increased the 'perceived level of threat' at the core of the ruling coalition, including most sectors of the business community and the landed elite, creating more than propitious conditions for alliances between these groups and the Uruguayan Armed Forces, while further weakening the power of parliament.[80] In sum, all these events reinforced the belief among MLN leaders that they were on the right track, and that perhaps they could actually lead the revolutionary transformation of Uruguayan society.

Whether magnified or objectively assessed, Tupamaro actions had an impact on the military. The army, divided over what strategy to follow in order to seize the state, had been contacted by the Tupamaros since 1966 on the issue of political corruption.[81] Unlike what has been widely argued, the Uruguayan military, far from being completely indifferent to politics, had entertained the possibility of a military take-over since the early 1960s,[82] and planned the 1973 coup starting in 1968.[83] The MLN saw in these developments an opportunity, and there is strong evidence that the Tupamaros played an important role in the process of faction formation and alliances that took place within the Armed Forces throughout the pre-coup period.[84]

All this begs the question of the real strength of the movement, that is, could it have posed a real military threat to the Armed Forces?[85] As it will become clear in part four, in retrospect the answer is negative, despite the high level of guerrilla activity carried out by the MLN in Montevideo during the second half of the 1960s and early 1970s (see Table 4). The basic

aim of these actions was to create and maintain an ongoing 'revolutionary momentum' and ultimately attain political power.[86]

Ironically, it was increasing police repression and a series of parliamentary crises that reinforced the MLN leadership's conviction of the effectiveness of their strategy. Indeed, the political system had acknowledged the Tupamaros' presence and had reacted accordingly. From the Tupamaros' standpoint, parliamentary imbroglios were a good sign of governmental weakness, popular mobilization an indication of welcomed unrest, and military build-up an evidence of the collapse of corrupted institutions and a chance to recruit dissident officers. When recruiting did increase during 1969, terrorism seemed to pay.[87] In short, an active strategy in a time of political conflict rather than a passive and time-consuming effort at changing the ideological preferences of an immature political base (as other groups in the left had tried), had proved to be much more effective in altering mass-government relations.[88] As Table 3 shows, other leftist groups who had not supported the MLN's strategy, were nevertheless affected by the increasing political conflict and, after 1968, denied legal status. Liberties were more and more suppressed and the predicted need for a revolutionary, military-like group, appeared more and more imminent, paying credence to the Tupamaros' strategy assessment. Thus, it was at this time (1967–70) that changes in the political environment contributed heavily to the feeling that the group had gained the center of attention.

The success the MLN achieved during these years eventually convinced the Tupamaros that they were virtually indestructible.[89] By 1969, for example, MLN leaders believed that an escalation of activities on their part would finally cause the breakdown of the ruling coalition. This was a gross overestimation, as the quick defeat of the movement at the hands of the military during the 'last offensive' of 1972 clearly demonstrated. At this point, however, the MLN tended to think of itself as a parallel army with enormous potential, attractive enough to gain defector officers on its side, and to provoke serious strife within the armed forces. This is hardly surprising. Other groups have also viewed terrorism as a way of bringing about harsh government responses that would force the uncommitted citizen to choose sides, and as a means of weakening the state's legitimacy.[90] They thought they could manage to funnel all this discontent into a social revolution. Pretentiously, the group claimed that it could offer their new recruits an organization strong enough to constitute what they called an 'alternative of power'.

What role did terrorism play as a part of this overall strategy? Terror never became the sole tactic of the group; in addition to terrorism, the Tupamaros still used earlier tactics, such as disclosing corruption, or 'Robin Hood'-like actions. In the period 1964–67, kidnapping and major terrorist

attacks were not on the agenda, but when they became central during 1969, the group did not abandon its earlier approach completely because it had gained them popularity. Why did the group jump to political kidnapping (in 1969) and assassination of a hostage (in 1970) when 'milder' tactics had brought sound results at an earlier date? To repeat a point made earlier, rational strategic planning sufficiently explains the MLN's use of terror.

The adoption of this tactic was encouraged by what the group perceived as significant changes in 'class relations and distribution of wealth' in Uruguayan society. The ongoing political pact between parties, the state, and labor was certainly changing. Indications of this were a series of parliamentary crises, and the increasing mobilization of an array of social movements, including labor, that demanded compensation for inflation and decreasing political participation. In a word, MLN leaders thought that 'conditions' were 'ripe' to attempt a strategic 'qualitative change'. In the eyes of the Tupamaros, the group's political aims could no longer be attained by simply denouncing corrupted government officials and members of the ruling elite. This had been only an initial step to bring the true nature of the state into the open; to persist in the use of these tactics was the equivalent of political death. Political kidnapping was estimated to strengthen the influence of the movement on the population, intimidate the government, increase recruitment, and initiate military actions on a larger scale.

Data gathered in interviews makes clear that, at least in the beginning, the MLN did not adopt terrorism as a result of weakness, but as a reaction to what they viewed as positive responses and new opportunities in its environment. Tupamaro terrorist actions started by being very selective; as we shall see, it was not until the end that terrorism *per se* gathered its own momentum. Guerrillas' testimonies coincide in that the distinctive characteristic of the Tupamaros was their awareness that there was a limit to what could be accomplished through the use of terror. Terrorism was considered as an experimental option, and one that could be abandoned afterward if unproductive – we will examine this in some detail in the final part of this essay.

Tupamaro terrorism showed similarities with terrorist experiences elsewhere. Martha Crenshaw has argued persuasively that terrorism 'per se is not usually a reflection of mass discontent and deep cleavages in society. More often it represents the disaffection of a fragment of the elite, who may take it upon themselves to act on the behalf of the majority.'[91] Although terrorism in Uruguay did emerge precisely at a peak of mass discontent, the masses at large did not provide support for it. True, an atmosphere of widespread discontent and popular mobilization, plus the daily erosion of democratic decision-making at the level of parliament colored the times, but it was not enough to provide steady support for terrorism. As with

other groups, the Tupamaros did not represent the will of the people and yet they felt they acted in its behalf.

By the same token, there were differences between the Tupamaros and other groups. In modern times, the MLN was the movement that most insisted in the importance and potential of political kidnapping as a central tactic for urban guerrilla warfare. Targeting the economic and political elite as well as diplomats, kidnappings were intended to draw attention to the public that local elites and foreign powers were both to blame for stagflation and political corruption. Data gathered from hostages about governmental corruption, foreign intervention in domestic affairs, and violation of constitutional norms, were all carefully released to the press, politicians, and officers in an attempt to gain support for political kidnapping.[92] To be sure, the Tupamaros thought that kidnapping was a new weapon that would enable them to negotiate with government and attract popular support.[93]

Thus, kidnapping seemed to fit nicely with the groups's general political strategy, and no doubt had great repercussion in the media. The first two kidnappings aimed to show that the government was powerless to protect its friends.[94] Targeting figures with a proven reputation of corruption and dishonesty, the Tupamaros attempted to capture popular support by imposing 'popular justice'. As many other groups before and after them, they tried to demonstrate that high rank officials were not immune and the police no match for a movement.[95] But, unlike anybody else before them, they became experts in political kidnapping and used it systematically and successfully. More importantly, they wanted to make clear that a well organized and daring handful of militants could threaten a government.

The seizing, in August 1970, of an American police advisor (Dan A. Mitrione), represented a major turning point with unforeseen consequences; immediately after a number of diplomats and advisers to foreign embassies were also kidnapped.[96] When (unexpectedly for the Tupamaros) the government refused to give way to their demand (the release of captured guerrillas), the group faced a dilemma that would have enormous repercussions. Although there is evidence of secret negotiations between the Pacheco Administration and the Tupamaros for the release of Mitrione,[97] the government clearly rejected any policy of accommodation. The movement finally adopted the decision to kill the hostage. The decision was a convoluted one: members in the central committee and most cadres all voted for yes or no on the issue and it took more than 48 hours to reach a final decision. And when it was reached, it was not by complete consensus. The MLN decided to 'execute' the hostage because it was accused of bluffing by the authorities and feared both the loss of bargaining power and the defeat of political kidnapping as a revolutionary strategy. According to a Tupamaro leader, they were 'not just thinking of our own situation,

but on the significance of kidnapping as a method for other revolutionary movements'.[98]

In the long run, however, political kidnapping turned out to be fatal. First, the decision to kill Mitrione facilitated, starting in 1970, the Armed Forces direct involvement in political repression. Second, the 'execution' created discomfort and disagreements erupting in serious strains within the leadership.[99] Third, although this crucial decision made apparent the limits of political kidnapping, it paradoxically also pushed the movement further into the use of terror. Due to strategic and internal problems, plus the need to give a quick response to increasing police and army repression, the leadership could not admit that the killing of the hostage had been a mistake; instead, it had to champion this new dimension of political struggle to its last consequences. Army, police, and Tupamaros, now were at war.

Tellingly, it was after the killing of Mitrione that the use of discriminate terrorism became customary for the movement. There after, the group ambushed and killed several policemen and state officials involved in the creation of death squads (see Table 4). In spite of its selectivity the rate of terrorism symptomatically increased parallel to both dissidence at the core of the group and leadership awareness that the failure of the urban guerrilla strategy was imminent. The observation that terrorism is the weapon of the weak finds confirmation at this stage of the movement's evolution. It is at this point (1971, the year that presaged the eventual demise of the movement), that some dissident columns (and at times the Tupamaros themselves), started using random terrorism. No doubt the use of random terror strikingly contrasted with earlier actions.[100] In short, as one might have expected, random terror coincided with divisions within the movement on strategic and ideological issues, deterioration of leadership and communications, and serious police repression.

It was at this point that the leadership quickly tried to regain control and decided to abandon political kidnapping and the use of terror. They opted, instead, for more open military confrontations with the army, and chose to shift the struggle to the countryside (see immediately below). This challenges the widely accepted notion that terrorism, once used, endures, and a shift of direction is hardly possible.[101] That view is surely right in a number of instances, especially in cases like Narodnaya Volya where terrorism is the basic linkage that bound group members together.[102] In response to new changes in the environment, Tupamaro terror was abandoned once it was deemed harmful to the long-term strategy of the group. Again, this highlights the importance of contextual events in explaining strategic choices and indicates that psychological factors that could prevent the abandonment of terror (guilt, frustration, revenge, commitment to a set of ideological principles) may play a secondary role.[103]

## IV. Back to the Countryside: The Abandonment of Terrorism and the Demise of the Tupamaros

It did not take a prolonged struggle for the Tupamaros to realize that terrorism would not result in concrete gains. During the early seventies the recruitment of inexperienced youngsters had increased – especially of students, see Table 1 – and infiltration became endemic at all levels. The army, trained now in counterinsurgency, was achieving tangible results in breaking down the guerrillas' security network. The engagement in terrorism had been too costly; the army was dismantling the movement cell by cell. Internal divisions crystallized between a younger, more radical 'generation' and 'los viejos' (the original cadres). Additionally, support from the working class, that slightly increased during the early 1970s, by 1971 was again fading away, while the group's connections with moderate and leftist groups in the capital were at the point of collapse, and the presence of the Armed Forces in the streets hampered even the most modest military operations. In short, by the beginning of 1971 the army had successfully engaged in waging a 'war against subversion' that had forced the Tupamaros to the deefensive, triggering the use of random terror and rendering them practically helpless in the urban environment. The group had to respond somehow to this and to other new challenges.

At the same time, distorted national elections in 1971 (involving military control of voting places, repression against the Broad Front, and irregularities in the scrutiny of votes), still raised doubts about the movement's strategy. Despite irregularities in the electoral process, the polls reflected the willingness of the population to seek a solution to the crisis within the framework of existing institutions. As a consequence, further factionalization within the group occurred and after these elections (November 1971) a number of MLN columns began to act independently of the central leadership.[104] At this point, the Tupamaros realized that they lacked proper military equipment and had no logistic capability to survive a war-like situation in the urban setting. It was under these circumstances that the leadership decided to stop the use of terror; the argument was that terrorism had become an inadequate response to new challenges (interviews). The proof that terror was losing momentum was obvious enough for the MLN, since 'the people, the oligarchy, and the whole of society are getting used to us'.[105] The solution was to abandon terrorism and to declare internal war against the government at the national level. Almost all factions supported this decision, bringing unity and consensus to a larger degree by the end of 1971. Other options were, of course, to surrender under no guarantees and making no demands, or to suspend operations, dissolve the organization, and wait. Both these last options were perceived

as defeatist, leading nowhere and rendering no gains. Therefore, under growing pressures and good doses of desperation, the group shifted from urban guerrilla and terrorism to rural guerrilla warfare.[106]

The decision was certainly a quick one, and without adequate preparation, contributing undoubtedly to the rapid defeat of the movement. By early 1971 the leadership had already noted the need for a rapid shift, and late that same year the group fully embraced a new tactic. Why such a brisk decision? Apparently, the group was confronted with a problem of 'timing': the MLN did not want to wait passively for the military to consolidate their control over the state to then offer open armed resistance. They saw before them their last opportunity to gain control of the country or, at least, to establish control of key areas; thus, the – already mentioned – attempt after the 1971 elections to establish 'liberated zones'. They also thought that prompt responses were their only chance, since they had a better likelihood of surviving (and even winning) under civilian rule (the possibility of a military coup was already apparent for most political actors during 1971). In addition, the movement still believed that the 'foco' strategy had not completely failed in the cities, although terrorism had (interviews). Thus, without much of a preparatory period (early to late 1971), the MLN engaged in rural guerrilla warfare.

Why engage in a rural-based struggle which the very same movement had judged unsuitable scarcely eight years before? How was the foco theory to work in a country with no mountains or jungle? The inspiration for a plan which could make rural guerrilla activity feasible in the face of unpropitious topographic conditions lay in the urban experience of the movement. This constituted the so-called 'Tatu' plan (Tatu is a South American armadillo which lives in the ground). The plan was innovative, appeared precise, and, in theory, made sense. The intention was to attack and hide in the 'Tatuceras' (holes made in the ground or caves), until security forces had given up their search, and then strike again.[107]

Yet the 'Tatu' operation failed to consider a number of important aspects. First, impromptu rural guerrillas, mostly of urban origin, were not properly trained to confront openly the army. Second, they received little collaboration from close towns and were easily identifiable by locals as strangers. The maintenance of an underground organization in the countryside was consequently much more difficult than it had ever been in urban settings.[108] Third, communications between the 'tatuceras' and the central committee, which remained headquartered in the capital, turned out to be irregular, if at all, and a solid infrastructure was never developed. Although the plan contemplated that combat columns would act independently according to local conditions, complete decentralization turned out to be fatal.

To sum up, the extension of guerrilla warfare to the countryside marked

the dissolution of the movement. The army quickly found and destroyed hideouts in the city as well as 'tatuceras' in the rural areas undermining the group's capacity for self-reconstruction. Indeed, it took the Armed Forces less than eight months to dismantle the rural operation, to liberate the remaining hostages still kept in people's prisons, and to virtually destroy the Tupamaros' infrastructure.[109]

## Conclusions



In any given polity, economic crises and the character of state intervention can be argued as being crucial in the formation of interest groups; they also appear crucial for groups that engage in terrorism. The Tupamaros emerged and declined in a time of crisis and shifting alliances within ruling blocs that created points of opportunity around which the Tupamaros and several other groups organized. The final result of this process was the breakdown of democracy and the emergence of the Armed Forces as a dominant political actor in 1973.

Although 'isolation from the masses' – always a central concern for the movement – did occur, political seclusion did not characterize this underground group. Since 1964, and even before, the guerrillas had sought contacts with the Armed Forces, the left, trade unions, 'progressive' factions of the Blanco and Colorado parties, and with high ranking bureaucrats.[110] Moreover, in an attempt to overcome underground aloofness and to gain 'official' political representation Tupamaro guerrillas penetrated organizations that did not subscribe to a doctrine of armed struggle (very often Tupamaro cadres were also members of the 'Movimiento 26 de Marzo' or of the Socialist party). In a nutshell, they supported almost every manifestation of dissent and sought to add their voice to those of workers, the petite bourgeoisie, and even of the military. If they thought of themselves as the 'natural' leaders in case of a revolutionary offensive, they never disregarded, however, the role other organizations ought to play; in fact, they believed social change would result from a shared effort toward a common goal.

The experience of the Tupamaros offers fascinating and suggestive material to theories of collective action and relative deprivation. Although after 1955 frustration steadily increased in a closed social system where political participation and upper social mobility were the privilege of a few, the MLN and other dissident groups were not able to capitalize on growing relative deprivation. Of equal importance, the evolution of this group indicates that the use of terror in a crisis situation can lead to the ultimate destruction of a movement. Terrorism, in the case of the Tupamaros, did not render any concrete gains for a group which, at least until 1970, had aroused popular sympathy with their reputation of competence

and honesty. But the Tupamaros' experience also tells us that terrorism can be used and abandoned, and that its use may be a response to concrete contextual opportunities. Without denying the influence of other factors, it was mainly an analysis of these opportunities that convinced the MLN that terrorism should be adopted and at a later date also persuaded the group to discard it.



## NOTES

1. First-hand data on the Uruguayan Tupamaros was gathered through 13 free-formed interviews I conducted with ex-Tupamaro guerrillas and members of the Uruguayan academic community in exile from 1978 to 1979 in Venezuela, and during 1983 and 1984 in Mexico and Paris. Further information was obtained in a recent trip to Uruguay in the Summer of 1987. Needless to say, I am most indebted to all my interviewees. Data gathering in Mexico was made possible by a travel grant from the Department of Political Science at UCLA. Interviews in Venezuela were conducted during 1978 and 1979 while on a fellowship from the Center of Latin American Studies 'Romulo Gallegos' in Caracas. At the request of those I interviewed, names and specific places will remain anonymous. Although the views expressed are, of course, the author's alone, several helpful suggestions should be acknowledged. Cynthia McClintock, Guillermo O'Donnell, and David C. Rapoport made useful comments on a different paper on the role of the Tupamaros in the breakdown of Uruguayan democracy (presented at the APSA 1985 Annual Conference). Some of these suggestions persuaded me to write a paper focusing on the group itself. Bonnie Cordes devoted time and effort to critical readings of earlier drafts and editing, and David C. Rapoport provided both useful advice and enormous moral support throughout the different phases of this writing. In Mexico, I must thank Carlos Martinez Moreno, of the Universidad Autonoma de Mexico, for his encouragement, time, kindness and valuable information (Martinez Moreno, a well-known Uruguayan lawyer and academic, legally defended a large number of captured Tupamaros during the late 1960s and early 1970s).
2. The name of 'Tupamaros' was adopted after the 1780 Peruvian Indian rebellion led by Jose Gabriel Condorcanqui, who took the name Tupac-Amaru in memory of the last Inca Indian Chief fighting the Spanish. Since then, some insurgents in the area were called 'Tupamaros', particularly those struggling against Spanish domination.
3. D.C. Rapoport, 'The Politics of Atrocity', in Y. Alexander and S.M. Finger (ed.), *Terrorism: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, (New York: John Jay Press, 1977), p.47.
4. Z. Ivianski, 'The Moral Issue: Some Aspects of Individual Terror', in D.C. Rapoport and Y. Alexander (eds.) *The Morality of Terrorism* (New York: Pergamon, 1982) pp.229–57.
5. R. Rogowski, 'Rationalist Theories of Politics: A Midterm Report', *World Politics*, Vol.30, No.2 (1978), 229.
6. True, the self-justifying collective memories of a group cannot be taken as the sole source of information about the actual strategies this or that group favors. Despite obvious shortcomings, however, interviews and testimonies are useful and revealing, sometimes remaining the sole source of information on underground guerrilla and terrorist groups besides the customary – and often similarly distorted – police reports on these groups' activities.
7. Charles Tilly, in his analysis of revolutionary groups and collective action, has suggested

a similar distinction. Cf. C. Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (London: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1978), pp.10–22.

8. M. Crenshaw, 'Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches', in D.C. Rapoport (ed.), *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, special issue, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.10, No.4 (1987), 19.
9. What I called here 'structural approach' bears a strong resemblance to what M. Crenshaw has defined as an 'instrumentalist perspective' (loc. cit., pp.14–29). I retain the term 'structural', however, because I feel it conveys more strongly the influences of contexts over group behavior.
10. The question of the 'symmetry' between military and political 'apparatuses' divided the movement from very early on. Invariably, the group struggled for a conciliation between 'political action' and 'military action', 'party' and '*foco*' – which included the use of terror after 1969. In 1968 the second national convention of the MLN singled out two 'deformations' as major problems gripping the movement. One was the extreme 'leftism' of some members who believed the movement ought to respond 'spectacularly' to 'any changes in the outside environment'. The other was the 'exaggerated' concern of militants 'with the preservation of the military apparatus, as if it would be an end in itself'. A. Sendic, in his *Movimiento Obrero y Luchas Populares en la Historia Uruguaya* (Montevideo: Movimiento Independientes 26 de Marzo, 1985), discusses this polemic quite vividly (p.97). This and other MLN conventions condemned the 'infantilism, impatience, idealism (of militants) who engage in any type of action, losing sight both of the internal (of the movement) and external realities in which the movement acts' (ibid).
11. Firm adherence to a political strategy did not mean, in the case of the MLN, devotion to a particular code of ethics or ideology. Despite a pseudo-Marxist – and, very often, Liberal – language in Tupamaro documents and testimonies, the group's overall strategy resulted from a rather simplistic cost-benefit appraisal of opportunities that reflected little macro-theoretical analysis and scarce commitment to any guiding ideological principle.
12. M. Crenshaw, in her commended and needed attempt to differentiate and abridge different approaches in the literature on terrorism, runs into a similar difficulty when describing what she calls 'the instrumentalist perspective' ('Theories') Terrorist actions are explained by so many variables that encompassing theories about the use of terror become practically impossible to formulate.
13. Most authors using organizational variables to explain group behavior, whether terrorists or not, struggle between the importance of two sets of variables, namely, the internal dynamics of a group, and the environment in which it operates. In most cases, there is a recognition of the importance of both, but no conclusion follows from this awareness. For an example of this unsolved dilemma, see R.D. Crelinsten, 'The Internal Dynamics of the FLQ During the October Crisis of 1970', in D.C. Rapoport (ed.), *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, special issue, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.10, No.4 (1987), 80–82.
14. I take strategy to be rational planning to achieve short and long-term political objectives. As theories of bargaining, warmaking, game playing, and collective choice detail, I understand 'strategy' to be a function of the number of opportunities available to a group and the information the group possesses about them.
15. A common argument in the literature on the Tupamaros has been to explain the deeds of the movement by the upper-middle class origins of its leadership. See R. Arismendi, *El Uruguay en los anos setenta* (Montevideo: Pueblos Unidos, 1971); T.H. Green, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1974); M.E. Gillio, *The Tupamaro Guerrillas* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1970); E. Kaufman, *Uruguay In Transition* (New York: Transaction Books, 1979); A. Porzecanski, *Uruguay's Tupamaros: The Urban Guerrilla* (New York: Praeger, 1973), and M.S. Radu, 'Terror, Terrorism, and Insurgency in Latin America', *Orbis*, Vol.28, No.1 (1984).
16. Both implicitly and explicitly, the assumption that ideology – understood as faithful adhesion to a code of ethics or creed – is enough to fully account for group behavior, has

underlined most Latin American writing on the Tupamaros. See A.M. Araujo, *Tupamaros: des femmes de l'Uruguay* (Paris: Editions De Femmes, 1980); C. Aznarez and J. Canas, *Tupamaros: Fracaso del Che? Un Analisis Objetivo de la Actualidad Uruguaya* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Orbe, 1969); O. Costa, *Los Tupamaros*, (Mexico: Editorial Era, 1971); F. Martens, *Despues de la Derrota: Un Eslabon Debil Llamado Uruguay* (Mexico: Nueva Imagen, 1980); C. Martinez Moreno, *El Color Que El Infierno Me Escondiera* (Mexico: Nueva Imagen, 1981); A. Mercader and J. Vera, *Tupamaros: Estrategia y Accion* (Mexico: Omega, 1971), and Nunez, C., *Los Tupamaros: Vanguardia Armada en el Uruguay* (Montevideo: Provincias Unidas, 1969). In addition, see C. Wilson, *The Tupamaros, The Unmentionables* (New York: Branden Press, 1974). No doubt that ideological convictions and, better, the Tupamaro's efforts to differentiate themselves from the Communist and Socialist parties of Uruguay, explain some characteristics of the MLN's strategy. However, a rational choice perspective, I argue, allows us to explain much more.

17. M.S. Radu, 'Terror'.
18. Ibid. Still more astonishing is the contention that Latin American insurgency resembles the 'socio-political pathology of West European middle-class youth', and that violence in the outcome of 'a unique combination of social, cultural, and political traits' which would result in a sort of Third World mentality (p.27).
19. Cf. C. Sterling, *The Terror Network* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Books, 1982), and H. Romerstein, *Soviet Support for International Terrorism* (Washington: Foundation for Democratic Education, 1981).
20. C.V. Hassel, 'Terror: The Crime of the Privileged – An Examination and Prognosis', *Terrorism: An International Journal*, Vol.1, No.1 (1977), 5–6.
21. All in all, Hassel's suggestions are by far too speculative. Although it is true that paranoid types may join a terrorist group, they also have been known to join the army, clubs, or churches, because all these groups present attractive qualities to paranoid personalities. Hassel's supportive evidence speaks for itself. His suggestions are based on two bizarre examples of 'terrorists' who had been diagnosed as paranoid: A. Hitler and C. Manson. Additionally, (and he is not alone in this interpretation) Hassel wrongly interprets Mao's well-known quotation ('Every Communist must grasp the truth, political power grows out the barrel of a gun') to constitute the basis of 'terrorist philosophy'. This sentence, as it reads and in the context of Mao's text, says nothing about terror: it only argues that armed combat is the 'correct' way to achieve Communist revolutionary change.
22. J.M. Post, 'Hostilite, Conformite, Fraternite: The Group Dynamics of Terrorist Behavior', *The International Journal of Group Psychology*, Vol.36, No.2 (1986), 211.
23. See Post, loc. cit., p.214.
24. Ibid., p.220.
25. Ibid., p.221.
26. Cf. Z. Ivianski, op. cit., and G. Chaliand, *Revolution in the Third World* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), and the contributions to the volume edited by the same author, *Guerrilla Strategies* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).
27. Cf. R. Diaz, 'Pais pequeno debe ser pais abierto: analisis de la estrategia de desarrollo optima para el Uruguay', in Charles Gillespi *et al.*, *Uruguay y la democracia* (Montevideo: Banda Oriental, 1985), Vol.II, pp.29–53.
28. M.H.J. Finch, *A Political Economy of Uruguay Since 1870* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p.179.
29. With the exception of a short period of recovery from 1979 to late 1980, at the time of this writing the Uruguayan government has not yet been able to solve this problem. For a discussion of the reasons for economic stagnation in Uruguay, see M.H.J. Finch, op. cit., pp.63–161, and L. Stolovich, J.M. Rodriguez, and L. Bertola, *El Polder Economico en el Uruguay Actual* (Montevideo: CUI, 1987), pp.197–232.
30. P.B. Taylor provides a good discussion on the traditional rivalry between agrarian and urban interests in Uruguay. See P.B. Taylor, 'Interests and Institutional Dysfunction in Uruguay', *American Political Science Review*, Vol.57 (1963), 62–74.
31. For the concept of consociational democracy, see A. Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns*

*of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), p.23.

32. On popular sector mobilization in Uruguay during the pre-coup period, cf. Handelman, H. 'Labor-Industrial Conflict and the Collapse of the Uruguayan Democracy', *Journal of Latin American Studies and World Affairs*, Vol.23, No.4 (1981), and, by the same author, *Military Governments and the Movement Toward Democracy in South America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981). Cf. also F. Martens, op. cit.
33. A clear objective of the state during the Tupamaros' formative period, was to reduce the collective bargaining power of urban labor and to increase capital accumulation; these policies ostracized blue-collar workers and unemployment rose in both agriculture and industry. All sources also agree that white collar workers and the petite bourgeoisie (small and independent businessmen, merchants, and small industrialists) suffered a rapid deterioration of their economic status.
34. C.G. Gillespie, 'The Breakdown of Democracy in Uruguay: Alternative Political Models' (Washington: Wilson Center), paper No.143 (1984), p.9.
35. Why was the population not more responsive to these 'conditions'? Although this question does not constitute the central focus of this article, I attempt to offer below some sketchy answers stemming from the experiences of the MLN.
36. The lack of interest of Uruguayan Communists, for example, in the organization of rural labor really constitutes an exception in Latin America. As the experiences of Colombia, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru testify, Communist organizers have been quite successful in the countryside. In Uruguay, however, rapid urbanization and scarcely populated rural areas convinced the left to devote its efforts to organizing urban constituencies.
37. Cf. S. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), pp.72–8.
38. See J.B. Bell, *A Time of Terror: How Democratic Societies Respond to Revolutionary Violence* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p.22.
39. Cf. C. McClintock, 'Sendero Luminoso: Peru's Maoist Guerrillas', *Problems of Communism*, Sept.–Oct. (1983).
40. Cf. Lim Joo-Jock and S. Vanis, *Armed Communist Movements in Southern Asia* (New York: Gower House, 1984).
41. Uruguay has 187,000 square kilometers and, in 1963, had a population of 2,556,000. As a consequence of emigration, however, by 1980 population was believed to be 12 per cent lower than in the late 1950s. Concentration of population in Montevideo is extremely high (46.3 per cent).
42. See Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional (Tupamaros), *Tres Evasiones de Tupamaros: Operaciones Estrella, Abuso, Gallo* (Mexico: Ediciones Diogenes, 1973), p.22.
43. C. Bergquist, *Workers in Modern Latin American History: Capitalist Development and Labor Movement Formation in Chile, Argentina, Venezuela and Colombia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986).
44. Araujo, op. cit., p.95. The relations of rural labor with their urban partners in Uruguay very much resembled those described by D. Sabean in pre-1800 Europe, where leaders who seldom came from peasant ranks were sought out by the peasants to act as their spokesmen. See D. Sabean, 'Communal Basis of Pre-1800 Peasant Uprisings in Western Europe', *Comparative Politics*, Vol.8, No.3 (1976), 359.
45. A. Porzecanski, op. cit., p.5, and O. Costa, op. cit., p.62.
46. Personal conversation with D.C. Rapoport. See also the 'Introduction' to his *Inside Terrorist Organizations, Journal of Strategies Studies*, Vol.10, No.4 (1987), 6. Data on the Tupamaros have been gathered through interviews.
47. Interviews.
48. Cf. H. Romerstein, op. cit., p.21, and C. Sterling, op. cit., p.237.
49. See C. Aznarez and J. Canas, loc. cit., p.170; O. Costa, op. cit., p.232, and A.C. Porzecanski, op. cit., p.14.
50. Cf. Junta de Commandantes en Jefe, *Las Fuerzas Armadas al Pueblo Oriental*, Vols.I, II and III (Montevideo: Department of Defense, 1976). See, especially, Vol.I, pp.112–26.

51. A large number of terrorist groups have incorporated an international dimension since the last nineteenth century. For a good discussion of this dimension of terrorist activity, see D.C. Rapoport, 'The International World as Some Terrorists Have Seen It: A Look at a Century of Memoirs', in D.C. Rapoport (ed.) *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, special issue, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.10, No.4 (1987).
52. Interviews.
53. See D.C. Rapoport, 'The International World', p.46.
54. M. Crenshaw has called attention to the fact that many West European groups compared themselves to the Tupamaros and found them a source of inspiration. See M. Crenshaw, loc. cit., p.19.
55. J.B. Bell, op. cit., p.65. Both these last groups had attempted to subvert their respective governments through urban guerrilla strategies very similar to that which the MLN was to adopt.
56. German terrorists, for instance, thought of themselves as following the path of Third World revolutionaries, and launched a struggle that aimed at the liberation of the oppressed in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. As such, their ideological discourse copied that of groups in the world that they supposedly would help to liberate (see D.C. Rapoport, 'The International World', 44). As mentioned, the first German terrorist group even named itself after the Tupamaros.
57. See, especially, E. 'Che' Guevara, *Cuba: Excepcion Historica o vanguardia en la lucha anticolonialista* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1972), pp.89–93. See also, by the same author, *Guerrilla Warfare* (London: Vintage Books, 1968).
58. Partido Comunista del Uruguay, *Fundamentos y Programa de la Revolucion Uruguaya* (Montevideo: Comite Central del Partido Comunista, 1965), p.9.
59. The Tupamaros were virtually the first Uruguayan group to resort to armed struggle, although a smaller group, the Uruguayan Revolutionary Movement (MRO), embraced the same strategy by early 1963, P. Agee, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), p.339. Most urban guerrillas (of Troskytè and/or Anarchist persuasion) emerged after the MLN, or were created by dissident Tupamaros, for example, the group 'September 22'.
60. *Tricontinental*, 1/1/71, p.9, and interviews.
61. See Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional, *Actas Tupamaras*, (Mexico: Editorial Diogenes, 1979), p.31.
62. *Tricontinental*, 1/1/71/, p.8.
63. Figures on gender composition are also inaccurate, but one can affirm that the number of female members was rather high. (see A.M. Araujo, op. cit., on the role of women in the movement). We also know that, from 1969 to 1972, the percentage of females increased from 39 per cent to 77 per cent. See S. d'Oliveira, 'Uruguay and the Tupamaro Myth', *Military Review*, Vol.53, No.4 (1973), 34.
64. Much has been written about the leading role of intellectuals and middle and high-class predominance in organizations of this kind, and the MLN only confirms these findings. See, for instance, H. Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), and T.H. Green, op. cit. In addition, drawing from a sample of 18 different organizations, in 1977 Russell and Bowman also presented supportive evidence on the leading participation of the middle classes and the educated in terrorist groups. See C.A. Russell, and B.H. Bowman, 'Profile of a Terrorist', *Terrorism: An International Journal*, Vol.1, No.1 (1977), 25. The MLN only provides confirmation to these findings.
65. Cf. Araujo, op. cit., and Russell and Bowman, loc. cit.
66. Russell and Bowman, op. cit., p.23.
67. C.M. Rama, *Uruguay en crisis* (Montevideo; El Siglo Ilustrado, 1969), pp.12–35.
68. T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1970), p.24.
69. As we shall immediately see, relative deprivation arguments that 'deprivation is relevant to the disposition to collective violence to the extent that many people feel discontented about the same things', are pertinent to the case of the Tupamaros and the environment in which they operated (see Gurr, op. cit. p.29).
70. See Arteaga R. Gutierrez, 'El mercado de empleo urbano: Uruguay, 1965–1979', in Estudios y Perspectivas, Centro Editor de America Latina (ed.), *Uruguay: dictadura*

*y realidad nacional* (Mexico DF: ERESU, 1981); Handelman, op. cit.; J.L. Lanzaro, 'Elementos para el estudio sobre el desarrollo del movimiento obrero' in Estudios y Perspectivas, Centro Editor de America Latina (ed.), *Uruguay: dictadura y realidad nacional* (Mexico DF: ERESU, 1981), and Rama, op. cit.

71. The movement counted several rural leaders among its ranks, and enjoyed support among Anarchist-led blue-collar worker unions (for instance, the huge union of the nationally owned tire factory, FUNSA; interviews). Indeed, captured Tupamaros by the early 1970s included agricultural laborers, and workers in metallurgic and textile industries, the group claiming to represent an alliance between the middle class and blue-collar workers (Tricontinental, 1/1/1971, No.4, p.3).
72. See J. Davies, 'Toward a Theory of Revolution', *American Sociological Review*, 27 (1962), 6–19.
73. See Gurr, op. cit., pp.85–6.
74. Cf. Handelman, op. cit., and C. Bidegain Greisig, 'Uruguay: Objetivos y Practicas de Clase and la Huelga General: 1973', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Lovaina, Belgium, 1980.
75. Arismendi, R., op. cit., p.45.
76. See Duena and Duena, op. cit.; E. Mayans, *Tupamaros: Antologia Documental* (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Communicacion, 1971); and C. Suarez and R. Anaya, *Los Tupamaros* (Mexico: Extemporaneos, 1971).
77. The use of terror in Uruguay no doubt contributed to the rapid deterioration of political consensus. In the political history of Uruguay, with the exception of isolated events in the wars of independence and guerrilla groups in the late nineteenth century that used terror in the countryside, terrorism was unknown.
78. Handelman, op. cit.
79. Cf. Martinez Moreno, loc. cit., pp.203–13.
80. I use here the concept of 'perceived level of threat' in the same fashion as O'Donnell does in his 'Tensions in the Bureaucratic Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy', in David Collier (ed.), *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p.292. For a critique of this concept see Remer, K.L. and G.W. Merkl, 'Bureaucratic Authoritarianism Revisited'. *Latin American Research Review*, Vol.17, No.3 (1982). For an analysis on the effect of perceived levels of threat created by the guerrillas on governmental coalitions in Uruguay during the pre-coup period, see F. Lopez-Alves, 'Urban Guerrillas and the Rise of Bureaucratic Authoritarianism in Uruguay: 1957–1973', paper presented at the 1985 Annual Conference of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans.
81. From 1969 to early 1972 the MLN turned over to the military more than 10 documents (some also to the press and members of parliament) that incriminated public officials and members of the financial sector in economic fraud, evasion of taxes, and embezzlement. These revelations had (as the MLN expected) an enormous impact on military officers, above all on those belonging to the short-lived, more 'progressive' Peruvian-like faction (as opposed to the conservative, pro-Brazilian 'Gorilas'). The fact that several officers did collaborate with the Tupamaros created tensions within the army and strict measures were taken to control infiltration. This also strengthened the influence of pro-coup factions that had long found receptive ears within the officer corps (interview with Carlos Martinez Moreno, Mexico, 1984).
82. See Agee, op. cit., pp.405 and 432; see as well as Finch, op. cit., p.255.
83. Officers of the rank of colonel and above gathered secretly and fairly regularly throughout the pre-coup period. In one of these meetings during late 1968 officers representing a sizeable part of the Armed Forces high command agreed on taking control of the state and eliminating (first) the guerrillas and (later) other sources of opposition. This certainly weakens Luis Gonzalez's argument that the Uruguayan Armed Forces are somehow sui generis because of the influence of a strong legal and civilian tradition on its officer corps, which results in a 'legal-civilian preoccupation'. See L. Gonzalez, 'Uruguay, 1980–1981: An Unexpected Opening', *Latin American Research Review*, Vol.28, No.3 (1983), 65–6. However strong this influence might have been, it certainly

did not prevent officers from engaging in conspiracy against civilian governments and finally taking over the state.

84. Lopez-Alves, loc. cit., pp.23–25.

85. If we measure strength by numerical membership, it becomes troublesome to provide a concrete answer because estimates are only approximate. More often than not, as is common in organizations of this sort, even the Tupamaros themselves were unaware of exact figures (interviews). Police reports vary from about 100 members in early 1963, to 12–15,000 active Tupamaros in 1968 (*Latin America*, 2 June 1972, No.22, p.175). The MLN claimed up to 20,000 active members in 1970 in a country with a population of 2,556,000, and still other sources estimated 500 active members and 5,000 people supplying shelter and support by 1969 (R. Moss, 'Urban Guerrillas in Latin America', *Conflict Studies*, No.8 (Oct. 1970), p.13, and, by the same author, 'Uruguay: Terrorism versus Democracy', *Conflict Studies*, No.14 (Aug. 1971). We know that membership increased rapidly and substantially until 1971, the group's infrastructure being good enough to provide training to most members and prevent major infiltration. After that year, mainly as a result of more effective repressive measures on the part of the army, however, infiltration became endemic, the infrastructure collapsed, and membership rapidly declined (interview with Carlos Martinez Moreno, Mexico 1984; see also Costa, loc. cit. On infiltration at the level of the Tupamaros' executive committee and the role of ex-Tupamaro Nelson Bardesio in the collapse of the MLN, see NACLA *Latin American & Empire Report*, Vol.6, No.6 (July–August 1972).

86. The movement had even designed a government program to be put in practice after the group's seizure of political power (*Tricontinental*, No.62, May 1972, and FBIS, 24 March 1971).

87. Interviews.

88. MLN leaders contrast strikingly with Hannah Arendt's description of European revolutionaries as 'professional revolutionists', theoreticians that spent their lives not in revolutionary agitation but in 'the famous libraries of London or Paris, or in the coffee houses of Vienna and Zurich' (Arendt, op. cit., p.263).

89. Costa, op. cit., pp.175–7.

90. See D.C. Rapoport, 'Thoughts on the History of Terrorism', paper presented at Stanford University (4–5 Feb. 1988).

91. M. Crenshaw, 'The Causes of Terrorism', *Comparative Politics*, Vol.13, No.4 (1981), 396.

92. The testimony of most victims, ex-guerrillas, and police reports coincide in that prisoners in 'peoples' prisons' were treated decently, no physical torture was used to extract information, and good medical attention was provided when needed. They were, however, submitted to long questioning. Sessions were taped, and most of the results released to the media.

93. Interviews.

94. The Tupamaros first kidnapped Ulises Pereyra Reverbel, head of the state telephone and electricity corporation and not by chance a close friend of President Jorge Pacheco Areco (1967–71); they also seized immediately afterwards a leading banker to show their sympathy with striking bank workers.

95. In Latin America, for instance, similar tactics had previously been used during the early 1960s by the Venezuelan group 'Red Flag', although with much less competence and success.

96. During 1970, in a chain-reaction series of operations, the Tupamaros kidnapped Mitrione, Aloisio Mares Dias Gomide, Brazilian Consul in Uruguay, and Claude Fly, US agricultural adviser. They demanded the release of captured Tupamaros as ransom. In response to the government's refusal to negotiate, they killed Mitrione on 10 August. Dias Gomide and Claude Fly were released during 1971. They also attempted to seize Michael Gordon Jones, second Secretary of the US embassy in Montevideo, and Natham Rosenfeld, the cultural attache. In 1971, the Tupamaros kidnapped Geoffrey M.S. Jackson, British Ambassador to Uruguay, and demanded the freedom of 150 political prisoners. Jackson was held in a 'people's prison' for eight months; he was released due both to his heart condition and the successful flight of 106

prisoners from jail, which left very few prisoners to bargain for. Jorge Berembau, an Argentine industrialist, was also kidnapped by the MLN on 12 July 1971. The group asked that $300,000 be given to three textile unions to compensate for a recent factory closing; Berembau was released on 26 November 1971.

97. See *Punto Final* (4/13/1971).
98. Interview with guerrilla leader 'Urbano', *Gramma* (8/8/1970).
99. Internal rifts were exacerbated by the fact that when the decision to kill the hostage was taken, Raul Sendic and other founders of the organization (the elders, 'los viejos', as they were called), were being held in prison. This contributed to disorientation, younger leaders had to take charge, and the executive committee found itself divided as to what strategy to follow in the hostage crisis. Yet the decision to kill the hostage gained majority support; it was assumed that, precisely because most of the movement's leadership was in prison, they had to show evidence of determination and strength.
100. d'Oliveira, loc. cit., p.30; interviews.
101. Crenshaw, 'The Causes of Terrorism', loc. cit., p.397.
102. On Narodnaya Volya, see F. Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Popular and Social Movements in Nineteen Century Russia* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1960), especially pp.645–7.
103. Declarations of liberated Tupamaros support this point, making apparent the relation between strategy, tactics, and political environment. Freed urban guerrillas (March 1985) have acknowledged that terrorist tactics adopted during the 1960s and 1970s did not render the desired results. Strong self-criticism on the part of the Tupamaros seems to have changed the Tupamaros' attitude toward parliamentary government and the creation of a revolutionary political party rather than an armed militia (cf. *Mate Amargo,* Montevideo, 2/3/86; and *The New York Times*, 1/5/86 and 1/6/86). Tupamaro leaders are at present seeking alliances with sectors of the Uruguayan leftist coalition (Broad Front) and 'progressive' groups of the ruling Colorado and Blanco parties (see interview with Tupamaro leader Raul Sendic, *Busqueda,* Montevideo, 2/19/1986). Again, the use of terrorism is completely out of the question.
104. Data gathered in interviews.
105. *Marcha,* Montevideo, No.1591 (5/5/1972).
106. Such change occurred in late 1971. Breaking the truce they had kept during the November 1971 elections, the so-called 'Leandro Gomez' column occupied the military airport and the local radio and police stations of the city of Paysandu, north-west of Montevideo (see Map). This was known as 'The Proclamation of Paysandu', and resulted in the first step of the Tupamaros' last offensive (*Tricontinental,* No.73, 1/4/1972). The group assumed that it would be more difficult for the army to effectively control the whole country rather than the small urban area of Montevideo due to lack of training, logistics, and communications (*Punto Final*, 5/9/1972, No.157). Guerrillas tried to isolate small geographic areas in the hope of creating frictions within the army's high command, and to buy time to reorganize and grow. In retrospect, there is no doubt that the MLN underestimated the army; it was unaware – or at least made an incorrect analysis – of the Uruguayan Officer School system and special training received under the Military Assistance Program, both in Uruguay and at US schools.
107. Interviews. The 'Tatuceras' were to be located at no more than 20 or 25 kilometers from towns and targets. They had to be close to roads and water supplies, and the insurgents were to receive support from nearby towns. The plan also included the creation of medical facilities and farms to supply refuge and foodstuff for guerrillas in areas far away from urban centers, for example, the 'Espartaco' farm, created in 1970.
108. Small towns did not provide the expected recruitment, and impoverished rural laborers (unlike in the past) were not receptive to revolutionary preaching; it had been one thing to unionize during the late 1960s, but it was another to find recruits for guerrilla warfare. Small-town middle-class elements, for their part, proved much less responsive than their counterparts in the capital during the turbulent 1960s. In addition, peons (the largest rural working force in Uruguay) in large 'estancias' (haciendas) were more than reluctant to cooperate with urban middle-class elements. The Tupamaros' (and

CP's) experiences in this regard support what most findings on peasant and rural labor insurrection have suggested, that is, that large latifundia worked by serfs or wage laborers tend to be inimical to political organization. Cf. T. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp.116–20.

109. Cf. *Latin America* (9/1/1972).

110. Interviews; on contacts with unions see especially Suarez and Anaya, *op. cit.*, p.39.