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A Radical Rethinks Terrorist Violence after the Murder of Chief Federal Prosecutor Siegfried Buback (April 25, 1977)

Chief federal prosecutor Siegfried Buback was murdered by the Red Army Faction [*Rote Armee Fraktion* or RAF] on April 7, 1977. This act, part of the mounting violence of the RAF's "Offensive 77," prompted an anonymous author (who signed his name "a mescalero from Göttingen") to rethink the moral legitimacy and practical utility of using force to affect political change. The "obituary" first appeared in a student newspaper at the University of Göttingen and was subsequently reprinted in numerous daily newspapers. These papers, however, only republished certain parts of the article and thereby misrepresented its message. For example, passages referring to the "clandestine joy" over Buback's murder were reprinted but not those that criticized the violence. In 2001, Klaus Hülbrock, a lecturer in German, told the *taz* (a left-of-center Berlin daily newspaper) that he was the author of the article. He also apologized to the son of the murdered prosecutor for his statements at the time.

Buback – An Obituary

This is not necessarily supposed to be an assessment or an annotated trashing from my desk, performed with a papal air and characterized as "loyal criticism." Balance, rigorous argumentation, dialectic, and contradiction – I couldn't care less about all of that. This Buback story[1] has left a bad taste in my mouth and these burps should get put down on paper. Maybe they will contribute a bit to a public controversy.

My immediate reaction, my "dismay" after Buback was shot down, can be described quickly. I could not and did not want to (and still don't) deny having felt clandestine joy. I often heard this guy agitating; I know that he played an important role in pursuing, criminalizing, and torturing leftists. Whoever saw his face even once in the last few days can recognize the characteristics of the rule of law in this state, which he embodied so outstandingly. And they also know a few features of the faces of the upright democrats who are now crying out, as if with one voice, in outrage and sadness. Honestly, I do regret a little that we can no longer add this face to the little red-and-black criminal album that we'll publish after the revolution in order to get hold of the most sought after and hated representatives of the old world and present them before a public hearing. Alas, not him – a child lost, *enfant perdu.*

[1] Buback was the federal prosecutor in charge of suppressing the RAF – ed.

But this is not all that has been haunting my mind and those of many others since this thing happened. A feeling of genuine joy, like when Carrero Blanco left this world,[2] just didn't happen for me. Not that I let the really well-staged "public outrage and hysteria" get to me. This spectacle seems to work better each time, and none of us believes anymore that even a single "critical" voice would be raised somewhere in the concert of these political eunuchs, who live (and live well) by creating "public opinion."

But I'm not so totally indifferent to this seemingly hermetic block of conformist media spurting official announcements and commentaries that I don't have to worry about it at all during various actions anymore. The bugging scandal has shown that this chorus of the upright has put lice into their hides, which are now irritating them and cannot be erased through opinions and commentaries. So at least tears and cracks have appeared in this apparently firm façade of legitimation; we can and have to take advantage of them, even with respect to Stammheim.[3] There a public murmur developed, a public uneasiness about the nonchalance with which the Bubacks, Maihofers, Schiess, and Benda commit the grossest infringements of the law, and we missed the chance to use it offensively for our cause and for the prisoners. This chance is lost for the moment. Now, after the assassination, not only is any means allowed to smash the "terrorist mob," but the means being used are even too minor.

That might be my own personal impression. I did not have any ideas or strength to intervene in this scandal. But what I want to criticize might be easier to illustrate through the example of the Roth and Otto trial in Cologne.[4] In this trial, the strategy of the Bubacks was to convict the leftists, who were proven not to have taken a shot, as police murderers. Revolutionary leftists are killers; their attitudes, their practices predestine them to be killers who do not shy away from any means – according to the equation made by the prosecutors and (evidently) the judges.

In painstaking, detailed work the comrades involved succeeded at least partially in thwarting this strategy, and thwarting it in such a way that even the conformist media was forced to report on the scandals, inhuman prison conditions, procedural errors, etc. That is how the little Stammheim in Cologne was able to spotlight the real Stammheim. Last Wednesday, the lawyers of Roth and Otto filed a petition for them to be released from custody because the body of evidence could no longer support a charge of the joint murder of the police officer Pauli. The equation "leftists equal killers" was foiled. But I still fear that the attack on Buback took the good cards out of the comrades' hands, that this did an unintentional service for the judiciary that might even have a negative effect on the verdict.

The blindness of those whose political world is reduced to Stammheim and who fight and choose their means totally irrespective of the current "political situation" could thereby disarm other comrades and serve as an involuntary contribution to doing them in. "Counterinsurgency" the other way around….

These thoughts alone were enough to stop any internal hand-wringing. But it gets worse. For a certain time (like so many of us), I also appreciated the action of the armed fighters. I, who as a civilian never had a weapon in my hand, let a bomb go off. I even got off on it a little when something else exploded and the whole capitalist in-crowd along with its henchmen was thrown

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[2] Referring to the 1973 assassination of the Spanish collaborator of Franco by Basque nationalists – ed.
[3] The name of the federal prison in which the elite of the RAF was locked up – ed.
[4] Karl-Heinz Roth and Roland Otto faced trial in 1975 as "psychological accomplices" in a police murder in Cologne – trans.

into turmoil. These were things that I had wanted to do in daydreams but never had the nerve to do.

Now I just imagined again what it would be like if I were with the armed fighters, were being sought, hunted, living somewhere in a conspiratorial context of just a few people, having to be careful that my everyday activities (shopping, emptying the trash, watching a movie) would not be my undoing.

And I have to ask myself how – cut off from everyday personal and political contexts – I could even make the decision with my people to undertake such an action. How I'd have to spend months preparing for the fact that Buback had to be gotten rid of, how logistics and ballistics would have to determine my whole way of thinking. How I could be certain that this guy and no one else has to die, how I would take for granted that someone else will be killed too, and how a third person might become a paraplegic, etc.

I'd have to turn my thinking around totally. I still think that the decision to kill or murder is in the hands of those in power: judges, cops, factory security services, the military, nuclear power plant operators. That I'd have to get special training to do that; cold-blooded like Al Capone, fast, brutal, calculating.

How should I decide that Buback is important, not for me and my people, but for other people too? That he is more important than Judge X at prison Y or one of its guards? Or that the salesman in the corner, who keeps yelling "off with his head," is less "guilty" than Buback? Just because he has less "responsibility"?

Why this politics of personalities? Couldn't we all kidnap a female cook together someday and see how they then respond, the upright democrats?

Shouldn't we be putting more of our focus on female cooks?

When one of these state-approved killers gets bumped off in Argentina or even Spain, I don't have these problems. I believe I can feel that the hate of the people against these figures is truly a popular hatred. But who and how many people hated Buback (to death)? Where could I – if I were part of the armed struggle – get my ability to decide over life and death?

We all have to get away from hating the oppressors of the people on behalf of the people. Just as we have already gradually gotten away from acting or building up a party on behalf of others. If Buback was not a victim of popular anger (or, if you like, class hatred, so no false suspicions arise), then the violence that is exercised comes just as little from the people as Buback's violence did.

We just have to open a newspaper and follow the daily headlines: the strategy of liquidation, this is one of the strategies of the powers that be. Why do we have to copy it? It frightens people ("The People"!). They have had their own experiences with this, as with incarceration and work camps. Whatever we do, it throws a light onto our goals. We will not liquidate our enemies. We will not lock them up in prisons and work camps but nonetheless we are not going to treat them gently.

Our goal of a society without terror and violence (even if there is still going to be aggression and militancy), a society without forced labor (even if there still will be grind), a society without a judiciary, prisons, and institutions (even if there are still rules and regulations, or better:

recommendations), this goal justifies not any means, just some of them. Our road to socialism (or if you like: anarchy) cannot be paved with bodies.

Why liquidate? Ridicule can also kill, for example, in the long run. Our weapons are not simply imitations of military weapons, but ones they cannot shoot out of our hands. Our strength therefore does not have to lie in a phrase (such as “solidarity”). Our violence, finally, cannot be that of Al Capone, a copy of open street terror and daily terror. Not authoritarian, but anti-authoritarian and for that reason all the more effective. For the sake of the power issue (oh my God!), leftists cannot be killers or brutes or rapists; but certainly also not saints or innocent lambs. To develop a strategy and practice of violence and militancy that is happy and to have the blessing of the participating masses: that is (turning to the practical conclusion) the task before us today. So the leftists who so act do not assume the same killer faces as the Bubacks.

A little hefty, isn’t it? But written in all honesty….

A Mescalero from Göttingen

Source: Anonymous [actually Klaus Hülbrock], “Buback – Ein Nachruf” [“Buback – An Obituary”], *Göttinger Studentenzeitung*, April 25, 1977.

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