

Rightist Violence: An Historical Perspective

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The aim of this essay is to trace the evolution of extreme right-wing violence by paying close attention to its changing patterns from the late nineteenth century to the present. Its basic subject is the specific *form* of violent actions that have historically emerged from the Right. As such, it takes the form of a study of deeds rather than propaganda. This paper will go on to discuss the perpetrators and methods of right-wing violence from its statist emergence in the late nineteenth century to its pivot in the early twentieth century to taking the 'low route' to power, as Italian fascists and Nazi stormtroopers developed strategies focused upon the 'conquest of the streets'. This essay will conclude by asking: having examined the historical violence of its antecedents, just how tactically innovative is today's right-wing violence?

¹ I am deeply grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their incisive criticisms and suggestions for further reading.

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to trace the long-term evolution of extreme right-wing violence by paying close attention to its changing patterns from the late nineteenth century to the present. Its basic subject is the specific *form* of violent actions that have historically emerged from the Right. As such, it takes the form of a study of deeds rather than propaganda. ‘Right-wing extremism’ Knoope has observed, ‘is a moving target. It is ever changing and evolving whilst being studied’.² I ask simply: is the same also true for its violence? How far—if at all—do right wing ideologies tend to shape violence in some directions rather than other? Are there distinctively repertoires of right-wing violent action that endure over time? Finally, and with necessary brevity, I turn to consider the present moment. How far do the practices of 21st century far-right violence resemble older traditions? Conversely, how far do they represent something genuinely and disturbingly original?

Given the bewildering variety of movements across both Europe and America that have been tagged as belonging to the Right, it would be unwise to offer any proscriptive understanding of the essence of right-wing politics.³ But, as a very general sketch, right-wing thought has been characterised by a general acceptance of human inequalities. By extension, the violent movements examined here have been characterised by both a celebration—and aggressive defence—of valued hierarchies against ‘progressive’ forces pushing for more equal societies. However diverse, those engaged in rightist violence have shared a basic assumption of “considering inequality between people as a nature-given principle, combined with an acceptance of violence as a legitimate way of acting”.⁴ Racist and nationalist motivations are indeed often driving forces here. However, it is worth noting they are not in themselves the exclusive property of the Right.

Hence, my label ‘rightist violence’ is chosen to remain wide-angled: and to mean simply acts of physical harm that support basically right-wing goals. I leave these ideological parameters as broad on purpose: since I am also interested in exploring how extreme right-wing tactics have been affected by wider changing contexts over time. Quite deliberately, I do not attempt to demarcate finely where wider forms of political violence end and terrorism begins. That said, Alex Schmid’s famous definition of terrorism as a form of political signalling in which random victims act as ‘message generators’ does usefully capture something distinctively *modern* in the evolution of political violence.⁵ Geographical focus is somewhat tighter for this study. Since the political concepts of ‘Right’ and ‘Left’ derive from directly *Western* experience since the French Revolution, my discussion of rightist violence remains focused upon *Western Europe and the United States*. Occasional comparative glances are indeed cast further afield; but the Atlantic World remains the broad arena of analysis.

Finally, for analytical convenience I focus more on ‘unofficial actors’ than state agents. Back in 1995, Ehud Sprinzak famously offered a bi-focal approach for studying right-wing terror groups. He argued that such movements tended to be involved in a ‘primary

² Quoted in: Holbrook, Donald and Taylor, Max. “Introduction,” in Max Taylor, PM Currie and Donald Holbrook (eds.), *Extreme Right-Wing Political Violence and Terrorism* (Bloomsbury, London, 2013), p. 1.

³ Holbrook, Donald and Taylor, Max. “Introduction,” in Max Taylor, PM Currie and Donald Holbrook (eds.), *Extreme Right-Wing Political Violence and Terrorism* (Bloomsbury, London, 2013), p. 2.

⁴ Bjørgo, Tore. “Introduction,” in Tore Bjørgo, ed., *Terror from the Extreme Right* (London, Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 2-3.

⁵ Schmid, Alex. “The Definition of Terrorism,” in Alex Schmid, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* (New York, Routledge, 2011, 2013), p. 61. For a fuller discussion, see my forthcoming: *Killing Strangers: How Political Violence Became Modern* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020).

conflict with an “inferior” community and a secondary conflict with the government’.⁶ Sprinzak went on offer a six-part typology of revolutionary, reactive, vigilante, racist, millenarian, and youth counter-culture terrorisms.⁷ With the historian’s traditional bias against arid precisionism, I make no attempt to follow such classifications too rigidly. ‘Operationalizing’ phenomena too strictly wrenches them from context.

But Sprinzak’s starting point remains a usefully provocative one – that right-wing violence will target despised ‘inferiors’ but stand in a far more ambiguous relationship to constituted authority. I take the latter point further: and deliberately include instances of freelance and unauthorised violence from the Right that—in the eyes of its perpetrators at least—were designed to lend the state ‘a helping hand’. State terror, though—officially sanctioned governmental persecution—is not the chosen theme of this essay. There are often blurred areas, of course, between state terror and pro-state violence. But, to ignore this borderland entirely risks neglecting a whole realm of right-wing violence that historically has often been its predominant expression. A global rise of an anti-statist ‘anarchy of the right’ is a relatively recent development.

The Emergence of Right-Wing Violence

First, though, it is necessary to ask how and when right-wing violence emerged at all. In Europe, this period saw the dawn of a recognisably modern form of mass politics that brought the Old World closer to the long-standing experience of American mass democracy. “By later standards this democratization was still incomplete—the usual electorate under universal suffrage was between 30 and 40 per cent of the adult population”, writes Eric Hobsbawm.⁸ Yet if franchises nearly everywhere still ruthlessly excluded women and the majority of working-class men, they were at least extensive enough that public opinion had clearly become a force to be reckoned with in its own right. Emerging mass circulation newspapers and rising literacy further reinforced these trends.

Where there are mass publics there could also, for the first time, appear radical movements at their edges: militants who tried hard to pull the tides of public opinion in their direction. In short, the point at which mass rightist politics began to emerge is the natural point to consider the appearance of right-wing violent extremism as well. It is important here to stress that the European Right from the later 19th century onwards remained emphatically statist—it celebrated strong government. In Sprinzakian terms, there was thus only limited potential for long-running and grassroots ‘secondary’ conflicts to open up from below. But, threats from *within* the state from the Right were a different matter; and the threat of military action not so easily dismissed. Rioting officers who sacked the offices of a newspaper that had threatened to publish a cartoon they considered derogatory succeeded in sparking a full-scale constitutional crisis across Catalonia in late 1905; and indeed contributed, in part, to the subsequent fall of the Spanish government.⁹

⁶ Sprinzak, Ehud. “Right-Wing Terrorism in a Comparative Perspective: The Case of Split Delegitimization,” in Tore Bjørgo, ed., *Terror from the Extreme Right* (London, Frank Cass, 1995), p. 17.

⁷ Sprinzak, Ehud. “Right-Wing Terrorism in a Comparative Perspective: The Case of Split Delegitimization,” in Tore Bjørgo, ed., *Terror from the Extreme Right* (London, Frank Cass, 1995), p. 17. For a critique: Ravndal, Jacob. “Thugs or Terrorists? A Typology of Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe”, *Journal for Deradicalization*, Summer 2015, No. 3.

⁸ Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p. 86.

⁹ McGlade, Rhiannon. “The ‘fets de Cu-Cut!’ Cartooning Controversy in Catalonia”, *Romance Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (2015), p. 206.

A threat of coups hung particularly heavily over the Third Republic in France: both during the crisis provoked by the complex political manoeuvrings of the crypto-royalist General Boulanger in 1888-9 and again during the Dreyfus Crisis that peaked in 1898-1900.¹⁰ The latter controversy at times resembled a dress rehearsal for civil war: the question of whether the Jewish officer Captain Alfred Dreyfus had been unfairly framed for treason split public opinion down the middle. Efforts by the far-right to support the anti-Dreyfusard cause threatened to become violent repeatedly. Yet ultimately, even their most dramatic acts such as the 38-day confrontation they staged in the Rue de Chabrol, remained largely theatrical. Here Jules Guérin, leader of the Antisemitic League, holed up with armed supporters in a Masonic Lodge while sympathisers tried to throw them baguettes over the rooftops. Wisely, the government refused to let the police storm the defences. Nor do the defenders appear to have considered taking any hostages. The epically prolonged stand-off finally ended in a notably meek surrender.¹¹ No rightist legends were born of the fall of ‘Fort Chabrol’.

Rightist violence in fin-de-siècle Europe remained broadly characterised by such amateur, freelance, and ‘disrespectable’ qualities. Anti-Semitism was a major motor, inevitably. But here, it must be emphasised that anti-Semitism was hardly the exclusive property of the Right: rather it was a broad “cultural phenomenon which dealt with the painful modernization of nineteenth-century Europe by blaming it on the Jews”.¹² And—while anti-Semitism certainly constituted a sort of hegemonic common sense for the mainstream Right—such prejudice did not automatically translate into any mass support for violence. Indeed, Jules Guérin had to pay the abattoir workers of La Vilette to riot on his behalf.¹³ In contrast to Russia, violent anti-Semitism here remained an inchoate phenomenon. It essentially took the form of sporadic disturbances—such as the sacking of a Jewish newspaper office in Vienna in 1888 by followers of the notorious rabble-rouser Georg von Schönerer. Careers of rabble-rousers such as Jules Guérin and Georg von Schönerer were, in short, still most likely to end in ignominious jail sentences.¹⁴ As yet, European governments still had little use for the assistance of self-appointed vigilantes from the far Right to uphold ‘order’.

In general, it is the *asymmetry* here between the violence of the far-right and far-left in the later nineteenth century that is most striking. At a time when anarchists were assassinating heads of state and bombing theatres and churches right across Europe and the USA, such mayhem was not directly answered antiphonally by rightist violence. No tradition of mass casualty bombing emerged from the Right at this point.

Assassination attempts from this quarter were still also strikingly rare. A couple, though, are worth brief discussion. During the Second Home Rule Crisis of 1893, William Townshend attempted to shoot the British Prime Minister, William Gladstone, to derail his attempt to grant a measure of self-government to Ireland. The chief historical interest of this attempt is how closely Townshend indulged in the classic behaviours of ‘lone actor’ terrorists identified in recent research.¹⁵ Townshend was 36 years old; a native of Sheffield (but with relations in Ireland); and with a history of depression. Extracts from his diary were read out in court. They revealed: ‘leakage’ of his intentions (shouting

¹⁰ Gildea, Robert, *Barricades and Borders: Europe 1800-1914* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, 2003), pp. 371-3.

¹¹ Hoffman, Robert, *More Than a Trial: The Struggle Over Captain Dreyfus* (London, Collier Macmillan, 1980), p. 183; Sante, Luc, *The Other Paris: An Illustrated Journey Through A City's Poor and Bohemian Past* (London, Faber and Faber, 2015), p. 84.

¹² Gildea, Robert, *Barricades and Borders: Europe 1800-1914* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, 2003), p. 367.

¹³ Griffiths, Richard, “From Nostalgia to Pragmatism: French Royalism and the Dreyfus Watershed” in Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett, eds., *The Right in France: From Revolution to Le Pen* (London, I. B. Tauris, 2003), p. 121.

¹⁴ Gildea, Robert, *Barricades and Borders: Europe 1800-1914* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, 2003), p. 368.

¹⁵ Gill, Paul, *Lone-actor Terrorists: a behavioural analysis* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2015), pp. 52-9.

'Traitor' at Gladstone; and sending him a death threat); dogged, but discreet, reconnaissance (stalking Gladstone to Brighton, hanging around Downing Street for hours whilst being 'afraid of raising suspicions by making enquiries'); technical preparations (he worried that one of the revolver chambers might stick); and an abiding concern with the validation of publicity ('I shall look anxiously in tomorrow's papers for my justification'). Townshend's final difficulty in crossing the threshold of lethal violence is also starkly revealed by his diary entry of 25th April 1893: 'I saw Gladstone emerge from his residence. I was so surprised at seeing him happy and cheerful that I raised my hat, then hurried to the Park, where I wept for two hours'. Despite police suspicions of a wider conspiracy, there appears to have been none at all.¹⁶

Considerably more consequential was Raoul Villain's successful assassination of the French socialist leader Jean Jaurès as he sat in a restaurant on the very eve of the First World War (31 July 1914). As an assassin, Villain proved barely more competent than Townshend: he later confessed "that he had been unable to go through with an earlier attempt at assassination because of the look of goodness and serenity he saw in his victim's eyes".¹⁷ Although generally known for his frugal lifestyle, on this occasion Villain had dressed in new clothes, eaten in an expensive restaurant, and was well armed with two revolvers.¹⁸ Allegations were levelled in the years that followed that Villain had acted as a tool of the Tsarist secret police: but this claim must remain, at best, unproven. Twenty-nine years old and of known reactionary views, Villain appears to have acted alone as the self-appointed executioner of the 'greatest opponent of war in France'. His subsequent acquittal during the chauvinistic high noon of early 1919 has left much about his precise thinking unclear.¹⁹

By contrast, the US in the later 19th century proved a highly creative laboratory of organised rightist violence. In large part, this was because the boundaries between official and unofficial violence were still so blurred. Certainly, the sheer bitterness of American industrial disputes needs to be mentioned here briefly: a direct consequence of the American tradition of delegating 'order' to private bodies. Against this backdrop of weak statism, a spectrum of violent assistance was available to major employers ranging from private services such as the Pinkertons through to the National Guard: all effectively acted as the private militia of capital. In prolonged industrial disputes such as at Homestead, Pennsylvania (1892) or in the Pullman Strike in Chicago (1894) the scale of destruction of both property and life could become truly spectacular. Indeed, in the spillover of the latter dispute across seven states no less than 34 died.²⁰ Only Barcelona with its traditions of hired thugs and rebel gunmen (the *pistoleros*) offered a European equivalent to this murky world of semi-privatised industrial violence.²¹

Brutal as such American industrial disputes undoubtedly were, their violence paled beside that of the predominantly rural Deep South. Unique conditions fostered a tradition of rightist vigilantism that grew both highly ritualised and carnivalesque. The key starting point here is to recognise that if the course of the Civil War foreshadowed total war, and if its verdict in denying the secession bid of the Confederacy was decisive, its social outcome was much less so. Despite the formal abolition of slavery, indeed, it

¹⁶ Derry Journal, 1 May 1893; Cheshire Observer, 13 May 1893.

¹⁷ Wilkinson, Paul, *Political Terrorism* (London, 1974), p. 135.

¹⁸ Bernstein, Samuel. "Jean Jaures and the Problem of War", *Science and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Summer, 1940), p. 163.

¹⁹ Ibid.; Seigel, Leila. 'Review of *L'Assassinat de Jean Jaurès* by Marcel Le Clere', *The French Review*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (March 1972), p. 891.

²⁰ Hofstadter, Richard, and M. Wallace eds., *American Violence: A Documentary History* (New York, Knopf, 1971), pp. 142-147, 151-156.

²¹ Ealham, Chris, *Anarchism and the City: Revolution and Counter-revolution in Barcelona, 1898-1937* (Chico, AK Press, 2010), pp. 48-50.

remained strikingly tentative and open-ended in the years immediately following the Confederacy's collapse in the spring of 1865. A decade of varying attempts at social engineering by Republican administrations in Washington followed before Reconstruction petered out.²² Attempts by federal government to create a southern society where ex-slaves could enjoy equal citizenship and some measure of economic autonomy foundered on the local realities of white resistance to these goals. By 1875-6, indeed, all the basic foundations of a resurgent racial caste system had been put in place. Ex-slaves were firmly re-integrated into a subservient place into the economy of cotton production as sharecroppers and labourers. Moreover, they were largely intimidated into non-voting where their numbers might have made a difference.

How was this achieved? The simple answer is: in large part through demonstrative terror of bodies such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). At first, "acts of violence were generally committed by local groups on their own initiative" writes Eric Foner: effectively a proto-version of 'leaderless resistance'. Over time, a loosely-organised, but systematic, supremacist vigilantism outbid the coercive power and political stamina of the federal government in Washington.²³ Here was an early example of terror being used as a "*control mechanism*, an effort to restore the previous caste structure of society".²⁴

In these early years, efforts to intimidate blacks and their white allies from voting had a largely clandestine quality to evade prosecution of individuals by federal authorities: that, after all, was the point of 'night rides'—hit-and-run raids—by relatively small gangs disguised in Ku Klux Klan hoods.²⁵ At the other end of the spectrum, white supremacist violence could become proudly pogromic—a truly mass phenomenon of sudden, one-sided violence that fits the template outlined by Donald Horowitz in his study, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*: 'a passionate but highly patterned event' triggered by a specific precipitant.²⁶ Still, white supremacist violence more often took highly targeted forms. Decapitation strategies were to the fore—with leading black leaders (or their white allies) disproportionately targeted for assassination or exemplary humiliation. Likewise, the meeting places of the black community were singled out for destruction: "nearly every colored church and school-house" (in the words of a contemporary report) were burnt in the Tuskegee area in late 1870.²⁷ Here was an enduring template for the future; and such tactics were to re-emerge more or less wholesale during the era of so-called 'massive resistance' eight decades later.²⁸

In general, what is striking about the counter-revolution in the Deep South is its growing confidence after about 1868. Clearly, its activists presumed they enjoyed widespread social support. Dynamite, the new wonder weapon of revolutionaries elsewhere, hardly seems to have been used by the 'masked Confederacy'.²⁹ Violence frequently had the quality of public performance: it was meant to be witnessed. Above all, and not at all coincidentally, it pressed back into service the chief instruments of social control of the

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²² Fellman, Michael, *In the Name of God and Country: Reconsidering Terrorism in American History* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 97-142.

²³ Foner, Eric, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, Harper Perennial, 1988, 2014), pp. 425-459, 550-1, 558-562, 569-574, 582.

²⁴ Sprinzak, Ehud. "Right-Wing Terrorism in a Comparative Perspective: The Case of Split Delegitimation," in Tore Bjørgo, ed., *Terror from the Extreme Right* (London, Frank Cass, 1995), p.32, Emphasis in original.

²⁵ Fellman, Michael, *In the Name of God and Country: Reconsidering Terrorism in American History* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2010), p. 109.

²⁶ Horowitz, Donald, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001), p. 1.

²⁷ Foner, Eric, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, Harper Perennial, 1988, 2014), p. 427.

²⁸ Dray, Philip, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown* (New York, Penguin Random House, 2003), pp. 36-37, 42.

²⁹ Dray, Philip, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, (New York, Penguin Random House, 2003), p. 45.

former slave regime.³⁰ As has been astutely commented, “the white terror utilized nearly every weapon available, but its favourite was the bullwhip.”³¹ Display was crucial: “mutilated carcasses hanging from trees, lying in the middle of city streets, or dotting country roads served as emblems and warnings of the fundamental meaning of white power”.³² Such displays, like the whippings, parades, and torchlight processions that flourished with them, served as ‘ocular proofs’ of dominance.³³

Thus, the grand achievement of the KKK terror was to help resurrect a racial caste system that was robust enough to last nearly another hundred years. A secondary achievement was to evolve in form until white supremacist violence came to seem—to many in white communities—as a ‘natural’ tool of policing rather than politics. By the 1880s, night rides had yielded to a new ‘institution’: lynching.³⁴ A snapshot estimate: between 1880 and 1930, 3,943 persons were victims of lynching in the USA. Most were male. Of these 3,943, no less than 3,220 were Afro-American.³⁵ By another broadly convergent estimate, 88% of lynchings took place in the eleven states of the ex-Confederacy.³⁶ One survey of lynchings between 1895 and 1905 has found 97% of victims were male and that 79% were Afro-Americans.³⁷

Although officially condemned at both state and federal levels, rightist violence here thus evolved into a parodic imitation of official traditions of ritualised execution: a truly baroque form of barbarism. In the half century that followed the end of the Civil War in 1865, the abdication of the federal state allowed the hit-and-run tactics to develop into spectacular carnivals of cruelty. No less than 15,000 bystanders turned out to enjoy the public dismemberment and incineration of the teenage Jessie Washington at Waco, Texas in 1916.³⁸

The Far-Right and the ‘High Route’ to Power post-1918

That the First World War is a watershed in the history of political violence is clear enough. Yet *how* it moulded the actual practice of violence is surprisingly under-explored: analysis has tended to hover at the broad overview level of surveying the widespread ‘cultures of defeat’ or ‘brutalisation’ that followed in its wake.³⁹ Still, some generalisations can usefully be offered as to how such experiences moulded the more limited, but persistent and pervasive, backwash of violence that followed across Europe in the wake of ‘total war’. Here it is possible to discern an emerging bifurcation between

³⁰ Foner, Eric, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, Harper Perennial, 1988, 2014), pp. 430-432.

³¹ Zuczek, Richard, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Reconstruction Era* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 2006), Vol. II, p.689.

³² Fellman, Michael, *In the Name of God and Country: Reconsidering Terrorism in American History* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2010), p. 117.

³³ Quoted in: Fellman, Michael, *In the Name of God and Country: Reconsidering Terrorism in American History* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2010), p. 130.

³⁴ Dray, Philip, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, (New York, Penguin Random House, 2003), p. 47.

³⁵ Krugler, David, *1919: The Year of Racial Violence: How African Americans Fought Back* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 9.

³⁶ Cook, Robert, *Sweet Land of Liberty? The African-American Struggle for Civil Rights in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York, Longman, 1998), p. 27.

³⁷ Buckser, Andrew. “Lynching as Ritual in the American South”, *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 37, *The Politics of Identity and Difference* (1992), p. 14.

³⁸ Dray, Philip, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, (New York, Penguin Random House, 2003), pp. 215-219; SoRelle, James. ‘The “Waco Horror”: the Lynching of Jesse Washington’, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 86, No. 4 (April 1983), p. 527, n 21.

³⁹ Gerwarth, Robert, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War failed to end, 1917-1923* (London, Penguin, 2017); Schivelbusch, Wolfgang, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery* (New York, Picador, 2004).

elitist and mass action strategies. In short, on the far-right, both ‘high’ and ‘low’ roads towards taking power were explored. It is worth considering each school of tactics in turn.

The Great War created a cascade of coups across Europe. To be sure, this was hardly an *exclusively* right-wing phenomenon (as the Bolshevik template of 1917 bore witness)—but they were *mainly* rightist. Portugal saw a right-wing coup in 1926. So, too, did Spain in both 1923 and 1936: in the latter case metastasizing into a prolonged civil war. One by one, the Baltic states “produced single-party, anti-Communist dictatorships dominated by the army and the big landowners”. First, in Lithuania (1926), then in Latvia (1934), and Estonia (1935). Hungary went much the same way (in 1919), as did Bulgaria (1923). Royalist coups became something of a Balkan speciality: in Yugoslavia (1929), Bulgaria (1935), and Romania (1938).⁴⁰

Such elitist tactics were notably less successful across Central and Western Europe. Here major states proved more resilient to coups. Certainly, this was not for lack of trying—especially in Germany where attempts from the right came thick and fast between 1918 and 1923.⁴¹ In general, the level of competence was not impressive. In the 1920 Kapp putsch, for instance, military leaders refused to break into the bank vaults to pay their own men (‘a German officer could not appear in the guise of a safe-cracker’).⁴² Both before and after taking power in Germany, the Nazis, in particular, proved incompetent technicians of the coup: their attempts in Munich (1923) and Vienna (1934) and Memel (1934) were all fiascos.⁴³ Where fascists did take over major states—in Italy (1922) and Germany (1933)—it was essentially by elite invitation.⁴⁴

Weimar Germany also saw the first emergence of a more organised right-wing underground: the Organisation Consul. With considerable quasi-official support and toleration, this shadowy outfit embarked on a professional campaign of high-level assassination attempts—most notably, the successful assassinations of finance minister Mathias Erzberger (26th August 1921) and foreign minister Walther Rathenau (24th June 1922). Erzberger was first wounded then finished off while on the ground; Rathenau was machine-gunned and bombed from a passing car. The Organisation Consul’s aim seems to have been to provoke a general crisis, even a civil war: in effect, they pioneered the concept of ‘strategy of tension’ by which far-right extremists have repeatedly hoped to ride chaos to power.

In this aim, the Organisation Consul over-reached itself. But as technicians of murder, its members were efficient.⁴⁵ Unlike the pre-1914 anarchist and nationalist assassins (who usually shot instinctively at the chest), the killers from the Right often used the clinical headshot.⁴⁶ Even a freelancer such as Count Anton Arco-Valley made sure of killing the

⁴⁰ Overy, Richard, *The Interwar Crisis* (London, Longman, 1994), pp. 56-9.

⁴¹ Kapp Putsch (12-17 March 1920); Buchrucker Putsch (1 October 1923), Hitler Putsch (8-9 November 1923). See: Diehl, James, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (London, Indiana University Press, 1977), pp. 67-74, 140-1, 150. Also: Malaparte, Curzio (transl. J. Bertrand), *Technique du Coup d’Etat* (Paris, Grasset, 1931), pp.143-156; Overy, Richard, *The Interwar Crisis* (London, Longman, 1994), pp. 58-59.

⁴² Wasserstein, Bernard, *The Secret Lives of Trebitsch Lincoln* (London, Harmondsworth, 1988, 1989), p. 182.

⁴³ World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, *Das Braune Netz: wie Hitlers Agenten im Auslande arbeiten und den Krieg vorbereiten* (Paris, Editions du Carrefour, 1935), pp. 183, 268; Anonymous (transl. Johann Messinger), *The Death of Dollfuss: An Official History of the Revolt of July, 1934, in Austria* (London, Archer, 1935), pp. 116-139.

⁴⁴ Bosworth, Richard, *Mussolini’s Italy: Life under the Dictatorship, 1915-1945* (London, Penguin, 2006), pp. 180-182; Finer, Samuel, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 1962, 2006), p. 93; Turner, Henry, *Hitler’s Thirty Days to Power: January 1933* (London, Bloomsbury, 1996).

⁴⁵ Sabrow, Martin, *Der Rathenaumord: Rekonstruktion einer Verschwörung gegen die Republik von Weimar* (Oldenbourg, 1994), pp. 148-9, 155, 164.

⁴⁶ Delmer, Sefton, *Weimar Germany* (London, Macdonald and Co., 1972), p. 37 (death of Liebknecht); Gurganus, Albert, Kurt Eisner: *A Modern Life* (New York, Ann Arbor, 2018), p. 424 (death of Eisner); Hofmann, Ulrike. “Fememorde”, *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns* available at: <https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Fememorde> (murder

President of the Republic of Bavaria, Kurt Eisner, by blowing away the back of his skull (21st February 1919).⁴⁷

An even more ambitious attempt at right-wing conspiracy was built in France: the *Organisation Secrète d'Action Révolutionnaire Nationale* (OSARN)—far better known by its nickname, the ‘Cagoule’ (in mockery of the hoods its members were supposed to wear to clandestine meetings). The Cagouards built a strikingly well-resourced Rightist ‘counter-state’ that briefly looked like it might threaten the existence of the Third Republic in November 1937. By 19 November 1937 it was reported that “guards at strategic points in Paris have been strengthened, and orders have been given that strangers entering Government buildings who do not stop after being called upon twice to do so are to be shot”.⁴⁸

Despite generous backing from Italian fascism, the achievements of the Cagouards were distinctly modest. In all, they conducted a handful of assassinations against exiled opponents of Italian fascism and suspected internal traitors; as well as sabotage of clandestine efforts to aid the Spanish Republicans; and a couple of ‘false-flag’ bombings of major businesses that it hoped would be blamed upon Communists. Again, the Cagouards seem more or less instinctively to have turned to a ‘strategy of tension’ approach. As the scale of its enormous arms-dumps, network of private prisons, and experiments with bacterial weapons demonstrated, they could hardly be said to have lacked ambition. In the end, though, it met much the same fate as the Organisation Consul had done in Germany; when the full force of the state’s investigative and repressive machine was turned on it, it quickly folded.⁴⁹

Italian support for the Cagouards highlights another ominous evolution of the period: the development of terror as an export industry. What today would be termed ‘state sponsored terrorism’ was essentially invented in Europe in the mid-1930s (rather than being, as so often implied, a by-product of the Cold War and the Middle East).⁵⁰ As so often, Italian fascism blazed a trail that Nazism later followed. As well as the Cagouards, Italian fascist sponsorship enabled the bombing campaigns of its proxies in the Croatian *Ustashe* (‘insurgents’) against Yugoslavia from 1931 onwards. More tightly directed, Nazi Germany employed cellular armed groups against neighbouring countries, most prominently in Austria (1933-34) and Poland (1939).⁵¹

Several broad observations can be offered here. First, at least in the eyes of their ultimate sponsors, these were essentially speculative and opportunistic expeditions— their aim being, in the words of an Austrian Nazi planning document from 1931, “to

.....
of Wilhelm Hörnlein, 31 October 1921). Accessed on: 12 July 2019. Also: Sabrow, Martin, *Der Rathenaumord: Rekonstruktion einer Verschwörung gegen die Republik von Weimar* (Oldenbourg, 1994), p. 19 (death of Erzberger); Bourdrel, Philippe, *La Cagoule* (Paris, Marabout, 1970), p. 225 (Maurice Juif, killed February 1937).

⁴⁷ Gurganus, Albert, *Kurt Eisner: A Modern Life* (New York, Ann Arbor, 2018), p. 424 (death of Eisner); Mitchell, Allan, *Revolution in Bavaria, 1918-1919: the Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 272.

⁴⁸ Dundee Evening Telegraph, 19 November 1937.

⁴⁹ Parry, David. ‘Counter Revolution in Conspiracy, 1935-37’ in Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett, eds., *The Right in France: From Revolution to Le Pen* (London, I. B. Tauris, 2003), pp. 161-182.

⁵⁰ Byman, Daniel, *Deadly connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1-2; Rapoport, David, “The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 11,” in Charles Kegley ed., *The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls* (New Jersey, 2003), p. 48.

⁵¹ Rothschild, Joseph, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 1974, 1990), pp. 245-6; Bourdrel, Philippe, *La Cagoule* (Paris, Marabout, 1970), p. 65; Parry, David. “Counter Revolution in Conspiracy, 1935-37” in in Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett, eds., *The Right in France: From Revolution to Le Pen* (London, I. B. Tauris, 2003), pp. 161-182.

increase the emotional turbulence until conditions are ripe for ‘everything’.⁵² Highlights (if such they may be called) were the successful assassinations of two European premiers—King Alexander I of Yugoslavia (1934) and Chancellor Dollfuss of Austria (1934)—and a rash of unsuccessful coup attempts or plans that signally failed to deliver instant regime change in Lithuania, Memel, and Austria.⁵³ Secondly, these bombing campaigns were inexorably drawn towards international transport nodes and routes. A key signature tactic here was the bombing of international train services, including the prestigious Orient Express.⁵⁴ As early as 1931, the Yugoslav authorities had been forced to make international travellers disembark at their frontier and re-board a new train, rather than allow through traffic.⁵⁵ Thirdly, the means of destruction made available to these bombers from state arsenals were truly enormous: such groups often seem to have had more arms than they were able to use easily.⁵⁶ Indeed, when the French authorities raided a Cagoulard hideout at Villejuif in Paris in 1938 they uncovered a dump of at least 3,000 grenades: the resulting explosion blew 14 policemen into fragments.⁵⁷

Being shrouded in official deniability, these campaigns remain inevitably rather shadowy escapades. But that they were the direct ancestors of many later 20th century similar state-sponsored and transnational horrors is clear enough, even if they have been almost entirely ignored by historians and scholars of terrorism.⁵⁸ Even if fleetingly, they could cause genuine alarm. Official security was tightened notably across capital cities and major international transport routes.⁵⁹ Such campaigns killed relatively few civilians at least before 1939: and it seems quite deliberately so. As with street fighting, their sponsors here proved themselves adept at calibrating violence with half an eye to wider audiences that they did not wish to alienate irrevocably.⁶⁰ State-sponsored terror as practiced by fascist regimes showed some finesse and restraint, indeed.⁶¹ But definite precedents had now been laid down: and with them a distinctly ominous new chapter in international relations. The bomb attack at Tarnów railway station in southern Poland on the night of 28 August 1939 (that killed 22 civilians) also pointed the way towards more ambitious committed by neo-fascists in the later 20th century.⁶²

⁵²Linz secret conference, 6 December 1932, quoted in: Botz, Gerhard. “Political Violence, its Forms and Strategies in the First Austrian Republic” in Wolfgang Mommsen and Gerhard Hirschfeld eds., *Social Protest, Violence and Terror in 19th and 20th Century Europe* (London, Macmillan Press, 1982), p. 321.

⁵³Seton-Watson, Robert. “King Alexander I’s Assassination: Its Background and Effects”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Jan-Feb 1935, pp. 20-42.; World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, *Das Braune Netz: wie Hitlers Agenten im Auslande arbeiten und den Krieg vorbereiten* (Paris, Editions du Carrefour, 1935), pp. 183, 268.

⁵⁴Chaliand, Gerard and Arnaud Blim, *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al-Qaeda* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007), p. 191 (Orient Express). For details on Yugoslav train bombings see: *Daily Herald*, 6 January 1931; *Dundee Courier*, 4 August 1931; *Leeds Mercury*, 23 January 1934; *Larne Times*, 27 January 1934; *The Scotsman*, 6 June 1934. For Austria: *The Scotsman*, 11 June 1934; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 11 June 1934; *The Scotsman*, 15 June 1934; Anonymous, *The Death of Dollfuss: An Official History of the Revolt of July, 1934*, in Austria (London, Federal Commissioner for Auxiliary Forces, 1935), pp. 35-6, 85.

⁵⁵*Dundee Courier*, 4 August 1931.

⁵⁶Anonymous, *The Death of Dollfuss: An Official History of the Revolt of July, 1934*, in Austria (London, Federal Commissioner for Auxiliary Forces, 1935), pp. 85, 87 [110 hand grenades, 120 stick bombs etc]. Also: Boudrel, Philippe, *La Cagoule* (Paris, Marabout, 1970), pp. 103, 304; Laqueur, Walter, *Terrorism* (London, Abacus, 1977, 1980), p. 142; Brunelle, Gayle and Annette Finley-Croswhite, *Murder in the Métro: Laetitia Toureaux and the Cagoule in 1930s France* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2010), pp. 123-132; Parry, David. ‘Counter Revolution in Conspiracy, 1935-37’ in Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett, eds., *The Right in France: From Revolution to Le Pen* (London, I. B. Tauris, 2003), p. 162.

⁵⁷Boudrel, Philippe, *La Cagoule* (Paris, Marabout, 1970), pp. 266-267.

⁵⁸For a rare exception: Laqueur, Walter, *Terrorism* (London, Abacus, 1977, 1980), p. 20.

⁵⁹Footman, David, *Balkan Holiday* (London, William Heinemann, 1935), p. 284.

⁶⁰Sadkovich, James. “Terrorism in Croatia, 1929-1934”, *East European Quarterly*, XXII, No. 1, March 1988, pp. 61, 75, note 27.

⁶¹Bowyer Bell, John, *Assassin: Theory and Practice of Political Violence* (New Jersey, Transaction, 1979, 2005), pp. 112-115, 143-147 (attempts to kill Trotsky); Ford, Franklin, *Political Murder: From Tyrannicide to Terrorism* (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 269-270. Also: *Irish News*, 26 May 1938 (Ukrainian nationalist killed with time bomb in Rotterdam).

⁶²Pospieszalski, K. “The Bomb Attack at Tarnów and Other Nazi Provocations Before and After the Outbreak of the 1939 War. Did Hitler Want the German Minority to Suffer Losses?”, *Polish Western Affairs*, No. 2, 1986, p. 241.

The Far-Right and the ‘Low’ Route to Power

If the ‘high route’ to power through coups, assassinations, and ‘strategies of tension’ proved too difficult against well-resourced states, the alternative ‘low route’ of mass mobilisation beckoned enticingly. In effect, such strategies depended upon the destabilisation of civil society at the local level rather than the decapitation or take-over of the governmental apparatus. What was new here was the scale of the ambition: before the war, mass demonstrations had been largely the preserve of the Left.⁶³ Now, as Adolf Hitler proclaimed in *Mein Kampf*, new possibilities were opening up:

Only very small groups, by years of sifting, can assume the character of real secret organisations. But the very smallness of such organisations would remove their value for the National Socialist movement. *What we needed and still need were and are not a hundred or two hundred reckless conspirators, but a hundred thousand and a second hundred thousand fighters for our philosophy of life. We should not work in secret conventicles, but in mighty mass demonstrations, and it is not by dagger and poison or pistol that the road can be cleared for the movement, but by the conquest of the streets.*⁶⁴

Where Rightist violence did evolve most dramatically was in the streets. Realising that the forces of law and order were unlikely to use their full force of repression against ‘natural’ allies from the Right, demagogues made public space a central arena for the contestation of power. Despite the rhetoric, in terms of micro-tactics, these confrontations were very far from the continuation of trench warfare by other means. Above all, they were highly intimate: the fist and knuckle-duster ruled. By 1926, indeed, it had become forbidden to carry a walking stick in both Berlin and Hamburg.⁶⁵

Both Italian fascists and Nazi stormtroopers deliberately developed strategies focused upon the ‘conquest of the streets’.⁶⁶ “When the crash came the man who could control the streets would win”, proclaimed the British fascist leader, Sir Oswald Mosley.⁶⁷ As has been insightfully pointed out in Europe, “what was distinct about these new movements was that they appeared *after* a century in which national armies had become the norm and modern police formations, penal codes and prisons had helped to firmly establish a largely unchallenged monopoly of force in the hands of the state.”⁶⁸

At the same time, it is important to note that the Weimar Republic in particular was not spared some classically ‘terroristic’ bombing attacks—albeit, most fairly amateur in execution. A campaign of minor bombings targeted eight public buildings over a two-month period in 1929.⁶⁹ A series of limited bombings also occurred across the Palatinate region of south-west Germany from the summer of 1931 into the spring of 1932; and a brief (but far more intense) ‘terror campaign’ was launched from 6-9 August 1932 by the Nazi stormtroopers or *Sturm Abteilung* (SA) across eastern German cities.⁷⁰ Shooting incidents also featured: such as on 23 November 1930 when 15 SA men shot up a

⁶³ Diehl, James, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (London, Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 111.

⁶⁴ Hitler, Adolf, *Mein Kampf* (London, Pimlico 1969, 1992), p. 494. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁵ Diehl, James, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (London, Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 194.

⁶⁶ Mann, Michael, *Fascists* (Cambridge, 2004, 2006), p. 174; Siemens, Daniel, *Stormtroopers: A New History of Hitler’s Brownshirts* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017), p. 39.

⁶⁷ Quoted in: Brendon, Piers, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (London, Pimlico, 2001), p. 170.

⁶⁸ Gerwarth, Robert and J. Horne John, eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 2.

⁶⁹ *Larne Times*, 7 September 1929 [Reichstag bomb with mention of other bombings]. Also, for a slightly later hoax: *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 1 April 1930 [fake bomb at Berlin Town Hall].

⁷⁰ Siemens, Daniel, *Stormtroopers: A New History of Hitler’s Brownshirts* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017), pp. xv, 51; Bessel, Richard, *Political Violence and the rise of Nazism: The Stormtroopers in Eastern Germany* (New Haven, Yale University Press), pp. 88-91.

workers' club at Eden Palast, Charlottenburg in Berlin.⁷¹ In general, though, Laqueur is correct to the extent that these rampages were very much a *secondary* feature of this Brownshirt terror. Indeed, one is left with an impression of a rather disorganized terror, largely spontaneous—and using whatever hand-grenades and handguns happened to be to hand.

Yet such reckless attacks seem to have received little encouragement from above, even when they were not explicitly disowned.⁷² 'The "street," as Goebbels saw it, was the decisive place in which policy was made.'⁷³ Here the important thing for the Nazi leadership was *not* to attack the state head on; nor to rely on such dramatic means of destabilization (such as bombing) that the state could not afford to ignore. Instead, smaller scale turbulence was kept constantly bubbling: in July 1932, no less than 400 street battles took place in Berlin alone.⁷⁴ And yet, once a Nazi dictatorship had been established and consolidated in 1933-34, Hitler swiftly retired his praetorian guard of street thugs.

Such violence now spread far and fast in its reach—driven by the wider destabilisations wrought by the war, of course, but also in reflection of the growth of motorized society. These developments benefitted those with more access to motor vehicles: the Right. Those with easiest access to these—still expensive—means of transport were best placed to use them most effectively. Mobile terror thus heavily favoured the privileged. So long as motorised swarm tactics depended upon ready access to private car owners, the Right with its conservative friends remained disproportionately advantaged.

Motor transport offered massive tactical advantages. Such novel swarm manoeuvres were developed most fully by the Italian fascists across northern Italy: they "adopted tactics of rapid incursions of squads who had arrived from other provinces, in this way making it impossible, or at least very difficult, to identify those responsible for the aggression".⁷⁵ Fascists

roared around the countryside, terrorising anyone who was, in their opinion, might be, socialist. They did so with impunity. 'The *carabinieri* travel around with them in their lorries... sing their hymns and eat and drink with them,' reported a priest. A lot of these lorries were provided by the army, many high-ranking officers being kindly disposed towards the squads.⁷⁶

Yet if Italy showcased such tactics at their most effective, by the early 1930s cavalcades of reaction were seen across Europe. In France, they were a speciality of the nationalist group Croix de Feu whose 'penchant for motorised mobilisations, in which a motorcade of thousands of members would descend on a location kept secret until the last minute, raised suspicion that the league was preparing an attempt on power'.⁷⁷ In Germany, the

⁷¹ Liang, His-Huey, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1970), p. 110.

⁷² Siemens, Daniel, *Stormtroopers: A New History of Hitler's Brownshirts* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017), pp. 51-2.

⁷³ Laqueur, Walter, *Terrorism* (London, Abacus, 1977, 1980), p. 93.

⁷⁴ Richie, Alexandra, *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (London, Harper Collins, 1999), pp. 400-401.

⁷⁵ Gentile, Emilio. "Paramilitary Violence in Italy: The Rationale of Fascism and the Origins of Totalitarianism", in Robert Gerwarth and John Horne eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, 2013), p. 97.

⁷⁶ Hughes-Hallett, Lucy, *The Pike. Gabriele D'Annunzio: Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War* (London, Fourth Estate, 2013), p. 578. Also: R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Fascist Dictatorship, 1915-1945* (New York, 2005, 2007), pp. 127-128.

⁷⁷ Jenkins, Brian and Chris Millington, *France and Fascism: February 1934 and the Dynamics of Political Crisis* (London, 2015, 2016), p. 153.

Nazi storm troopers were very well organised in forming “subsections that pooled militants who possessed motorcycles and private cars”.⁷⁸

If motor transport allowed the rapid concentration of friendly forces, it also facilitated the removal of opponents. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the emergence of the quintessential 20th century death squad without mass ownership of motor cars. Weimar Germany can claim the dubious honour of helping lead the way here. On the night of 15-16 January 1919, Marxist Rosa Luxemburg and socialist Karl Liebknecht were both separately abducted by car from the Eden Hotel in Berlin—and both separately murdered. The killings had an improvised, rather than ritualistic, quality.⁷⁹ But an ominous template quickly emerged. By the autumn of 1920, indeed, the death squad operating out of the Bavarian Civil Guard had worked out a standard operating procedure: “in several instances, vehicles traced to the Business Affairs Division were seen at times and in places where shots were heard or bodies were found”.⁸⁰ A notable variant was pioneered by the right-wing Lapua movement in Finland. Generally—but not invariably—they preferred not to “kill their opponents but kidnapped them, beat them up, and dropped them over the Russian border”.⁸¹ Again, it was the right that led the way here: although ‘the Red Terror’ during the Spanish Civil War soon took near-identical forms.⁸²

All of these developments had much about them that was genuinely new. Even when drawing upon age-old templates of public humiliation derived from peasant societies, fascists systematised such tactics into a standard template.⁸³ A notorious tactic of Italian fascism, for instance, was the forced administration of castor oil, the laxative ‘golden nectar of nausea’. Effects were explosive: “forced to drink it, helplessly soiling themselves, victims were sickened and grossly humiliated”.⁸⁴ Such methods spread amongst rightist groups: from Italy to the Nazi Stormtroopers, Spanish Blackshirts, and the French *Camelots du Roi* [‘Street-Hawkers of the King’].⁸⁵ But even here, such apparently innovative tactics remained, to some extent, adaptations of much older repertoires. In Europe, then, the market square still remained a key political stage: and the peasants, in turn, a key political constituency. For all the vaunted pretensions to radical transformation, fascist violence partially reflected these enduring social realities.

In the USA, the brutality of industrial disputes also reflected a basic continuity with 19th century traditions: albeit now amplified by the Red Scare. To this period (1919) belong the spectacular lynchings of labour activists: of Frank Little at Butte, Montana (1 August 1917) and of Wesley Everest in Centralia, Washington (11 November 1919).⁸⁶ The latter atrocity – in which Everest was castrated, hanged and shot – has rightly been identified

⁷⁸ Siemens, Daniel, *Stormtroopers: A New History of Hitler’s Brownshirts* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017), pp. 64-65.

⁷⁹ Jones, Mark, *Founding Weimar: Violence and the German Revolution of 1918-1919* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 233-238.

⁸⁰ Brenner, Arthur, “Feme Murder: Paramilitary “Self-Justice” in Weimar Germany” in Bruce Campbell and Arthur Brenner, eds., *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 65.

⁸¹ Laqueur, Walter, *Terrorism* (London, Abacus, 1977, 1980), p. 97.

⁸² Ruiz, Julius, *The ‘Red Terror’ and the Spanish Civil War: Revolutionary Violence in Madrid* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 134.

⁸³ Siemens, *Stormtroopers*, p. 126.

⁸⁴ Hughes-Hallett, Lucy, *The Pike. Gabriele D’Annunzio: Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War* (London, Fourth Estate, 2013), p. 524.

⁸⁵ Ebner, Michael, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 8-9, 32; Rees, Laurence, *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (London, BBC, 1997, 1998), p. 71; Weber, Eugen, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 142; Richards, Michael, *After the Civil War: Making Memory and Remaking Spain since 1936* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 61; Brendon, Piers, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (London, Pimlico, 2001), p. 317.

⁸⁶ Hofstadter, Richard and Michael Wallace, eds., *American Violence: A Documentary History* (New York, Knopf, 1971), pp. 354-356.

as the climax of three years of vigilante terror against the International Workers of the World (IWW) movement.⁸⁷ But even the deployment of regular military and police in labour disputes continued to lead to notably high death tolls over the coming decades: 13 in the national cotton strikes (1934), 15 in the Little Steel Strike (1937) and 10 during the Republic Steel Strike (also 1937).⁸⁸

A more significant cultural shift, however, was the general decline in spectacle lynching. Here the general trajectory is clear enough: ‘the incidence of lynching declined after its peak in 1892, though it continued to claim roughly twenty-five black victims a year through the 1920s, and roughly ten black victims a year through the 1930s’.⁸⁹ A key driver behind this shift was an enhanced, if still uneven, general desire on the part of US law enforcement agencies to assert the prerogatives of their states against freelance vigilantes. According to one estimate by the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), in the decade before 1920 only 39% of attempted lynchings were prevented. This proportion rose to 77% in the 1920s; and indeed reached 84% in the 1930s.⁹⁰ Radio-dispatched state patrols assisted greatly here.⁹¹ Already ebbing by the eve of the Second World War, such exhibition killings effectively disappeared in its immediate aftermath.⁹²

Far-Right Violence in the Shadow of Catastrophe, post-1945

Broadly speaking, in Europe the post-1945 environment proved notably inhospitable for ambitious experiments in Rightist violence. With hindsight, one can see that the key change was the general retreat in official sympathy and support that followed the defeat of Nazism. Admittedly, right-wing dictatorships still dominated much of southern Europe until the 1970s. Even they were less proudly murderous than in the pre-war era. Of course, much of the machinery of government remained authoritarian by instinct: notably, police forces. But only in special circumstances were organised right-wing terror groups now able to burrow into the heart of the state to exploit its resources directly. Collapsing French rule in Algeria sparked the emergence of the well-resourced Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS) who briefly combined an obsession with assassinating De Gaulle with causing mass casualty mayhem in Algeria during 1961-2.⁹³ But the OAS strategy of tension, however spectacular, remained a fleeting episode.

Rightist violence thus remained largely amateur and semi-spontaneous for a generation. Compared to the aftermath of the First World War, veterans kept a conspicuously low political profile. It is true that the Nazi Werewolf movement of underground resistance was no myth. But its activities after the capitulation of the Third Reich rarely escalated beyond small-scale attempts at sabotage and occasional bombings of courts involved in the de-Nazification processes.⁹⁴ Neither did the early attempts by pan-German extremists in South Tyrol: here the group organised by Dr. Burger only managed two

⁸⁷ Renshaw, Patrick, *The Wobblies: The Story of Syndicalism in the United States* (London, Eyre and Spottiswood, 1967), pp. 208, 236.

⁸⁸ Hofstadter, Richard. “Reflections,” in Richard Hofstadter and Michael Wallace, eds., *American Violence: A Documentary History* (New York, Knopf, 1971), p. 19.

⁸⁹ Wexler, Laura, *Fire in a Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching in America* (New York, Scribner, 2003), p. 205.

⁹⁰ Tolnay, Stewart, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynching, 1882-1930* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 203.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Wexler, Laura, *Fire in a Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching in America* (New York, Scribner, 2003), p. 76.

⁹³ For the most detailed account of the OAS, see: Fleury, Georges, *Histoire secrète de l’O.A.S.* (Paris, Grasset, 2002).

⁹⁴ Biddiscombe, Perry, *The Last Nazis: SS Werewolf Guerrilla Resistance in Europe 1944-47* (Stroud, Tempus, 2004), pp. 193-231.

bomb attacks against electricity pylons in 1963.⁹⁵ A handful of neo-fascist bombings occurred in Italy: including a small bomb outside parliament upon the anniversary of the 1922 March of Rome.⁹⁶ Still, these efforts remained very limited and low-casualty affairs compared to the later horrors that were to affect Italy after 1969.

Lone assassins now made a limited re-appearance on the Right—a reversal of interwar trends where they had largely been a leftist (or at least, anti-Nazi) phenomenon. An early example was the non-fatal shooting of Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communist Party, as he left the Italian parliament on 14 July 1948: an event that sparked widespread unrest and the spectre of renewed civil war. His would-be killer was a 25-year-old student, Antonio Pallante: known in right-wing circles, but apparently acting alone. A copy of *Mein Kampf* was found in his hotel room. He declared he had wanted to remove Togliatti as ‘an agent of a foreign power, [who] is impeding the rebirth of the Fatherland’.⁹⁷

By contrast, in the USA, assassination tactics were much more consistently applied. Between 1954 and 1968, “at least forty-four blacks and whites were murdered in pursuit of civil rights”.⁹⁸ Racist assumptions often funnelled white supremacist violence towards decapitation strategies: the guiding assumption here was that if rabble-rousers and outsiders were removed, the black masses would become satisfactorily docile once more. Effectively, this was the old strategy of the 1870s reheated—intimidating blacks into not exercising their constitutional rights.⁹⁹ Key leaders, activists, and organizing centres such as community churches thus became the main targets of lethal violence, along with ‘uppity blacks’ who had moved into predominantly white lower middle-class neighbourhoods: a pattern long seen in the northern cities, but one which now spread to the south.¹⁰⁰

Along with older traditions of dumping bodies in waterways, a new feature of white supremacist violence in the era of Civil Rights was its heavy reliance on use of explosives for hit-and-run attacks. Reconstruction terror of the 1870s had not used dynamite bombings much (if at all): “its favourite [weapon] was the bullwhip”.¹⁰¹ Now such bombings became *the* signature tactic of extremist resistance to change. Targeted assassinations against ‘uppity’ activist members of the black community were combined with a more general wave of intimidation bombings—usually at night—against black homes and churches, Catholic churches, and Jewish synagogues.¹⁰² Between 1 January 1956 and 1 June 1963, 138 dynamite bombings were broadly attributed to the Klan across the south: generally to small ‘inner groups’ so that official involvement could be denied.

⁹⁵ Koehler, Daniel, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century: the ‘National Socialist Underground’ and the History of Terror from the Far-Right in Germany* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2017), pp. 201-2.

⁹⁶ Gloucester Citizen, 29 October 1946.

⁹⁷ Behan, Tom, *The Italian Resistance: Fascists, Guerrillas and the Allies* (London, Pluto Press, 2009), p. 129.

⁹⁸ Whitfield, Stephen, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (New York, John Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 101.

⁹⁹ Foner, Eric, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, Harper Perennial, 1988, 2014), pp. 558-562, 574; Hewitt, Christopher, *Understanding Terrorism in America: From the Klan to Al Qaeda* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2003), p. 62.

¹⁰⁰ Krugler, David, *1919: The Year of Racial Violence: How African Americans Fought Back* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 102-3. Also: Birmingham Daily Post, 6, 13 October 1958, 20 April 1960, 17 February, 5 October 1964; Lancashire Evening Post, 10 January 1957; Shields Daily News, 10 September 1957; Northern Daily Mail, 28 April 1958; Aberdeen Evening Express, 10 February 1960; Coventry Evening Telegraph, 17 January 1962 and 25 September 1963; Liverpool Daily Echo, 25 September 1963, Aberdeen Evening Express, 30 September 1963, 24 September 1964.

¹⁰¹ Zuczek, Richard, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Reconstruction Era* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 2006), Vol. II, p. 689.

¹⁰² Wade, Wyn Craig, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 294-295. Also: Kennedy, Stetson, *I rode with the Ku Klux Klan* (London, Arco Publishers, 1954), pp. 219, 230-231.

Such attacks generally stopped short of mass carnage: but there were exceptions. Notoriously, the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham on 15th September 1963 that killed four children seemed to herald just such an escalation. “We knew the rules had changed” writes Carolyn Maull McKinstry of this, and the subsequent bombings: “Birmingham residents had once believed Klan bombs were meant only to intimidate people, not kill people. The shrapnel bomb changed all that”.¹⁰³ Overall, though, warnings also remained common: while explosions were often timed for the middle of the night, and usually targeted key local leaders and activists.¹⁰⁴

Despite the visceral hostility to de-segregation amongst southern governing elites, racist violence remained strikingly covert. Death squads—private-police partnerships that pursued ‘murder with deniability’—did appear on the fringes of the ‘massive resistance’ movement: the well-known ‘disappearance’ of the three civil rights workers in the Mississippi delta in 1964 was in this tradition.¹⁰⁵ A series of explosion at the University of Alabama was also traced to National Guardsmen nominally entrusted with the responsibility of desegregating higher education.¹⁰⁶ Even here, though, such resistance remained essentially clandestine: a return, in outline terms, to the white supremacist tactics of a century earlier: the last time that federal government had taken the responsibility of controlling racist violence at least half-seriously.

Far-Right Violence and the Legacy of 1968

1968 and its aftermath was recognised by contemporaries as a watershed in the evolution of left-wing violence.¹⁰⁷ Yet its significance for right-wing violence has been much less considered. In many ways, it does not constitute such an obvious break-point on the right. Disoriented by the rise of the New Left on the streets, the extreme right found itself in disarray. Despite assistance from members of the Rome Boxing Academy, neo-fascist activists got much of the worst of the street fighting against left-wing students in Rome (March 1968).¹⁰⁸ A very few reached for the gun. Here Josef Bacchmann—who shot the German student leader Rudi Dutschke in West Berlin (11 April 1968)—seems to have been a classic lone assassin: essentially no different to Raoul Villain in 1914.

In general, there seems to have been a striking lack of tactical contagion from left to right. With the notable exception of Croatian extremists, the aircraft ‘hijacking carnival’ of the 1970s was not a right-wing phenomenon. Mass hostage taking was also largely absent—although in the exceptionally tense atmosphere that followed the failed coup in Spain in 1981, right-wing extremists took 269 hostages in a bank in Barcelona.¹⁰⁹ Nor were there any right-wing equivalents of the Schleyer (German industrialist, 1977) and Moro (Italian statesman, 1978) kidnapping crises.

¹⁰³ McKinstry, Carolyn, *While the World Watched* (Carol Stream, Illinois, Tyndale House, 2011), p. 171; Greene, Melissa, *The Temple Bombing* (New York, Fawcett Columbine, 1996), pp. 268-269.

¹⁰⁴ Greene, Melissa, *The Temple Bombing* (New York, Fawcett Columbine, 1996), pp. 1-2.

¹⁰⁵ Campbell, Bruce, “Death Squads: Definition, Problems and Historical Context” in Bruce Campbell and Arthur Brenner, eds., *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 3-7. Skolnick, Jerome, *The Politics of Protest* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1969), pp. 221-222.

¹⁰⁶ *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 21 December 1963.

¹⁰⁷ Hofstadter, Richard, “Reflections,” in Richard Hofstadter and Michael Wallace, eds., *American Violence: A Documentary History* (New York, Knopf, 1971).

¹⁰⁸ A. Mammone, *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, 2019), p. 129.

¹⁰⁹ Wilkinson, Paul, *The New Fascists* (Pan Books, London, 1983), p. 135.

And yet with hindsight, it is also clear that the period saw more innovation in right-wing violence than might be apparent. If hippy countercultures had exemplified the values of anti-militarism, the rise of the skinhead scene across Western Europe represented an enduring reaction to this in its turn. As early as spring 1970, ‘Paki-bashing’ had emerged as a recurrent phenomenon across East London.¹¹⁰ Even if apparently only lightly politicised and loosely organised for sustained action, here was a model for ‘control’ terror against immigrant communities whose full potential would only become apparent over time. Unlike Jules Guérin’s rent-a-mob, such exuberant brutality was both authentic and ‘spontaneous’—if that adjective can be appropriately applied to a pattern of violence that was often tightly structured by the sacred dictates of the football calendar. Soccer hooligans were the new weekend warriors of consumer society: Lords of Excess who tended to riot within tightly defined spaces and schedules, but whose skills as technicians of violence made them widely useful to the far-right.¹¹¹

Even more ominous—because less predictable and far better armed—was the revival of right-wing extremism in the USA in these decades. Whilst old-style clandestine conspiracies on KKK lines had been roundly defeated by the 1970s, to some extent this represented a Pyrrhic victory for the federal authorities. What Richard Hofstadter had once famously called ‘the paranoid style’ to American politics merely burst forth in myriad groups and movements: as decentralised as the despised liberal counter-culture it was reacting against.¹¹² Above all, the notion that a Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG) was taking control of ordinary Americans’ lives proved a strikingly effective formula for melding chauvinist prejudice with libertarian anti-statism. Here, for those with eyes, to see was the shape of future far-right armed struggle: tooled up, hyper-individualistic, and paranoid.

What, however, was clearer at the time was the emergence of mass atrocity campaigns from the Right for which there were relatively few historical precedents. In general, the neo-fascist movements of the period were less resilient than either their nationalist or far-left counterparts. But while they lasted, they could plan—and occasionally effect rather impressive amounts of horror. The early 1980s saw a particular surge in such incidents. Most infamously, the bombing of the Oktoberfest in Munich in 1980 killed 13 and wounded 211.¹¹³ A foiled plan to bomb the Notting Hill Carnival in London the following summer would, presumably, have led to comparable carnage.¹¹⁴

Italian conditions fostered many of the worst horrors of these decades. Supported by the CIA and elements within the Italian state, the so-called Gladio cells had early embraced rampant escalation. The bombing at the *Bianca Nazionale dell’Agricoltura* in the Piazza Fontana, Milan (12 December 1969) killed seventeen: six died at Brescia (28 May 1974); another 12 in a train bombing near Bologna a few months later. In a league of its own, the bombing of Bologna railway station killed 85 and wounded 240 (2 August 1980).¹¹⁵

Arguably, the horror of this last ‘strategy of tension’ experiment looked both forward and back. Such demonstrative carnage anticipated a wider turn to a ‘New Terrorism’ in the 1990s. Certainly, impersonal slaughter tactics were a long way from the fascist

¹¹⁰ Leech, Kenneth, *Brick Lane 1978: the Events and their Significance* (Stepney books, London, 1980, 1994), p. 7.

¹¹¹ Buford, Bill, *Among the Thugs* (London, Mandarin, 1990, 1992), p. 286.

¹¹² Hofstadter, Richard, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (London, Cape, 1966).

¹¹³ Koehler, Daniel, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century: the ‘National Socialist Underground’ and the history of terror from the Far Right in Germany* (Abingdon, Routledge 2017), pp. 79-80. Also: Hoffman, Bruce. “Right-Wing Terrorism in Europe”, *RAND*, (March 1982), pp. 7-8.

¹¹⁴ Wilkinson, Paul, *The New Fascists* (Pan Books, London, 1983), p. 202.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

strutting and parading of the early 1920s. And yet its very premise—that through general crisis the road to authoritarian government could be cleared—looked, in time, more and more antique. Across both Western Europe and America, the future of the far-right was to be firmly anti-statist.

At the ‘End of History’: the violent Far-Right in the aftermath of the Cold War

Right-wing violence conducted by skinheads, gangs, and crowds seemed to have last peaked notably in the early 1990s. All in all, in one single two-year period during the early 1990s, no less than 1,499 “extreme right-wing-motivated arson attacks were counted by the German authorities”.¹¹⁶ Here the political significance of the Molotov Cocktail deserves some passing mention. As the ‘artillery’ of reaction, it was low-tech petrol bombs that were directly responsible for the notorious atrocities that created the national crisis that in turn led to a tightening of Germany’s immigration laws.¹¹⁷

Still, Germany in the early 1990s was in many ways a special case—not least because its troubled reunification bridged different mental and social worlds. In general, the former Soviet bloc (in general) and Russia (in particular) have consistently exhibited levels and lethality of far-right violence far in excess of anything seen further west.¹¹⁸ Across Western Europe, a striking trend has been this general *decline* in the number of deadly incidents under conditions commonly thought to encourage right-wing violence: “increased immigration, enhanced support to radical right parties, Islamist terrorism and booming youth unemployment rates”. Instead, “several annual reports on right-wing violence over the past 10-15 years show low, stable, or decreasing levels of violence”.¹¹⁹

Ravndal usefully sets out several hypotheses as to what might lie behind this process. He notes: the ebbing (or at least evolving) nature of activism—“existing research suggests that ‘keyboard warriors’ operating at the transnational level are less likely to carry out violent attacks than radicalized street gangs operating on the national or local levels”; an apparent general decline in public acceptance of violence (as evidenced by falling homicide rates and the partial disappearance of skinhead sub-cultures); and the electoral success of far-right parties in acting as a ‘safety valve’ for discontent.¹²⁰ What is more clear is the result: a decline in street politics. Recent right-wing disturbances have been both short-lived and notably small by historical standards. The much-hyped ‘Unite the Right’ rally in Charlottesville (August 2017) drew 500 neo-fascists.¹²¹ At their height, the notorious disturbances in Chemnitz (26 August 2018) attracted perhaps 6,000 supporters of the far-right.¹²² By contrast, 60,000 Nazi Stormtroopers had descended on Braunschweig in October 1931: their parade lasted six hours; and was accompanied by widespread violence across working-class districts.¹²³

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¹¹⁶ Koehler, Daniel. “Recent Trends in German Right-Wing Violence and Terrorism: What are the Contextual Factors behind ‘Hive Terrorism’?”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (December 2018), p. 76.

¹¹⁷ Panayi, Panikos. “Racial Violence in the New Germany, 1990-93”, *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Nov. 1994), pp. 265-287. For a longer discussion, see my own: *Killing Strangers: How Political Violence Became Modern* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹¹⁸ Enstad, Johannes Due. “Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Putin’s Russia”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (December, 2018).

¹¹⁹ Ravndal, Jacob Aasland. “Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe; Introducing the RTV Dataset”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 3, 9.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 10-12.

¹²¹ Ruiz, Joe and McCallister Doreen, ‘Events Surrounding White Nationalist Rally in Virginia Turn Fatal’, *The Two-Way*, 12 August 2017.

¹²² *Die Zeit*, 30 August 2018.

¹²³ Siemens, Daniel, *Stormtroopers: A New History of Hitler’s Brownshirts* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017), p. 71.

By the eve of the 21st century, across Western Europe the far-right's enthusiasm for strong government had waned noticeably. At this point, notably, there was an ideological convergence with the 'anarchy of the right' that had begun to flourish in the USA. To borrow Sprinzak's framing, the distance between primary targets (hated communities or minorities) and secondary ones (unsympathetic governments) narrowed. As early as the 1980s, American right-wing extremist Louis Beam had begun to advocate 'leaderless resistance' as a strategy of desperation. His starting point was the recognition of the federal state's impregnability ('the government will not doubt make today's oppressiveness look like grade school work compared to what they have planned in the future').¹²⁴ In many ways Beam merely gave early expression to trends that were likely to gather momentum anyway as the communications revolution accelerated.¹²⁵ Even as the Western state appeared to reach an apotheosis of impregnability at the end of the 20th century, entirely new possibilities for resisting its reach and control were opening up: as the carnage at Oklahoma City demonstrated in 1996.¹²⁶ As a result, strategic double-think has dominated: in which suspicion of an all-powerful state co-existed easily with lurid fantasies of imminent civil war. The rather obvious tension between these two assumptions was rarely acknowledged.

Radically new information-sharing possibilities—including the rise of many-to-many communication—soon emerged with profound implications for the performance of political violence. What the sociologist Manuel Castells has called the 'network society' thus helped transform both the prospects and profile of far-right violence in complex ways.¹²⁷ One key effect of the network society has been the enormous psychological empowerment of murderous individuals: a genuine atomization of mayhem.¹²⁸ As has already been seen, lone assassins have arisen on the Right since at least the late nineteenth century. But this recent 'strong preference for lone-actor or small-cell tactics' is something different. According to one major study, "no less than 54 percent of all 4,420 extreme right-wing violent incidents between 1990 and 2012 in the United States of America were committed by single perpetrators".¹²⁹ Of 91 identifiable right-wing terrorists operating in Germany since 1971, writes Daniel Koehler, "approximately 70 percent are either small cells with 2-3 members, small groups of 4-9 members, or lone-actors".¹³⁰

Unlike the massed paramilitarism of the 1920s and 1930s, then, much of the right-wing violence in the early 21st century seems driven by very small units indeed. As their title indicates, the National Socialist Underground (1999-2011) might lay rhetorical claim to wider Nazi traditions. But their low-key but sustained campaign of serial killing waged against individuals of Turkish descent was clearly an entirely different phenomenon. A long running campaign that set out to terrorise specific communities whilst *avoiding*

¹²⁴ Beam, Louis. "Leaderless Resistance", *The Seditiousist*, No. 12, February 1992, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Pernicone, Nunzio and Fraser Ottanelli, *Assassins Against the Old Order: Italian Anarchist violence in Fin De Siècle Europe* (Champaign, University of Illinois, 2018), p. 159.

¹²⁶ But for more judicious assessments of this gathering threat, see: Hoffman, Bruce, *Inside Terrorism* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 249-252, 261; Koehler, Daniel, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century: the 'National Socialist Underground' and the History of Terror from the Far-Right in Germany* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2017), pp. 114, 181; Kaplan, Jeffrey. "Leaderless Resistance", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 9:3, 1997, pp. 80-95.

¹²⁷ Castells, Manuel, *The Network Society*, Vol. I, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Hoboken, Wiley-Blackwell, 1996, 2010).

¹²⁸ Koehler, Daniel. "Recent Trends in German Right-Wing Violence and Terrorism: What are the Contextual Factors behind "Hive Terrorism"?", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (December 2018), p. 75.

¹²⁹ Perlinger summarised in: Koehler, Daniel. "Recent Trends in German Right-Wing Violence and Terrorism: What are the Contextual Factors behind "Hive Terrorism"?", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (December 2018), p. 75.

¹³⁰ Koehler, Daniel. "Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe: Current Developments and Issues for the Future", *Prism* 6, No. 2 (July 2016), p. 92.

wider publicity was unprecedented. There had been nothing ‘underground’ about the original Nazi movement.¹³¹

A general effect of this organisational shift towards smaller groups and individuals seems to have been to lower the boundaries to a promiscuous borrowing of tactics from across the ideological spectrum. Individualistic improvisation has flourished. Whereas right-wing groups had traditionally been rather reluctant to imitate the repertoire of leftist groups, these new actors have borrowed heavily from the repertoire of Islamist atrocity. Vehicle ramming attacks have been a hybrid Islamist-rightist phenomenon: their sudden rise and even more abrupt fall is arguably better explained by the dramatic ‘contagion effects’ peculiar to the network society rather than to ideological influences.¹³²

Finally, and as a related point, the network society lavishly rewards attention-seekers who demonstrate genuine eye-catching creativity. Of course, this is a broad tendency whose influence is felt widely right across society, but it has particular implications for the practice of political violence (in general) and for rightist terror (in particular). As professional technicians of instability, the leading right-wing mass shooters of the early 21st century bear little resemblance to the amateurish assassins of 100 years before. As Peter Neumann has commented, “we are now no longer talking about one-off events, but a loosely coordinated chain of far-right attacks across the world, where members of these networks inspire- and challenge – each other to beat each other’s body counts”.¹³³ Here it is indeed fortunate that few come close to the single-minded focus achieved by the grand geeks of massacre such as Anders Breivik or Brenton Tarrant.

But these latter figures have shown what is fully possible and in doing so helped create a wider pool of cultural knowledge about how lone shooters can slaughter effectively that will not disappear: and which remains as a permanent resource for future imitators. It is hard not to be struck here by the emergence of spectacular set-piece shooting massacres as a learned ‘contagion’ phenomenon of the early 21st century.¹³⁴ A new threshold of fifty or so deaths stands as both a challenge and an inspiration for tomorrow’s mass shooters, whatever their ideological motivation.¹³⁵

Conclusion

What, then, does this brisk but broad survey of right-wing violence over the past 150 years teach us? Given the sheer range of actors and causes surveyed, the overall picture inevitably remains a heterogeneous one. But, some basic contours of action can at least be picked out. At their most disorganised and locally spontaneous, extreme right-wing traditions of persecuting unpopular minorities can be traced back over 150 years. As is well recognised, at this level the boundaries of political violence and hate crime can easily become blurred: but on occasion—such as Germany in the early 1990s—such

131 Lehr, Peter, ‘Still Blind in the Right Eye? A Comparison of German Responses to Political Violence from the Extreme Left and the Extreme Right’ in Taylor, Max, PM Currie and Donald Holbrook (eds.), *Extreme Right-Wing Political Violence and Terrorism* (Bloomsbury, London, 2013).

132 Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, “How and Why Vehicle Ramming Became the Attack of Choice for Terrorists”, *The Conversation*, 29 March 2017. Available at:

<http://theconversation.com/how-and-why-vehicle-ramming-became-the-attack-of-choice-for-terrorists-75236>,

accessed: 6 October 2019. Also: Vincent Miller and Keith Hayward, “‘I did my bit’: Terrorism, Tarde and the Vehicle Ramming Attack as an Imitative Event”, *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 59, 1, January 2019, pp. 1-23.

133 *The Guardian*, 11 August 2019.

134 Gill, Paul, *Lone Actor Terrorists: A Behavioural Analysis* (Routledge, 2015), pp. 59-62.

135 Hemmingby, Cato and Tore Bjørgo. *The Dynamics of a Terrorist Targeting Process: Anders B. Breivik and the 22 July Attacks in Norway* (London, Palgrave Pivot, 2016), p. 2.

violence can have far-reaching political consequences. That alone is a sobering reflection.

How innovative has far-right violence been tactically? Much of the spectacular innovation has often come from elsewhere: neither dynamite bombings, hijackings, nor suicide missions first emerged from the Right. That said, the early 1920s was a particularly fertile period for fascist innovation—both in the use of motor transport and in mastering public space as the key springboard towards power. In the early 21st century, Anders Breivik pioneered the mass shooting as an advertisement for an online political manifesto. Imitators have been plentiful. Less imitated—though no less novel—has been the National Socialist Underground’s model of unspectacular but highly focused racist assassination. Still, changing political and technological contexts matter here of course: and there is little reason not to think that new opportunities for fresh horrors may not be exploited first from the far Right as well: especially as the online world is so effervescent with right-wing intellectual energy just now.

But longer-term perspectives offer some comforts as well. Democratic states simply look far less vulnerable to violent overthrow from the Right than a century ago. Here the retreat of the military from active intervention politics across the whole of Europe has been one of the great success stories of the past 60 years. Military coups do not have to favour the Right, of course: but the European experience of the first half of the 20th century was that they often did. That threat has now gone.

Overall, indeed, Western democratic states remain extremely well-protected against threats from below. Darren Osborne, the Finsbury Park Mosque attacker, had dreamt of assassinating the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn: but soon realized this was way beyond his capabilities.¹³⁶ Victims of right-wing assassination attempts in the early 21st century are now consistently (relatively) lowly figures: mayors, mayoral candidates, and members of parliament.¹³⁷ Of course, it is hardly acceptable in any democracy that representatives are being targeted at all. But it also does not suggest that democracy itself is about to collapse, although it may continue to decay in both quality and civility. Violent attacks on its representatives remain essentially sporadic: although abuse in public life has become seemingly endemic.¹³⁸

And, paradoxically, the rise of the network society has also helped strengthen states yet further in certain key respects. Even if it is to the profound dismay of civil libertarians, the surveillance opportunities of states have been transformed in recent decades. Daily living generates electronic evidence trails promiscuously. In practice, this means that old-style cellular conspiracies of whatever ideological persuasion have become largely obsolete. Here the aftermath of the Chemnitz riots that briefly overwhelmed the local police in the autumn of 2018 offers a thought-provoking case study. When a handful of local neo-Nazis attempted to plan a bombing campaign, the security services had them

¹³⁶ Rawlinson, Kevin. “Finsbury Park attack accused ‘wanted to kill Jeremy Corbyn’”, *Guardian*, 30 January 2018. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jan/30/finsbury-park-attack-darren-osborne-kill-jeremy-corbyn>, accessed: 21 September 2019.

¹³⁷ Langdon, Julia. “Jo Cox Obituary”, *Guardian* 16 June 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/jo-cox-obituary>, accessed: 21 September 2019.

Koehler, Daniel, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century: the ‘National Socialist Underground’ and the History of Terror from the Far-Right in Germany* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2017), p. 94 [stabbing of Henriette Reker, mayoral candidate for Cologne, 17th October 2015; Davies, Christian. “A Tragic Moment’: thousands gather across Poland to mourn Gdansk mayor” *Guardian*, 15 January 2019. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/14/gdansk-residents-donate-blood-stabbed-mayor-pawel-adamowicz> accessed: 21 September 2019.

¹³⁸ Committee on Standards in Public Life, ‘Intimidation in Public Life: A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life’ (London, Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, December 2017).

rounded up very swiftly indeed. ‘Revolution Chemnitz’ and its fantasies of provoking civil war was stopped right in its tracks.¹³⁹

In summary, any present snapshot of repertoires of rightist violence must remain impressionistic. No governments are likely to collapse because of it: but public moods remain highly febrile and unstable. Revolutions and coups do not threaten. But apparently, unending turbulence does. Powered by the endlessly renewable energy of self-pity, online subcultures have flourished by fusing identity politics and individual narcissism into the heady, if unstable, combinations that characterize the so-called ‘alt right’.¹⁴⁰ The sheer variety of old prejudices and new grievance rebooted here as ‘movements’ is quite bewildering: including the infamous ‘incel’ scene that celebrates acts of violent misogyny as acts of Nietzschean transgression against standard liberal pieties.¹⁴¹ Even if they remain very rare figures, it is from precisely these internet shadowlands that the self-appointed avengers of the Right will periodically continue to emerge. Magnified in their own estimation in the magic lantern show of social media, the most competent and determined of them devise both more original, and larger, atrocities, to command mass attention.

Seen in this unusually long-term perspective, any attempt to account for changing patterns of extreme right-wing violence must make room for some consideration of changing wider contexts. After all, the appeal of ideologies is always constrained by wider and deeper social trends. Or as David Copeland, the Soho nail bomber, reflected: the obscure might as well never have lived. By contrast, he implied that his own notoriety was somehow personally redemptive: hardly an unreasonable assumption in a society that so relentlessly celebrates and promotes attention-seeking behaviour.¹⁴² In the final analysis, then: the truly disturbing feature of extreme rightist violence in the early 21st century is just how thoroughly it remains a part of our civilization, and of us.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Adelhardt, Christine, Sebastian Pittelkow and Lena Kampf and Katja Riedel. “Anklage gegen ‘Revolution Chemnitz’”, Tageschau, 25 June 2019. Available at <https://www.tagesschau.de/investigativ/ndr-wdr/revolution-chemnitz-anklage-101.html>, accessed: 21st September 2019.

¹⁴⁰ Hawley, George, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford, 2019).

¹⁴¹ For overviews: Mammone, Andrea, Emmanuel Godin and Brian Jenkins, *Varieties of Right-Wing Extremism in Europe* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2013); Wendling, Mike, *Alt-Right: From 4chan to the White House* (London, Pluto Press, 2018).

¹⁴² Rojek, Chris, *Celebrity* (London, Reaktion Books, 2001), pp. 143-146.

¹⁴³ Mann, Michael, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. ix.

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Tim Wilson is the Director of the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews. Tim was born in 1971, going to school in Cambridge and university in Oxford. His intellectual interests in conflict derive from working as a community worker in both North Belfast and East London in the later 1990s. Trained as an historian, his chief interest is in the widely differing effects political violence can have across different contexts. In over ten years of teaching and researching at top universities (Oxford, St Andrews, Queen's Belfast) he has worked widely both on terrorism committed by governments, and by their opponents.

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