

But the case of the repentant Italian terrorist points to another paradox: Although social chaos is a positive and, indeed, essential condition for terrorism, at a certain point this same condition reverses itself, capsizes, and re-emerges as a massive trap. Specifically, the criteria for recruitment become less rigorous, and recruits are accepted who are questionable not only from an ideological standpoint but even in terms of personal character. To increase the number of terrorists is simultaneously to increase the statistical probability that the number includes unreliable individuals—people of uncertain commitment, of “shaky nerves,” who the police might easily induce to tell all. At the same time, in general anthropological/cultural terms, the act of repentance and confession and the return of the prodigal son to his father’s house is, especially in a Catholic country, one of both religious and social importance.

Confessions do one thing more: they accuse. The terrorist’s confession is an indictment of Italian society and state, and it would be all too easy and unyielding to hide behind the facade of law. Italian society and institutions cannot simply dismiss their involvement in terrorism: Where, after all, do these “penitents” come from? In what families, what parishes, what party sections and union locals were they “produced,” socialized, such that they kill for the sake of some poorly grasped article and place bombs out of spite or to celebrate a supposed anniversary? The terrorist’s confession is never one way; it is also a fearful attack and cry of alarm concerning the voids and deficiencies of Italian society. It is an accusation directed against the educational and formulative institutions, against the family and all who represent moral and religious requirements—in short, against the institutions entrusted with the collective, historical memory whereby a society is defined.

To defend the Italian state in the face of such accusations is neither aesthetic nor inspiring. Yet it must be done, without illusions, and with all the critical force we can muster. We did so at the time of the kidnapping and killing of Aldo Moro, and it should be done now as well. The state must be connected to society and society connected with the basic social groups that make it live and in which genuine popular sovereignty lies. For this, seemingly contradictory qualities are needed—rigor and flexibility, hardness and understanding. To use Max Weber’s formula and adapt it to our circumstances, we must distinguish between the “ethic of principles,” or absolute ethic of the state of law, and the “ethic of responsibility,” or the ethic of operational commitment, capable of mediating between available resources and desired ends. To insist on the state of law in an absolute sense is not only ahistorical, it can lead straight to the ethical state of fascist memory.

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EXCURSUS 5

Thomas Land on A PACKAGE DEAL IN PEOPLE

Contract labor, the modern equivalent of the slave trade, has recently grown into a ruthless multinational business, particularly in the Middle East. The government-supervised trade in the labor of South Korean construction workers is just one example of such exploitation. The sharp oil price increases of the 1970s dealt a severe blow to the Korean

economy, but, ironically, it also offered the country a golden opportunity to export its construction technology and labor when the increased oil revenues enabled the Middle East to undertake large-scale development projects. Korean construction companies were quick to move in, securing contracts worth \$7.8 billion by 1980. And the construction boom has survived the recent drop in oil prices. More than eighty companies are now engaged in thirteen Middle Eastern countries.

The companies operate on a package deal, including the labor force—from supervisors to engineers to unskilled laborers—all brought from Korea and settled in camps carefully segregated from the local inhabitants. “It is an attractive package indeed,” comments an International Labor Organization (ILO) study, “for governments faced with local labor shortages and anxious to avoid friction between the migrant workers and the nationals.”

Unlike the waves of migrants that swept Western Europe in the 1960s—many of whom are still there—the Korean construction workers are bound by contractual arrangement to return home after a one-year tour of duty. The hours are long and the work is hard, but the relatively high wages make the job attractive to Korean workers, whose numbers in the Middle East now exceed 100,000. Their remittances home have also become important for their country, reaching 2.2 per cent of its gross national product by 1980.

Once the workers arrive at the camps, virtually all aspects of their daily lives are under the control of their employers. They are forbidden to form trade unions while in the Middle East, the individual contracts providing the only basis for bargaining or settling labor disputes. The Korean Government, however, encourages the employers to be receptive to the workers’ feelings in order to minimize trouble in the camps, which could endanger the growth of business in the region.

The government has also established minimum standards in the camps concerning living space, sanitary and recreation facilities, and medical care. But the ILO study suggests that these requirements are not always strictly enforced. It says that the number of work-related injuries among workers during their stay in the Middle East is rising. More than 400 migrant workers were killed and nearly 5,700 injured from 1977 to 1980.

The Korean Ministry of Labor is responsible for the administration of the contract labor policy. Before expanding their activities abroad, construction companies must obtain a license from the Minister of Construction. Once licensed, enterprises receive preferential treatment, including favorable credit and interest rates as well as tax relief.

But the ILO study also observes “signs that the highly successful package deal is coming apart at the seams.” Some Korean construction companies already are trying to modify the scheme by recruiting foreign labor in order to cut wage costs. Many potential contract migrants are also showing dissatisfaction with the system by seeking employment with foreign companies in the hope of securing a better deal.

The Korean construction companies still enjoy a competitive edge in the labor-intensive projects of the Middle East, but the study projects a change toward new technology-intensive building methods, reducing the commercial attractiveness of contract migrants. And the ILO’s own world employment conference in Geneva has recently approved new global labor standards, inevitably pointing to changes in international law that will guarantee migrant workers everywhere the right to trade union protection.

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