

Headline Hunters

Another component in the foolishness of guerrilla-ism is that it looks to the media as the agency of its propaganda. According to Baumann

RAF said the revolution wouldn't be built through political work, but through headlines, through appearances in the press, over and over again, reporting: 'Here are guerrillas fighting in Germany.' This over-estimation of the press, that's where it completely falls apart. Not only do they have to imitate the machine completely, and fall into the trap of only getting into it politically with the police, but their only justification comes through the media. They establish themselves only by these means. Things only float at this point, they aren't rooted anymore in anything, not even in the people they still have contact with. (p. 100)

This is especially absurd given the role of the most popular news sources in stimulating and maintaining the most irrational elements in people's response to acts of political violence. They deliberately try to obscure political issues by omission and commission. Take the Middle East as an example — How many people remember that 106 passengers and crew were killed in a civilian plane shot down by an Israeli jet over Sinai? How many people know that Israeli bombs killed 46 children in a village in the Nile delta? How many know that 1500 were killed and 3000 napalmed in Palestinian refugee camps and villages by Israel from 1969 to 1972?

In November 1977 rocket attacks by Palestinian guerrillas into Israel killed 3 people. In response Israeli planes bombed 9 villages and 3 refugee camps which they claimed harboured guerrillas. More than 100 citizens were believed to have been killed. A Guardian reporter (20-11-77) visited one village and one camp to find that they were not guerrilla outposts. The Israelis also used delayed action bombs so that people were killed during attempts to find survivors. Yet the terrorist acts of Palestinians are the ones which people abhor because they were the acts extensively reported.

Before too long the killing of civilians by the Israelis in their incursion into Lebanon will be forgotten. But you can bet that the killing of civilians by the PLO's terror squad will be remembered. In fact the hypocrisy and cynicism of Israeli planning relies on this amnesia.

The media seek to obscure politics further by treating incidents as spectacles. This does suit the apolitical nature of guerrilla strategy in which their struggle is supposed to take on bigger and bigger proportions in the media in order to call forth a ruling class response.

The real effect amongst the people, however, is to confirm the idea that politics is a removed realm to be viewed passively — usually as dreary routine but occasionally as a spectacle. Even if people "support" the guerrillas, this hardly has any real meaning in terms of their own involvement in politics. Instead, the usual result is to provide an organizing base of vicious attitudes for the rulers to exploit for their ends.

The hypocrisy of the media is illustrated by their tendency to play up the significance of political violence compared with their failure to raise any stir about industrial accidents and disease. Car accidents are treated, even sensationalized, but with a kind of primitive fatalism, when in fact they are a serious social and political problem. Many people die of these causes, many more are maimed. Who cares?

The existence of media manipulation should not, however, obscure its basis in reality. Leftists are inclined to dismiss people's outrage as "reactionary". But the killing of school-children, placing of bombs in underground stations or machine gunning people at an airport can never be dismissed no matter what the context. People's response is, on the whole, genuine moral outrage. This is manipulated into law and order hysteria which allows legislation to be passed and the left to be crushed. But it is typical of the elitism of many passive leftists lacking in principled ideas who sycophantically devote themselves to any active cause somewhere else, carried out by someone else, to pour contempt on the reactions of people to real outrages.