

Europe
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17.9.03

Dark days for democracy

AFTER Sweden's prime minister Olof Palme was shot dead in 1986, there was considerable speculation about his killer's motives. One theory, based on the fact that Palme was an outspoken critic of injustice against Palestinians, linked his assassination to Mossad.

Despite an apparently rigorous investigation by the Swedish authorities, the mystery remains unsolved. Although Mossad's ruthlessness and reach should never be underestimated, no convincing proof has emerged of an Israeli hand in Palme's death. And it is, of course, no more than a coincidence that another popular Swedish social-democratic politician was murdered in the same week that Israel vowed to deal conclusively with the president of the Palestinian Authority.

The Israeli cabinet's designation of Yasser Arafat as an obstacle that the state will "act to remove" has widely been interpreted as a threat to force him into exile, but the commandment is sufficiently ambiguous for more sinister meanings to be read into it — and at the week-end at least one Israeli minister openly addressed the possibility of assassination.

The United States has taken the unusual step of criticizing Israel publicly in this context, albeit in a manner insulting to Arafat — pointing out that in exile he would be free to travel from capital to capital, spreading his propaganda and garnering far more international media attention than he attracts in his besieged Ramallah base.

WORLD VIEW

By Mahir Ali

Worldview tackled the Chilean disaster on its anniversary last week and there may be cause to return to it in the near future. For present purposes, it is sufficient to point out that in Sweden it is commonly assumed that the Americans don't have a monopoly over mourning on September 11.

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Sweden has long been proud of its neutral status, and its leading politicians have rarely hesitated to speak out on international issues. Palme was a powerful critic of the war in Vietnam. Lindh dubbed George W. Bush the Lone Ranger for defying common sense on Iraq. In an uneasy parallel with the Palme murder, Lindh's killer had not been tracked down at the time of writing. His possible motives, therefore, are

Lindh's murder was part of an extremist plot: after all, why would anyone strongly opposed to the euro consciously seek to create circumstances that were bound to sway voters in the opposite direction?

The rather more remote possibility that the killing may have been a desperate attempt to encourage popular acceptance of the euro, has been aired in Sweden. But the police as well as most Swedes are disinclined, in the absence of evidence, to accept that the murder was politically motivated. They lean towards the suspicion that it was committed by a deranged individual.

Sweden's image as a placid and prosperous society tends to obscure the fact that it has the highest per capita homicide rate in the European Union. It is also the case that after the country's first conservative government in decades privatized mental institutions in the early 1990s, substantial numbers of unstable folk were released into Swedish society.

Should it turn out that this process accounted in some way for the foreign minister's death, it will reinforce the impression that Sweden's welfare state which once not only served as a paradigm for Western European social democracy but also received close attention from Mikhail Gorbachev as he strove to reform the Soviet Union — has been allowed to wither away.

Although it was pioneered by the conservatives, the return of the social democrats to power did not halt the privatization process. But, while the much vaunted Swedish model, which combined high taxation with a level of welfare unparalleled in the capitalist world, has suffered from dilution dur-