



Spectacular murders

POLITICAL MURDER is always justified by some appalling injustice, a cruel outrage, an insupportable grievance, which demands bloody revenge. The biblical calculus of *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth* is employed in atavistic mimicry of a blood feud in which the family of a murdered person seeks vengeance on the murderer or the murderer's family. Politically, entire clans, tribes, bodies of believers, races, ethnicities, classes, sub-classes, occupations, professions, parties, sects and groupuscule are, of course, always and everywhere *all in the family* when it comes to the necessity of murder. *An injury to one is an injury to all.*

Workers robbed by the bosses, brutalised by cops and company goons, have every right to murder policemen in bomb attacks and shoot-outs. President McKinley, Tsar Alexander II, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his missus were, after all, all entirely "legitimate targets" as Emma Goldman or the *Cronaca Sovversiva* might have argued. Irishmen, suffering the oppression of foreign rule for seven centuries have every right to blow up bus stations and murder passers-by. The killing of a few French teenagers in the cafes of Algiers is entirely understandable given the savagery of the *Pieds-Noirs*, their police, their torturers, and their army. Who could blame the gunmen for the murders carried out by Euskadi Ta Askatasuna given what the dictatorship of Francisco

Franco did to the Basques? It's true it was a bit rough to shoot poor Miguel Ángel Blanco in the head, but blowing up Franco's pal, Carrero Blanco, was an excellent *coup de théâtre* especially when we consider his resolutely fascist past and his promotion of *Opus Dei*.

It has never been difficult to defend the actions of these murderers. The scale of the scores that they sought to settle was so enormous that it would be difficult to conceive of an end to the slaughter. Perhaps this is why the killing has gone on and on in waves of terror inspired by anarchists, nationalists, and Marxist-Leninists, who have resolutely ignored Lenin's injunctions against assassinations and terror attacks – he, after all, always regarded terror as the proper occupation of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the *Cheka*, and the proletarian state. It was certainly not the business of isolated deracinated individuals like Andreas Baader and the Red Army Faction.

Still, despite, it being abundantly clear that if Lenin had been alive he would have heartily disapproved of the Marxist-Leninists of the Red Army Faction, the group's militants felt that they had every right to shoot chauffeurs, border guards and policemen at will. Who could doubt that these lackeys, these flunkies of the imperialist bourgeoisie, were legitimate targets in the war to right all wrongs? At any rate, they were merely collateral damage in the vitally necessary process of murdering state prosecutors and bankers. Who could doubt that these bigwigs deserved annihilation? Hans-Martin Schleyer, the West German employers' leader, had also been, for example, an *Untersturmführer* of the SS and a leading player in the occupation of Czechoslovakia in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. He probably got what he deserved.

So, although it is often difficult to defend the actions of this or that terrorist group, to debate the legitimacy of this or that murder, overall it is always possible to believe that the killing sprees embarked upon by highly committed men and women, who are evidently prepared to die in their pursuit of justice *by blood feud*,

are entirely justified, not least because their crimes pale into insignificance when weighed in the balance against those of the *oppressor*.

This is why it is so easy among socialists, communists, anarchists, and among the left more broadly, to find apologists for terror. The most moderate do not hesitate to “explain” the reasons for terror, while not, *of course*, “justifying” it. They even resort to *empathy* in their defence of sporadic killings. “How would you feel if your country was occupied by a foreign army?” “If I was a Palestinian, I might become a bomber, I too might engage in *martyrdom operations*.” This sort of conjecture sanctifies the slaughter of innocents, turning it into a blood sacrifice in which the blood of the martyr is shed in expiation of the blood of the passengers on the bus or the passers-by in the street. Who can entirely condemn those prepared to die in the fight against oppression?

This partly explains why so many people who are ostensibly committed to socialist, rationalist and materialist political doctrines, are prepared to endorse something as old fashioned, something so positively medieval as vendetta. By imagining the blood feud as a reasoned political response to modern political problems, they endorse murder in pursuit of the spectacle of revenge. They, like Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof, are dazzled by the glamour of martyrdom operations.

It is in these circumstances that assertions replace arguments. The Muslims are oppressed because they are Muslims. Muslims are the victims of a global campaign against them. This is why wholesale murders carried out by the militants of Al-Qaeda or a host of other ill-defined and hazily understood insurgent groups are “entirely understandable” (if not always entirely defensible). The spectacle of resistance to the evil designs of the oppressor is difficult to resist. Let us forget that the case for believing that there is a “War against the *Ulema*” has not been made convincingly by anyone. When all is said and done, a picture is worth a thousand words,

and the pictures of distraught five-star tourists in Mumbai, the child of a dead rabbi, the bullet riddled bodies of businessmen, are worth every penny. The spectacle of resistance is what the murderers want – they surely know that capitalism and world imperialism will not rock on their foundations – but the spectacle will play well in the virtual world of virtual resistance to a virtual system for its crimes against a virtual community.

When the World Trade Centre collapsed, when an entire wing of the Pentagon was reduced to a bloody shambles, capitalism did not miss a step. Despite the loss of billions of dollars in office space in Lower Manhattan the stock exchanges were all back online within a week. In London in July 2005, ably assisted by the British government's *Financial Sector Continuity*, the banks and dealing rooms within the Square Mile recovered within a day from the killing and maiming of Tube and bus passengers.

Despite Ayman al Zawahiri's best efforts in claiming the world financial crisis for Al-Qaeda everybody knows that capitalism's "internal contradictions" are much more lethal than any Islamist spectacle dreamed up by heaven-bound thrill seekers. Mumbai, is a vast city, neither it nor India can be brought to their knees, by those intent upon organizing yet another photo opportunity for the world's cameras.