

REVIEW ARTICLE

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TERROR: MOTIFS AND MOTIVATIONS. PETER MERKL (ed.)
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TERRORISM AND THE LIBERAL STATE. PAUL WILKINSON. [London: Macmillan, Second
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EXCELLENT social science research and writing on contemporary political violence are rare. These two books, with the exception of some good essays in the generally better Merkl collection, confirm this harsh judgment. The obstacles to high quality research in this field are legion. The contamination of unreliable sources, official or unofficial, and the presence of maximum feasible moral controversy, dog every chronicler, let alone analyst, of political violence. However, comparable obstacles have not prevented high quality scholarship in cognate fields, such as the study of crime or civil disobedience. But much of Wilkinson's book, albeit revised, extended and updated, is unfortunately all too typical of the political violence literature: it manages to combine factual inaccuracy, armchair psychology, and loose moralising reflection in a way which does little for the professional reputation of social science.

Let us start with factual inaccuracy. Chapter 10 of Wilkinson's book *Countering Incipient Civil War* is mostly a review of British security policy in Northern Ireland. If Wilkinson's inaccuracies and errors of judgment in this chapter are representative of his research on terrorism and security policy outside of the U.K. then the author will have damaged his reputation as an expert on terrorism. He begins by describing the conflict in Northern Ireland, uncontroversially, as an incipient or repressed civil war. One might quibble with this judgment in light of the fact that far fewer people died in the Irish Civil War of 1922-23 than have died in Northern Ireland since 1969, but civil wars are only described as such when they are terminated or "go on sabbatical". However, what is far more critical is Wilkinson's amazingly inaccurate interpretation of the events preceding and succeeding the introduction of internment in Northern Ireland. He states, categorically, that internment was introduced in 1972, although he does not specify the month or day. Internment, was in fact introduced on the 9th August, 1971. It seems that this error on Wilkinson's part is not a trivial or a typographical mistake both because he repeats it twice on the same page¹ and more significantly because he builds a theory around his erroneous dating: "When one looks at the escalation of the terrorism in Northern Ireland in 1972, with 467 killed, it is easier to understand why the British government was fully prepared to support a determined crack-down on the terrorists by the Army, combined with the use of internment, introduced in 1972."² There was indeed an escalation of political violence in Northern Ireland in 1972. It is perhaps a matter of detail whether 474 rather than

Appropriately

¹ Wilkinson, 1986, p. 161.

² *Ibid.*

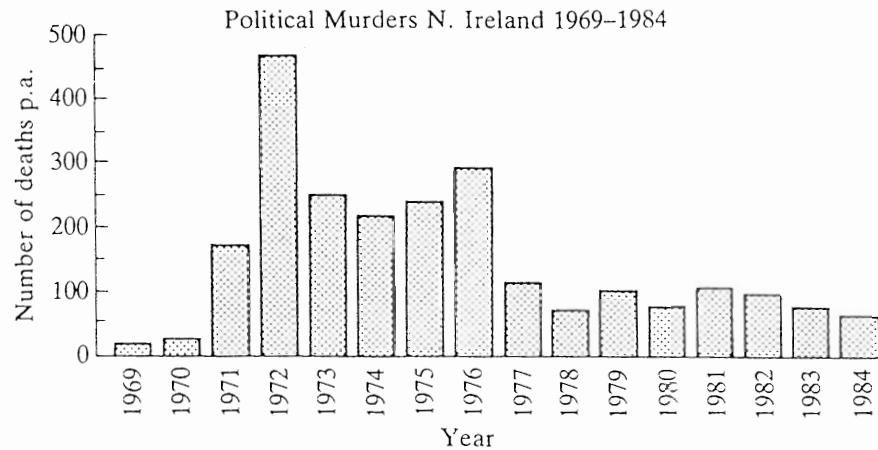


Figure 1

467 people were murdered that year.³ But what is not a detail is Wilkinson's interpretation of the introduction of internment which is critically dependent upon his false belief that internment was introduced in 1972. In 1971 the total number of deaths due to political violence was 173,⁴ and in 1972 the total was 474. In other words the number of deaths almost tripled in the year *after* the introduction of internment, and not, as Wilkinson's interpretation suggests, *as or before* it was introduced.⁵ This mistake is an example of his propensity to engage in wishful thinking: he wants to believe that British security policy has been competent, and that "no other army in the world could have performed the internal security role in Northern Ireland with such humanity, restraint and effectiveness".⁶ He is tempted to write history as he thinks it ought to have occurred. The facts, as illustrated in the graphic below, are that the death toll in Northern Ireland was at its highest (always over 150 deaths p.a.) between 1971 and 1976, *i.e.* the period in which internment was in force for most of the

³ Wilkinson is relying on figures from the R.U.C. Press Office which differ from other calculations such as those found in the *New Ireland Forum*, *The Costs of Violence Arising from the Northern Ireland Crisis Since 1969*. The breakdown of those killed in 1972 was: 166 Catholic civilians, 65 I.R.A. *et al.*, 74 Protestant civilians, 10 U.V.F. *et al.*, 107 British soldiers, 42 local security forces (mainly R.U.C. constables) and 10 others. As Dillon and Lehane (1973, *Political Murder in Northern Ireland*, Penguin) and K. Boyle and T. Hadden (1985, *Ireland: a Positive Proposal*, Penguin) confirm, many more Catholics were killed than Protestants in the early phases of political violence in the 1970s, both absolutely and relatively, and yet internment was mostly targeted at suspected Republicans and the I.R.A.

⁴ *New Ireland Forum*, *ibid.*

⁵ In the first edition of his book Wilkinson (1977, p. 156) argued that "the abandonment of internment was ... an act of incredible folly, a self-inflicted wound on the part of the civil authorities. It is an affront that men and women known by the police, the Army, and the community at large to be terrorist leaders and assassins are allowed to walk the streets in broad daylight". This passage, to my knowledge, has been deleted from the second edition, although it casts interesting light on the origins of Wilkinson's wishful thinking about the "success" of internment in 1972-73. In the second edition Wilkinson indicates, without suggesting that he ever held a contrary opinion, that he has been persuaded by Army sources that internment is, perhaps, too crude a weapon—"it ... does not help forward the business of the detection and conviction of terrorists ... is a useful propaganda weapon for the terrorist ... and the detention centres ... become 'training centres' for the terrorists—(1986, p. 169). Perhaps in a third edition some ten years hence Wilkinson will think the same about the emergency legislation, prison management and other features of British security policy between 1972 and 1985.

⁶ Wilkinson, 1986, p. 159.

time (August 1971–December 1975), and since the abandonment of internment the death toll has been much lower (always less than 115 deaths p.a.) except in 1976, the year immediately after its phasing out. These facts are of course open to multiple explanations. One explanation, which Wilkinson might be expected to favour, is that the fall in the death toll, after internment was abandoned, confirms that the policy had been successful. But a contrary interpretation is also possible: internment acted as both as a catalyst and cause of political violence. And finally, it is possible that the aggregate level of violence was causally independent of the existence or non-existence of internment. Such elementary social science reasoning is sadly absent from Wilkinson's writing—in which the wish is too often parent to the thought.

Wilkinson should have at least posed *the* important analytical question about the consequences of British security policy: of internment, the introduction of emergency legislation, and the operation of Northern Ireland's prisons. The important question is: "Have the *unintended* consequences of British security policy facilitated the Provisional I.R.A. in its objective of building a significant political base amongst the Nationalist bloc in Northern Ireland?" Many analysts in Britain, Ireland, Northern Ireland and North America have answered "yes" to this question. They are not fellow-travellers, nor anti-British, nor in possession of unground axes. Their opposition to terrorism is in no sense compromised by their positive answer to this question. Wilkinson does not address it.

Instead he is content to make a series of unsubstantiated assertions about the effectiveness of British security policy. They are unsubstantiated because he rarely cites the sources for either his factual statements or his opinions.⁷ He is *bullish* about the PTA's effectiveness. He tells us, *inter alia* that one positive benefit from the proscription of the I.R.A is that it deprives the terrorists of the opportunity to march, demonstrate and provoke affrays with rival groups, that the power to exclude terrorists from entry is of proven value, that the powers given to the port police have proven invaluable and yielded much invaluable information,⁸ and that the powers of arrest and detention have been the most useful of all the provisions. No contrary evidence or arguments are seriously considered.⁹ He is equally optimistic about the "supergrass system" (*i.e.* the use of the evidence of paid convicted informants as the sole basis for convicting others of terrorist offences). Wilkinson praises these various

⁷ In the Preface he warns the reader that he has tried to keep "cross-references and academic apparatus to an unobtrusive minimum". In the case of chapter 10 which mostly deals with Northern Ireland the unobtrusive academic apparatus amounts to six references: one citation from a Brigadier writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, one citation of the book by Dillon and Lehane mentioned above in footnote 4, one citation from the *Economist*, one citation from the explanatory memorandum to the Prevention of Terrorism Act, one letter to the *Times* from Conor Cruise O'Brien, and an American article about the merits of gun control. All of these references were published before 1977—since which date there has been considerable social science research on Northern Ireland.

⁸ Wilkinson simply asserts that the information yielded through these powers has been valuable. My personal experience of such intelligence gathering is to the contrary. As a student journeying from England to my family's residence in Northern Ireland, I was asked by a police inspector at Stranraer whether I was a Communist. The question was asked after a search of my bags had revealed *inter alia* a Labour Party membership card, a Norman Mailer novel and Leonard Shapiro's *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union!* (I still feel guilty about the Norman Mailer novel. . .)

⁹ See for example C. Scorer and P. Hewitt, 1981, *The Prevention of Terrorism Act: The Case for Repeal*, National Council for Civil Liberties, London, as well as the Hansard record of arguments made by various members of the Parliamentary Labour Party—especially during Roy Hattersley's period as Shadow Home Secretary.

REVIEW ARTICLE

powers because of the number of arrests which they have facilitated—rather than, for example, the number of convictions which they have produced—which is strange coming from a defender of the rule of law.¹⁰ The fundamental point is that all of these controversial assertions might have good arguments to support them but Wilkinson does not provide them. Political scientists or criminologists should consider rival explanations of given phenomena, rival evaluations of the effectiveness of given policy measures, and official and unofficial data for and against a given proposition before coming to a reasoned conclusion. Unfortunately, on the evidence of his writing on Northern Ireland, Paul Wilkinson systematically neglects these elementary canons of social science.

There are two further examples of misleading statements, amongst the many which litter his text and could have been chosen for illustration, which confirm wishful thinking, or lack of careful research on Wilkinson's part. The first is a misleading statement about the opposition parties' positions on Northern Ireland.¹¹ He states that "we should remember that it is now official Labour Opposition policy to plan for the withdrawal of British troops and the totally impracticable panacea of a united Ireland. It is true that the Liberals, the *Daily Mirror* and the "Troops Out" lobby are the only other vocal supporters of this line."¹² But it is misleading to suggest that Labour is planning for the withdrawal of British troops because Labour's policy is in fact for the "unification of Ireland by consent". Until consent is forthcoming from the Unionist population the troops will stay, *i.e.* the troops will stay for the foreseeable future! Wilkinson's judgment on the Liberals also relies on the contestable assumption that a solitary Liberal conference resolution is Liberal party policy. Even if these statements were not misleading they betray a certain lack of democratic tolerance because his description suggests that the Labour and Liberal parties and readership of the *Daily Mirror* are unrepresentative of a considerable proportion of mainland public opinion—how else is one to understand his strange employment of the expression "the only other vocal supporters of this line"?

Another example is Wilkinson's statement that "The Northern Ireland conflict is exceptional in Western Europe because it is a classic case of ethnic minority terrorism: the Provisional I.R.A., a tiny minority of the Catholic population of Northern Ireland, seeks to 'liberate' a territory in which the majority refuse to be liberated".¹³ The grammatical meaning of this sentence suggests that there are no other examples of ethnic minority terrorism in Western Europe. So much for violent activities amongst Basques, Bretons and Corsicans. . . . The charitable interpretation of the meaning

¹⁰ Wilkinson, 1986, p. 171. The same strange propensity is also evident in another passage where Wilkinson tells the reader that British security policy "is slowly but surely winning the battle against terrorism". One of the facts which he believes is relevant to this optimistic assertion is that "between 1976 and April 1984, 8,281 persons were charged with terrorist offences" (p. 163—my emphasis). Surely the relevant indicator to cite for this incautious argument is the number of persons convicted, even if the persons concerned were mostly convicted under the questionable procedures of Diplock courts? Perhaps Wilkinson's slip tells us something interesting about Diplock courts—the belief is widespread that to be charged in a Diplock court makes conviction a formality.

¹¹ The reviewer does not believe that Labour's policy of seeking the unification of Ireland by consent is either desirable or practical, and supports the Anglo-Irish Agreement as a stepping stone towards power-sharing within Northern Ireland—cf. B. O'Leary, 1987, *The Anglo-Irish Agreement: folly or statecraft?* *West European Politics*, 10, 1.

¹² Wilkinson, 1986, p. 166. The same blurring of the positions of the Labour Party, the Alliance and the Troops Out Movement occurs on page 91.

¹³ Wilkinson, 1986, pp. 164–165. The entire sentence has been quoted to avoid de-contextualisation.

REVIEW ARTICLE

Wilkinson intended to convey is that the Northern Ireland conflict is exceptional because the I.R.A.'s social base is a minority of the relevant territorial arena. But even this interpretation would make the sentence false because it is also true of the Basques and Bretons that the majority of the population in the relevant territorial area do not want to be "liberated" in the relevant manner. Wilkinson is a poor scholar of Northern Ireland and weak on comparative analysis.

The second dominant feature of Wilkinson's book is his penchant for "armchair psychologising" and "loose" moralising. For instance he opines that "It is important to remember that the community tends to get the kind of police service it deserves, both in terms of public support and control, and in the amount the community is prepared to spend on manpower and equipment. For example, the ceilings laid down for the full-time police establishment in major British cities are almost certainly too low." Well, yes and no, and what one can say to this bar-stool gambit? We are also told that "recent judicial decisions in America, for example, concerning the Watergate conspiracy, and in Britain regarding the Clive Ponting Affair, would seem firmly to disprove claims that judicial independence has been subverted by corruption and political interference".¹⁴ Again how should one respond to this kind of reassurance? The Americans can thank their stars for their independent judiciary, but the British have to rely on the contingent possibility that rebellious juries—despite vetting—will reject the less than independent judgments of the likes of Justice McGowan.

Indeed some of Wilkinson's wilder assertions leave one believing that he cannot have edited his additions to (or his subtractions from) his second edition with a great deal of care. Does he really believe that "Riots such as those in Brixton and Toxteth (1981) and Handsworth (1985) show it is impossible to control the dangerous and volatile force of collective violence"?¹⁵ Does he believe there is any, let alone some, evidence for the assertion that under terrorist brutalisation "a cult of bombs and guns is created and headstrong youths can become so hooked on the life of terrorist murder that they perform their tasks in a kind of sacrificial ecstasy"?¹⁶ Any terrorist who carries out his or her tasks in sacrificial ecstasy is likely to be an incompetent terrorist who will either unintentionally commit suicide or be killed by the security forces—in which case we will have no evidence of the person's state of mind when he/she executes the deed. This possibility is one reason why competent terrorist organisations try to imitate the indoctrination and training techniques of professional armies. They seek to train people to kill "professionally", routinely, and with the minimum of emotion rather than in a state of sacrificial ecstasy.

Similarly, the reader must ask whether Wilkinson really believes that the philosophies of Sartre and Fanon have been the most influential of terrorist ideologies in the contemporary world.¹⁷ A questionnaire survey of the key philosophers who have influenced terrorists might produce interesting results—such as how few of them have read any philosophy at all, whether directly or indirectly—but we can be confident that Wilkinson's conviction would be falsified. Nationalist terrorist movements, as he knows, are far more prevalent and powerful than those of the ultra-left in Western Europe, and while their ideals may well be indirectly derived from versions of Western

¹⁴ Wilkinson, 1986, p. 17.

¹⁵ Wilkinson, 1986, p. 42.

¹⁶ Wilkinson, 1986, p. 67.

¹⁷ Wilkinson, 1986, p. 72, p. 100.

REVIEW ARTICLE

philosophy, the texts of Sartre and Fanon are not found in a diluted form amongst the arguments of their apologists, let alone by the terrorists' bed-side lamp. We can also be confident that the impact of Sartre and Fanon has been far greater in the *salons* and *S.C.R.s* of Western Universities than in the hills and forests of the Third World.

By comparison the collection of essays in the Merkl collection show greater methodological rigour, scholarly research and detachment. Merkl divides his collection of twelve essays into two parts. Part One, *Aspects of Political Violence* is supposed to deal with the various methods already in use, while Part Two, *Individual Motifs and Motivations* is supposed to illustrate "one of the newer methods; namely, the psychological or socio-psychological approach that focuses on individual motivations and the factors that might account for them". But this division of the book, presumably made to give some rationale for various international conference papers, is unconvincing, and misrepresents the book's contents. First, Guelke's essay on the U.D.A. and the Provisional I.R.A. and Clark's essay on patterns of E.T.A. violence in Part One focus upon rational explanations of terrorism in Northern Ireland and the Basque country. Unless the study of irrationality is the exclusive province of psychologists and social-psychologists then the essays in Part One are just as "psychological" as those in Part Two. And second, there is little that is "new" about the psychology employed in Part Two. Not only is there little that is novel about the "methods", there is little that is original in the methodological errors that are made.

The editor's first essay "Approaches to the Study of Political Violence" is disorganised. It makes an unsuccessful attempt to arrive at an operational definition of political violence, which amounts to no more than a checklist of comparative questions with which to compare the methods, victims, addressees, social bases, organisation and goals of violent political groups. These dimensions are indispensable to comparative analysis but do not add up to the operational definition of political violence promised by the author. The second objective of the essay—categorising approaches to the study of political violence by units of analysis—is also unclearly pursued. We are also offered, *en passant*, nuggets of wisdom such as the following: "It seems plausible to assume (but it needs to be tested in comparative studies) that violence plays a key role in the ongoing process of revolution"¹⁸ and "there has always been some speculation as to the motives that might drive a person to violent behaviour, but relatively little empirical work on empirical theory".¹⁹ Merkl is however aware that terrorist political violence based on religious and ethnic conflict produces the heaviest toll of casualties, but spoils the value of this insight with the absurd suggestion that rivalry among nationalist guerilla groups is "rare, whereas political terror organisations in the same country are very likely to compete".²⁰ He notes that the Palestinians and the I.R.A. are exceptions to his generalisation, but any competent observer of world news bulletins on Zimbabwean, Eritrean, Salvadorian and Cambodian events would suggest that Merkl's generalisation sweeps more than it generalises.

Richard Drake's essay on "Julius Eyola and the Ideological Origins of the Radical Right in Contemporary Italy" (chapter 2) is an informative account of the career and the ideas of a neo-fascist ideologue but does not, as one might have expected in a

¹⁸ Merkl, 1986, p. 37.

¹⁹ Merkl, 1986, p. 38.

²⁰ Merkl, 1986, p. 45.

REVIEW ARTICLE

collection of this sort, systematically address the question of the impact of Evola's bizarre ideas on the terrorism of the Italian far right.

Adrian Guelke's essay on "Loyalist and Republican Perceptions of the Northern Ireland Conflict: the U.D.A. and the Provisional I.R.A." (chapter 3) and Robert Clark's two essays "Patterns of E.T.A. Violence 1968-1980" (chapter 4) and "Patterns in the Lives of E.T.A. Members" (chapter 10, presented in Part 2) stand out because they are empirical, theoretically informed and careful to avoid unsubstantiated armchair speculation. Guelke explicitly states that it is his purpose to show that Loyalist and Republican terrorism are "altogether more susceptible to rational explanation than Wilkinson's model of terrorism implies". He obtains this objective with ease. He also confirms, for Northern Ireland at least, that Hannah Arendt's well known argument is true: because violence is instrumental, those who wield it are constantly compelled to justify themselves. He documents the compulsion of Republicans and Loyalists to seek legitimacy amongst their social bases, real or alleged. Clark also demonstrates that E.T.A.'s violence is not random, senseless killing and wounding, "but rather acts carefully chosen with great attention to their political impact on their surrounding political environment", and that "most *etarras*²¹ are well within the range of functioning and sane human beings".²² Clark's second essay is also a notable example of what can be attempted by a political scientist concerned to construct a data base on terrorists from police records, official data, media materials and interviews. His sample, which he carefully notes has its limitations, allows him to falsify some of the standard assumptions about the social origins of E.T.A. recruits:— notably the idea that they are *lumpenproletarians* or social marginals. Nonetheless, despite the very considerable merits of their essays, both Guelke and Clark exaggerate the rationality of political violence in their chosen research areas. But not because they omit psychology and social psychology from their reflections, but rather because they fall into the trap of understanding terrorists or guerillas as *unitary* rational actors, *i.e.* monistic organisations whose behaviour can be explained as the value-maximising choices of their policy élites. However, it is worth emphasising that terrorist organisations are organisations, and that "organisational behavior" can only be understood as the resultant of the actions of various sub-groups and actors, of partially successful standard operating procedures, and considerable local variation in beliefs, motivations and the implementation of formal goals. It is important to avoid the assumption that all terrorist incidents are carefully planned and executed from above.

The essays in Part II are allegedly held together by a focus upon individual motifs and motivations. The two essays by Weinberg, and Pasquino and Della Porta on Italian terrorism (chapters 5 and 6) are much more structural and sociological than the editor's classification suggests. Weinberg's essay establishes some of the salient features which must enter into any analysis of the Italian state's susceptibility to terrorism—the characteristics of the established political élites, the consequences of the fascist and resistance traditions, the widespread perceptions of the state as weak and illegitimate, the decline in deference towards traditional institutions, the P.C.I.'s espousal of reformism, and a profound generational conflict on both the right and left. His argument is explicitly directed against Wilkinson and Laqueur²³ who have both

²¹ *i.e.* E.T.A. members.

²² Merkl, 1986, p. 283.

²³ W. Laqueur, 1977, *Terrorism*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

argued that liberal democracies are especially prone to assaults by terrorists—because of their civil liberties and open mass media. Weinberg points out that “all this may be true, but the argument does not explain why some democracies have been more subject to terrorism than others”.²⁴ He is right that this key question is one which social scientists should address.

Pasquino and Della Porte are also concerned to establish “the most important problems for sociological analysis”.²⁵ They reject two popular explanations of Italian left wing terrorism, the conspiracy and the psychopathological theses. The conspiracy thesis they reject is the idea that Italian terrorists are the marionettes of non-Italian states. They do not deny that there have been many conspiracies in Italy, but they forget to note that by definition all terrorist organisations are conspiracies! Instead they prefer to focus on two sociological explanations: terrorism as the product of the choice made by a collective actor, and terrorism as the symptom of dysfunction in the system. The functionalist and holistic methodological assumptions implicit in these formulations can be neglected because they can be translated into intelligent arguments. The first thesis suggests that Italian left-wing terrorism was a by-product of the P.C.I.’s reformism, a reaction against Eurocommunism and the historic compromise by “surplus militants”. The problems here are twofold: the timing of events does not support the thesis and it cannot be said that a very substantial component of the left-wing Italian terrorists belonged to the P.C.I.’s constituency before they embarked upon their activities. The second “dysfunctionality” thesis points to the importance of the consequences of perceptions of illegitimacy and the fact of political immobilism. Pasquino and Della Porte conclude with the “preliminary explanation” that “left-wing terrorism in Italy is the result of the stalemate in the political system and at the same time of the conscious decision of some groups to resort to armed activities in the belief that legal avenues for the transformation of the system were no longer available and that, indeed, a right-wing, authoritarian threat was in the making”.²⁶ The reader is counselled to await their further research.²⁷

Two essays follow on political violence in Western Germany, the first by Klaus Wasmund on “The Political Socialisation of West German Terrorists” and the second by the editor on “Rollerball or Neo-Nazi violence?” The primary feature of West German terrorists is just how small scale have been the direct violent consequences of their acts in comparison with Irish, Basque or Italian terrorists,²⁸ and just how small the R.A.F.²⁹ fraction was by contrast with terrorist movements elsewhere in Western Europe. The “ideas” and actions of the West German terrorists also suggest the appropriateness of psychopathological explanations of their formation and development—a task which Wasmund only partially succeeds in fulfilling. He argues that West German terrorism was an unintended by-product of the student movement in the “counterculture” of West Berlin and that most terrorist recruits came from the

²⁴ Merkl, 1986, p. 146.

²⁵ Merkl, 1986, p. 170.

²⁶ Merkl, 1986, p. 187.

²⁷ With S. Tarrow, Della Porte has subsequently produced an empirically focused article as part of her research: Unwanted children: political violence and the cycle of protest in Italy, 1966-73. *European Journal of Political Research*, 14, 607-632.

²⁸ The political impact of terrorism of course bears no necessary relationship to its scale. The R.A.F. have “succeeded” in making West Germany less liberal in certain respects.

²⁹ Red Army Fraction.

upper middle classes. We are given such details as "every fourth terrorist, over the age of fourteen, grew up in a broken home",³⁰ but in the absence of comparable data for their West German contemporaries from analogous social positions such information is meaningless. What has happened to the basic idea of a "control group"—surely fundamental to applied sociology, social psychology and political science? But after similar sophisticated data presentation on the biographies and assumed psychohistories of future terrorists Wasmund confesses that "no single set of circumstances can be identified in the primary socialisation process that would necessarily lead to a terrorist career".³¹ Yet this statement, although very plausible, fits ill with the assertion he has made only two sentences previously: "nearly all the biographies of the terrorists display unusual family and psychodynamic features."³²

While many will find the psychological and psychoanalytical assumptions in Wasmund's case study of the terrorists' group dynamics compelling, arguments such as the following are neither scientific nor plausible: "the decision to go underground was generally preceded by a phase in which such a step was prepared for consciously or unconsciously".³³ The notion that a loner departing for West Berlin is unconsciously preparing for a terrorist career is both teleological and absurd. What is also very unclear is how terrorist group dynamics differ from other groups' dynamics apart from the fact the terrorist group have more reasons for thinking that their personal security is in jeopardy. To be told that "in the cells of the terrorist underground a friend-enemy mentality exists which is typical of all totalitarian political groupings"³⁴ is neither a revelation nor plausible. Many non-totalitarian groupings, such as academics, accountants, liberal politicians and actors have friend-enemy mentalities, their own jargon, stereotypes, mindguards and processes of identification, integration and groupthink.³⁵ Wasmund concludes that it would be "no exaggeration to say that terrorists are in many ways 'victims of group thinking' ". He does not establish this assertion, but he does, unintentionally, go a long way towards showing that West German terrorists were, amongst many other things, bad thinkers. If they were victims of anything they were victims of stupidity. Merkl's essay on the Neo-Nazi right is also, unintentionally comforting, because it shows us that there is little reason to be kept awake at night by these thugs who resemble English football hooligans in every ugly particular and so far are equally incapable of serious political or terrorist organisation. The *Octoberfest* carnage, despite its horrors, merely confirms this assessment.

The scene of the book then shifts from Western Europe, and we are treated to an essay by Peter Waldman on "Guerrilla Movements in Argentina, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Uruguay" (chapter 9). This essay is a provisional attempt to establish some hypotheses about the formation, propagation and chances of success of guerrilla groups in Latin America. Waldman argues that three factors are much overvalued in accounting for the success and failure of such movements—the particular ideology of the guerrillas, their organisation, and the impact of Castro's Cuba and multi-national networks. He argues that the social composition of these movements is strikingly

³⁰ Merkl, 1986, p. 202.

³¹ Merkl, 1986, p. 203.

³² Merkl, 1986, *ibid.*

³³ Merkl, 1986, *ibid.*

³⁴ Merkl, 1986, p. 215.

³⁵ See *inter alia* I. Janis, 1982, *Groupthink: Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascos*, Houghton Mifflin.

homogeneous—they are made up of whites and half-breeds (rather than Indians), youths with higher education, and contain very few working class members. He bases his explanation of their formation upon three sets of motivations. First, material-economic motivations are aroused by the dashing of heightened expectations—frequent in the history of the continent. Second, historical-ideological traditions are especially likely to make an impact upon idealistic youths—the axiom that the young are necessarily more idealistic is an axiom which many authors seem to take as self-evident. And third, political occurrences such as the failure of a reform movement or programme are likely to precipitate guerrilla activity. His emphasis upon guerrilla failure or success rests fundamentally upon assumptions about the importance of legitimacy. He argues that the guerrillas fail when they underestimate the importance of middle class support, and they err when they assume that the provocation of repression will be beneficial to their movement. Waldman's data on the social origins of guerrillas are informative but organisational materialists will not be impressed with Waldman's core arguments—which still rest upon the importance of popular legitimacy. Guerrillas succeed if and only if the state's coercive apparatus fragments, and in the case of Latin American countries that prospect is far more heavily dependent upon the conduct of American foreign policy and indigenous ruling class cohesion than it is upon popular illegitimacy.

Abraham Ashkenasi's essay on "Social-Ethnic Conflict and Paramilitary Organisation in the Near East" (chapter II) is a survey of several paramilitary organisations in the Near East which were active before and after World War II. Unlike Waldman he is far more concerned with organisational materialist explanations of the success of guerrilla/terrorist movements. He demonstrates that the so-called urban or city guerrilla is doomed to failure without a strong rural base, and also that the countryside must be well co-ordinated by a group of educated cadres, normally from an urban setting, if the paramilitary organisation is to succeed in maintaining itself—and for this task what he calls "ethnosocial affinity" is critical. This essay was informative although the reviewer was puzzled by the assertion that "Obviously, then, paramilitary organisation is not simply paramilitary organisation".³⁶

The editor's concluding essay begins on a defensive note: "This was not intended to be a travelogue of countries convulsed by violence nor a freak show of violent movements around the world".³⁷ But one's confidence in the editor's judgment, which in other work has been of much higher quality, is not enhanced by his summary of what can be extracted from the uneven collection of essays which he has brought together. As with Wilkinson Merkl's undoubted analytical capacities seem to be affected by his moral horror at the materials he studies. From the premise that "the anticapitalist and antielitist thrust of left-wing terrorists can be expected to single out leaders of society and its business organisations" it is simply wrong, especially on the basis of the essays which he has just edited, for Merkl to conclude that "Here the West German terrorists seem to have been more systematic, with the murders of Hans Martin Schleyer and Jürgen Ponto, two figures at the very top, while the Italians have for the most part been content with kidnappings (of less prominent figures), bank robberies and extortions"³⁸ Aldo Moro was after all a former Italian Prime Minister; judges are

³⁶ Merkl, 1986, p. 312.

³⁷ Merkl, 1986, p. 335.

³⁸ Merkl, 1986, p. 345.

REVIEW ARTICLE

surely major establishment figures even if they are not household names; and perhaps systematicity is the last thing of which the R.A.F. should be accused! But the editor is also careless elsewhere. When writing of Northern Ireland Merkl writes: "In fact, the killers on both sides are self-chosen executioners who have rarely suffered the other side's aggression on either their own bodies or on those of close kin and friends".³⁹ There can be no quarrel with the expression "self-chosen executioners" but one would like to know how Merkl derived the alleged "fact" that the terrorists and their friends and kin have only rarely suffered from the other side's aggressions. It may be true, but it sounds like wishful thinking to serve the condemnation of murderous organisations. There is quite sufficient factual evidence with which to condemn the I.R.A. and the U.D.A. without making up "plausible facts" as we go along.

With luck analytical scholars concerned to make the social science of political violence more rigorous, and prescriptive scholars concerned to make liberal democracies better able to understand, withstand and defeat terrorist attacks, from wherever they come, will learn something from the defects of Wilkinson's book, and the flaws in some of the essays edited by Merkl. The essays by Guelke and Clarke, and with qualifications, those of Weinberg and Pasquino and Della Porte, are promising signs that the study of political violence by academics can make methodological and empirical progress. It is a worthwhile task. After all, as José Ortega y Gasset put it in his book *The Revolt of the Masses*: "Civilisation consists in the attempt to reduce violence to the *ultima ratio*, the final argument".

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³⁹ Merkl, 1986, p. 354.