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 (orig under Hitchens)

When American citizens are murdered in foreign countries, there is a Richter scale of indignation which monitors varying levels of outrage and protest. Should the killers be "terrorists" or some other kind of properly constituted enemy, the needle goes off the graph. Should our fellow countrymen or -women be slain by "our side," or with American weapons provided to "our friends," there is confusion. Every C.I.A. station loathes the press because the last thing it wants is a reporter whacked out by a pro-Western goon squad. Somoza's regime never recovered from the shooting of a cameraman on prime time. And when four churchwomen were raped and butchered by the American-trained army of El Salvador, the Reagan Administration managed to suggest that they were terrorists, that they had been killed by the left and that they were victims of a misunderstanding, all at the same time.

For decades, one of the most sought-after newspaper prizes has been the George Polk Award. George Polk was the CBS correspondent in Greece during the civil war there, and in May 1948 he was found dead in Salonika harbor. He had been on his way to interview Gen. Markos Vafiades, the commander of the Communist forces; the American advisers then implementing the Truman doctrine were at pains to suggest that he had been murdered by the left. At home, a committee of leading American writers was formed under the chairmanship of Walter Lippmann. Its members included James Reston, Marquis Childs and Eugene Meyer, chairman of the board of *The Washington Post* and father of its present proprietor. The committee nominated Gen. "Wild Bill" Donovan, the former director of the Office of Strategic Services, to conduct its investigation. By the time he arrived in Greece, the Security Police were already flourishing a confession from a left-wing Salonika journalist. Donovan decided to accept the authorities' version of the incident, despite misgivings expressed by Polk's family, who recalled that he had received threats from right-wing death squads.

Sound familiar? So does the sequel. Last month in Athens, a book was published titled *The Polk Affair: My Personal Testimony*. The author, Grigoris Staktopoulos, is the man who spent twelve years in prison for Polk's murder. He relates in hideous detail how he was tortured into confessing. He presents a mass of documents and testimony to show how the trial and the investigation were rigged. The foreword to his book, written by former conservative Prime Minister Panayotis Kanellopoulos, compares Staktopoulos to Dreyfus. It is only a matter of time until, like Dreyfus, he is given a full judicial pardon.

Where will this leave the George Polk Awards and all the members of the American journalistic establishment who commissioned General Donovan to find that Polk was a cold war martyr to the Communists? Even at the time, the eagerness of American officials to accept the word of the Greek right was distinctly suspicious and self-serving. Col. James Kellis of the U.S. Air Force, Donovan's chief in-

vestigator, wrote, "I collected other information that contradicted the official investigation and reported to General Donovan that I believed there was an attempted right-wing cover up . . . many of our officials here were concerned that if the extreme right committed this murder and were discovered . . . it would upset our aid program to Greece." Colonel Kellis was "caught," like so many in his position before him, "between what I thought was the truth and our national and personal interest."

He was also caught between the truth and an outraged U.S. Embassy. The chargé d'affaires, Karl Rankin, told Kellis to keep his mouth shut and to understand "the need to pin this murder on the Communists." C.I.A. agents Christopher Freer and Robert Driscoll did the same. Finally, Kellis was recalled to Washington and his misgivings were shelved. Not until 1978 did he make a sworn statement, at the Greek Consulate in New York City.

But even before that, material was available that indicated the U.S. government knew more than it cared to admit. Papers discovered in the National Archives in Washington and released by the Greek journalist Elias P. Demetropoulos in 1976 include a letter from Smith Simpson, labor attaché at the embassy in Athens, to Loy Henderson, then director of Near Eastern Affairs at the State Department.