

One man's campaign for peace

By JON PEIRCE

WEARINESS — a sense of overwhelming weariness — is my first but strong impression of Montreal peace activist Dimitrios Roussopoulos when I meet him just before his talk in Queen's University's John Deutsch Centre. And his seems more than any purely physical fatigue, more than something borne of too many early flights and dank hotel rooms (though in fact he has just returned from a nine-month tour of Europe, where he's been researching the new peace movement.)

I'm particularly intrigued by the patient, wan, long-suffering smile with which he greets me. I suspect already that here is a much more complex person than one usually meets on the North American Left, a man who, above all, seems to have none of the buoyancy normally found in even the most battle-scarred North American activists.

Almost without being noticed by the crowd of 50, this medium-sized, middle-aged man, casually but nattily attired in dark blue suit and open-necked light blue shirt, comes to the podium and begins. With a few minor changes in content and context, he could be addressing a Young Liberal club, so little is there of the activist about him at first. A long pat on the back for Queen's, always an important centre for disarmament work and, in fact, the site of the first Canadian university conference on military alliances. Not a word is out of place, nary a pause too long or too short. Textbook after-dinner speaking style.

The tone deepens. Gradually I become aware of a much greater intensity. I feel we're about to be hit with massive evidence of some sort. Oddly enough, it's just at this point that I realize the man is speaking totally without notes.

Still deliberate in manner, Roussopoulos lays it on the line. His tour of Europe has convinced him that nuclear war in our time is overwhelmingly likely, the chance of preventing it "razor-thin." (As he says this, he sounds curiously unapocalyptic.) If there's any hope at all, it's in the new European peace movement, whose salient features he then proceeds to list as methodically as a general would review his troops.

The new movement is massive; marches of a million are common. It's also far more sophisticated than earlier peace movements, though it has absorbed these as well as other social-change movements such as ecology and feminism. Its organizers are professionals; it uses modern computer technology and puts out slick mass-circulation peace magazines. No more 'mimeos' in the basement.



Dimitrios Roussopoulos: the chance of preventing nuclear war is "razor-thin"

Best of all, unlike earlier peace movements, the new European one isn't pro-Moscow. It criticizes the U.S. and Soviets equally for their role in the arms build-up. This is a point he will reiterate in discussing both the European and the Canadian movements.

Somehow he gets on to his own background in the movement. As a child in post-war Montreal, he was appalled when he saw newsreels of civilians killed during bombing raids and film clips of people emerging from concentration camps. Later, as a graduate student, he took part in mass marches, in addition to organizing the first student disarmament campaign in Canada in Montreal, in 1959, in protest against the Diefenbaker government's decision to deploy BOMARC missiles. For the one time this evening, he emphasizes the emotional aspect of his work.

"What has sustained me over the years has been a fundamental, existential, emotional experience that gave me faith in ordinary people's ability to turn things around. There's a real high about walking with one million people," he says. Not, perhaps, surprising words. But the tone is another matter. In describing his "high," he sounds as distanced as a psychology professor discussing the extra-curricular behavior of street people.

His formal talk over, Roussopoulos spends a good hour fielding questions like a master, still without notes. He has the professor's knack of turning a question into the occasion for a mini-essay, a self-contained discourse as carefully crafted as many published articles. And his knowledge of the peace movement is well-nigh photographic.

But for all his knowledge and rhetorical skill, there's something curiously naive and insular about the man. Consider his insistence that the

book he's just edited, *Our Generation Against Nuclear War*, (published by Black Rose) is suited to general readers as well as activists. The book is 476 pages long, is made up mostly of very scholarly articles, and offers little in the way of editorial guidance. What can this say for Roussopoulos' knowledge of general readers?

When our interview begins (much too late) the experience is like doing root canal work on an aging camel. Bits and pieces do emerge, but only after protracted digging. I find myself at a loss to understand his resistance.

He does say that at university he studied philosophy ("to understand 'why'") and then politics and economics ("to understand 'how'"). Later he taught at a Vermont college for several years. In the early '60s, he helped found *Our Generation Against Nuclear War*, a quarterly devoted to peace research which has continued to this day; its current circulation is 2,500.

All in all, in both intellectual and personal style, he seems more of a 19th- than a 20th-century activist. And there's something endearingly nostalgic, too, about his fondness for intra-movement polemic — the subject that engages him most. It keeps him and our whole Grad House table going until 1 a.m. If only one didn't have to sleep.

Abruptly he rises; he has a 7 a.m. plane to catch next day. And now, at parting, the same sad, wan smile I saw before. "Write a good story," he urges, almost pathetically it seems, and is off. This time the image is of Adlai urging his troops to be a loyal opposition after the crushing 1952 defeat by Ike. □

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Peronist persuasion

Perón: A Biography
by Joseph Page
Random House, \$33.00

Reviewed by W. GEORGE LOVELL

TO ITS OWN citizens as well as to the rest of the world, Argentina has long defied satisfactory comprehension. The history of the country, far more than that of any other Latin American nation, is one in which mystique prevails over rational explanation. From revolutionary birth in the early 19th century to the disastrous confrontation with Britain in the South Atlantic last year, Argentina has confounded even the most experienced observers.

Why has a nation with so much potential faltered so persistently? How is it possible for a country with such bountiful natural and human resources to lurch without direction from crisis to crisis? What makes it so difficult, to use the words of the Argentine thinker Domingo Sarmiento, for an educated people to distinguish between civilization and barbarism? It is almost as if the puzzling complex of land and people was not in fact, real, but rather a bizarre and tragic invention of Argentina's master storyteller, Jorge Luis Borges. Anything that serves to make Argentina less enigmatic must therefore be considered a welcome and significant contribution. Joseph Page's *Perón* is precisely that.

A professor at the Georgetown University Law Centre, Page has written a definitive study of the life and times of Juan Domingo Perón, a figure without equal in 20th-century Argentina, one whose presence — nine years after his death — still looms over the nation's destiny.

Page's book traces, often in dizzying detail, Perón's rise to power in 1946, his fall from grace in 1955, and his dramatic political resurrection (after 18 years in exile) in 1973. That Page has produced such an elaborate and comprehensive biography is a feat in itself, not least because Perón, besides himself being an inveterate liar, usually inspired either love or hate among his contemporaries, both of which are seldom reliable bases on which to record for posterity.

With the available historical documentation being generally partisan, vitriolic, or non-existent Page has wisely chosen to interpret evidence rather than passively be "informed" by "the facts." His extensive reading (the bibliography and notes total more than 70 pages) has been supplemented by equally extensive interviewing and exhaustive archival research. His sources have been subjected to rigorous procedures involving crosschecking, corroboration, and multiple confirmation. By so doing, Page has produced a balanced and objective work, one which successfully combines serious academic scholarship with the desire to reach a wide public audience.

Page's work reveals Perón as a master politician in the classic Latin American *caudillo* mould, although it must be recognized that as a "strongman" Perón was a good deal more gifted and devious than most. His meteoric ascendancy had much to do with his Mephisto-like ability to mean all things to all men and women. As an architect of coalitions there was none better. Like Benito Mussolini, for whom he expressed great admiration, Perón knew how to play to the crowds and, more importantly, how to get away with promising much and delivering little.

Upon gaining presidential office in 1946, however, Perón sabotaged rather than consolidated his position by failing to draw on the counsel of respected intellectuals and policy-makers. Corruption and incompetence led to his ouster in 1955, but such was Perón's grip on the political psychology of Argentina that he returned triumphant from exile in Spain in 1973, to govern briefly before his death one year later, at the age of 78.

A notable feature of Page's book is the way in which the glitter and hype surrounding Perón's second wife, the legendary Evita, is put quietly into perspective. Recently the subject of a



Left to right: Evita, Juan Peron and Isabel on a poster in Argentina in 1976

TV mini-series and a rock opera, Eva María Duarte has assumed a status rivaling (and perhaps even surpassing) that enjoyed by Perón himself.

While Evita was most certainly, by any standards, a remarkable woman, Page makes it quite clear that, like her fellow Argentines, she was manipulated and used mercilessly by her husband. Beholden and subservient, Evita was simply more engaging and more reliable than anyone else in pro-

moting the will of Perón. Champions of feminism and disciples of the chic left had better think twice about employing Evita as an appropriate iron for their cause. Two examples from her autobiography should help deflate the myth: "We women were born to make homes, not for the street" . . . "no woman's movement will be glorious and lasting in the world if it does not give itself to the cause of a man."

Though not as colorful or renowned, Perón's third wife, Isabel, is no less daunting a figure than Evita. Isabel succeeded Perón as president of Argentina when he died in 1974, and for two years stood negligently by as chaos replaced order throughout the country, thus paving the way for a brutal military takeover in March, 1978.

Argentina has yet to recover from the aftermath of the 1976 coup, during which an estimated 6,000 to 10,000 people "disappeared" in the name of anti-terrorism. Fresher still is the humiliation of defeat in the Falklands/Malvinas war of 1982. It would be encouraging to think that the outcome of last month's elections, in which the Peronist candidate was soundly defeated, heralds the beginning of a New Argentina. Whether or not president-elect Raul Alfonsín succeeds in the monumental task confronting him will depend very much on how carefully he deals with the Argentine military and on how adept he is at laying the ghost of Juan Domingo Perón finally to rest. □

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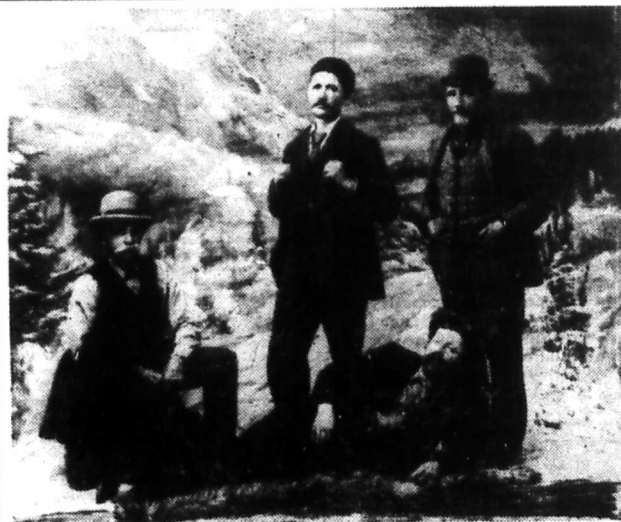
For self, for gold

The Klondike Quest:
A Photographic Essay, 1897-1899
by Pierre Berton
McClelland & Stewart, \$50.00

Reviewed by WILLIAM C. JAMES

IT WOULD BE easy to take a few gratuitous cheap shots at this lavish book. It would be easy to insinuate that Berton, like the provisioners and packers, hookers and hostlemen of the Klondike, has found ways to reap a fortune without grubbing in the hills and creeks for gold. Indeed, one might suspect that the prolific and enterprising Berton has found a new way to mine the motherlode of the Klondike without leaving his armchair. Furthermore, it would be easy to find a parallel here to the inflated prices which Klondike fever produced, when a two-bit shave and haircut cost \$1.25 and a nickel glass of lemonade was a quarter. For, in 1965 the first paperback edition of Berton's best-selling *Klondike* cost 95 cents, while this new "photographic essay" sells for \$50.00.

The reality is that the splendid and unique photographs make this a brand-new book of very high quality, deserving to be reckoned among the half-dozen most significant photographic books ever published in this country. It cannot be dismissed as a simple repeat of what the author has already done elsewhere. Nor should it be dismissed as a crassly commercial rip-off (Berton's \$12.00 little essay of last fall, *Why We Act Like Canadians*, is more susceptible to that charge).



1897: adventurers posing in studios before heading north to the Klondike

In appearance and quality, this is an expensive book. Berton and his assistant, Barbara Sears, did careful prospecting in numerous libraries and archives, especially at the University of Washington, to unearth photographic nuggets deserving of such a beautiful presentation.

Great changes took place in the lives of those who went to the Klondike when the gold rush was at its height. Berton's thesis is that the Klondike quest was a microcosmic approximation of life, mirroring in its various stages "the naivete of childhood, the enthusiasm of youth, the disillusionment of middle age, and the wisdom of maturity." It was, he claims, as much a quest for self as for gold. Close-ups of faces reveal these

transformations, from the cheerful innocence of the studio portraits taken at the beginning, through the weariness and exhaustion at the Chilkoot pass, to the final endurance seen in the expressions of the survivors who got to Dawson.

Words and pictures, always difficult to combine, are put together admirably well here. Too often it seems that the extent to which a publication can be taken seriously is in inverse proportion to the number of photographs in it. Still, there are a few problems. The copyright page has a list of "picture credits," useful if you want to know that photographs from McGill University are on pages 21, 150, and 151, but of virtually no help if you want to know the source

of a particular photograph you happen to be examining on a given page.

Even worse, there is no attribution whatsoever to individual photographers (though the signatures of E.A. Hegg and Asahel Curtis will be found in the corners of many of the photographs printed here). The efforts of those who lugged their equipment to the Klondike to make this visual record deserve to be better honored.

A few inaccuracies suggest that the busy Berton may have looked only superficially at some of the photographs and source material. Whereas he states that a photograph of mounds of supplies at the Chilkoot summit is "almost devoid of human presence," close inspection reveals dozens of people among the heaps of sacks and boxes. Arizona Charlie, who in a shooting exhibition described in the earlier book, *Klondike*, merely "nicked" his wife's thumb, here has shot it clean off. Has new information about this incident come to Berton's attention, or does such historical accuracy not matter in a mere "photographic essay?"

Perhaps we need a war or a depression or a gold rush to launch thousands on the kind of transforming quest Berton documents here — some experience to transmit "the sure knowledge that nothing worthwhile in this world is easily gained." In an age when many young people's notion of a journey of exploration is comprised by an acid trip, and whose greatest challenge comes from wind-surfing, we need something like what Berton terms "the hard university of the trail and the finishing school of the goldfields." □

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