

GERMAN TERRORISM

GUNTHER ARZT

Stefan Aust. *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex*. (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1986). vi + 600 pp. DM 39.80.

Stefan Aust keeps both of the promises implied in the word "*Komplex*" in the title of his book. Foremost we are promised factual information on the complicated growth of the first generation—the "complex"—of West German terrorists after World War II. At the same time, we are promised an examination of the many unsound reactions by the government and the general public to terrorism that were signs of a "complex."

Andreas Baader, Ulrike Meinhof, and Gudrun Ensslin were the leading figures among the first generation of terrorists, and Aust follows their careers from 1967 to 1977. This decade encompassed the beginnings of the West German protest movement and the initially slow growth of violence that finally culminated in spectacular terrorist actions against United States Army installations, the "Black September" at the Munich Olympics in 1972, and the taking of hostages to win the release of Baader and his three codefendants on trial in Stuttgart-Stammheim.

Aust begins and ends with the night of October 17–18, 1977. That night brought the successful storming of a Lufthansa jet at Mogadishu in Somalia by a German antiterrorist squad and the death of Baader and two of his codefendants in the high security prison at Stuttgart-Stammheim. Irmgard Moeller, the third codefendant, survived her serious stab wounds. Aust reports both versions of these deaths. The official investigation proclaimed them suicides made to look like executions; the alternative view held that the authorities had executed them. The American reader should keep in mind the many oddities surrounding the murder of President Kennedy in order to appreciate the confused debate over the facts surrounding the deaths at Stuttgart-Stammheim.

Aust provides a highly factual and, in that sense, authoritative account of what happened. He avoids personal value judgments wherever possible and refrains from speculations. Aust's objective treatment is remarkable since he did not approach this topic completely from the outside. As we learn from the short preface and the jacket, he knew some of the main figures, including Meinhof, from former times. Of course, Aust does not limit himself strictly to the period from 1967 to 1977. For example, he provides in-

sightful sketches of the childhood of each of the terrorists. Unfortunately, he fails to summarize terrorist developments since 1977, when the level of such incidents has been much lower. The time doubtlessly has arrived for a calmer, more rational discussion of terrorism. It is hoped that this book will form an important basis for such discussions.

Aust's chronicle of the first decade of German terrorism reveals the importance of ideology to the movement. He clearly shows the connection between the terrorists and communist countries. Meinhof, for example, was a member of the Communist Party in West Berlin in 1958, even though the party had been outlawed by West Germany. After the Spring of Prague in 1964, quarrels between party leaders in West Germany and East Berlin developed along ideological lines. The Konkret lost the financial support of East Berlin and only survived by mixing leftist politics with sex. Imagine the indecision of East German officials over how to react to the discovery of weapons at the East Berlin airport when West German radicals proclaimed that these arms were meant to aid the revolution in the West.

The ideology of the Baader-Meinhof group was expressed when they signed letters claiming responsibility for their actions as the "Red Army Fraction" (RAF). Aust shows in some detail how the RAF's call for reforms progressed from rhetoric to revolutionary deeds. Consequently, defense counsel attempted to turn the Baader-Meinhof trial into a review of the Vietnam War, with motions demanding that Richard Nixon and Melvin Laird, among others, be called as witnesses. And yet one wonders whether the Vietnam War had made them revolutionaries or they were revolutionaries waiting for a cause.

Aust also raises questions about the competence of the German criminal justice system. He shows that it mixed clumsiness with helplessness that resulted in overreaction. The criminal code of procedure simply could not imagine defendants who refused to play their proper role and attorneys who were also members of the same criminal group to which their clients belonged. Thus the legal proceedings against the terrorists flouted the law in bizarre ways. Aust gives higher marks to the police, perhaps because their rules were not as clearly defined. The threat by the terrorists was countered by an enormous build-up of the Bundeskriminalamt (the German FBI) and the strengthening of the office of the Bundesanwaltschaft (the German attorney general).

Aust does less well in reporting public reaction, probably because too little has been done to probe the attitudes of Germans on the terrorist issue. When the police first used the technique of extensive random searches on the autobahn, they had public support (p. 238). The public, however, is unlikely to tolerate such tactics (and the resulting inconveniences) in the long run. Nor is the public likely to accept willingly the persistent failure of the German

government to fashion a coherent policy toward terrorism. In this regard, Aust teaches us a particularly instructive lesson.

GUNTHER ARZT is a Professor of Law at the University of Bern, Switzerland. His writings on criminal law and criminal-law policy include a book on the consequences of the fear of crime (*Der Ruf nach Recht und Ordnung*, 1976). His latest publication is an introduction to the legal system (*Einführung in die Rechtswissenschaft*, 1987).