

Ariel Sharon's Likud-led government not only sees Arafat as a barrier to the sort of peace settlement that it presumes would be in Israel's best interests, it also regularly blames him for the sporadic suicide-bombings directed against Israelis. It chooses not to remember that the Israeli state was instrumental in setting up organizations such as Hamas, primarily as a counter-weight to Arafat and his Fatah faction.

In this, as in so many other respects, it is in harmony with the US—which 20 years ago was busy funding and arming the very fanatics who evolved into Al Qaeda. And just as the US evidently failed to realize that its occupation of Iraq would be profoundly unpopular among many Iraqis, Israel seems incapable of grasping the simple fact that every move it makes against Arafat tends to cement his iconic status among the Palestinians. Even those wary of his machinations and resentful of the corrupt administration he has instituted in the occupied territories flock to his defence whenever he comes under attack. These are just the sort of ironies that would not have been lost upon Anna Lindh, the Swedish foreign minister stabbed to death in a Stockholm department store last week.

In the weeks preceding her murder, Lindh's visage graced posters across the country urging Swedes to vote yes in last Sunday's referendum on replacing the krona with the euro as the national currency. On many walls in Stockholm, they shared space with posters exhorting the people to remember September 11.

The latter did not relate, however, to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington two years ago. Their reference point was a different wave of terror unleashed in Santiago, Chile, 30 years ago with the overthrow by the military of an elected socialist government. The role of the US in instigating that coup has never been much of a secret, but recently declassified documents have served to highlight the extent to which Henry Kissinger (who was Richard Nixon's secretary of state in 1973) was complicit in the crimes of Gen Augusto Pinochet's junta.

unclear.

about Silvio Berlusconi (the Italian prime minister who last week compared Benito Mussolini favourably with other dictators) and considered Italy's presidency of the European Commission as a travesty.

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, were unclear. The Swedish authorities were keen to hose down speculation that Lindh's prominence as a campaigner for the euro may have accounted for her fate. However, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, that appears to be the likeliest explanation. Even if the assassin was simply a lunatic rather than a deranged ultra-nationalist, chances are that he picked Lindh as a victim because her image was ubiquitous.

Immediately after the brutal, frenzied attack on the foreign minister, her wounds were not considered life-threatening. Lindh was officially pronounced dead 13 hours later. In the interim, postings appeared on Swedish neo-Nazi websites expressing regret that the stabbing wasn't fatal.

It wasn't only the ultra-Right, however, that viewed Lindh as a "traitor". She had also been pilloried by the far Left for selling out to big business. It is fairly remarkable that although all of Sweden's major political parties as well as business interests and the mainstream media supported a yes vote in Sunday's referendum, public opinion remained firmly opposed to adopting the euro by a margin of about 10 per cent. Lindh's murder changed the dynamics of the situation as both sides immediately stopped campaigning and vowed to respect the popular verdict.

All of a sudden, the vote became too close to call. In a natural reaction to the assassination, large numbers of previously undecided or unconvinced Swedes apparently chose to take sides out of respect and affection for Lindh. The fact that this was a predictable outcome tends to undermine the theory that

ing the determined global drift towards free-market economies, key elements have thus far been

retained. For example, the students in Sweden are not expected to contribute so much as a penny towards the cost of their education. The fear that such benefits would soon become a thing of the past were Sweden to allow greater economic dictation from Brussels prompted left-wing opposition to euro-ization.

Some on the Left also see increasing continental integration as the construction of a European citadel designed to exclude the world's poor. The nationalistic far Right, in the meanwhile, has tended to look upon the dalliance with Brussels as a socialistic plot that would rob Swedes of their identity and could lead to an influx of dark-skinned people.

Given Sweden's social-democratic traditions and the fact that several members of prime minister Goran Persson's cabinet opposed the adoption of the euro, it is likely that the Left played a bigger role than the Right in Sunday's decisive vote in favour of retaining the krona. The result could have significant implications for other nations, such as Britain and Denmark, that have thus far hesitated from jumping into the eurozone.

Sweden, meanwhile, has much else to contend with. Despite her euro-enthusiasm, Anna Lindh wouldn't have considered it a cause worth dying for. Her assassination prompted the largest demonstration in Stockholm since the Vietnam War.

Like Palme before her, Lindh proved such an easy target because Swedish politicians generally move about in public without bodyguards. This and other aspects of Sweden's refreshingly open democracy may be compromised by last week's tragedy.

The 46-year-old Lindh, admired as a model working mother, had been involved in politics since her school days and was considered a likely successor to Persson as prime minister. For her nation it is singularly unfortunate that she may now be remembered as a euro martyr.