

THE CONDOR YEARS: HOW PINOCHET AND HIS ALLIES BROUGHT TERRORISM TO THREE CONTINENTS

John Dinges. The New Press,
New York, 2005.

Reviewed by David Sheinin

In 2004, Patricia Derian recalled a troubling encounter with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) twenty-six years earlier. Beginning in 1977, during Jimmy Carter's presidency, Derian was the public face of the Carter Administration's commitment to human rights in foreign policy making. Carter had decided that authoritarian regimes in Latin America guilty of human rights violations would face an embargo on U.S. arms exports. The military regimes in Chile, Argentina, and other countries suffered such sanctions as a consequence. But because of profound contradictions in U.S. policy, Carter's human rights emphasis did little to end the atrocities.

In 1978, as the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, Patricia Derian made a highly publicized trip to Argentina where she spoke with victims of human rights violations to determine the extent of Argentine state terror. The visit was watched closely by the dictatorships themselves and by political hawks in Washington opposed to Carter's human rights project. When Derian returned to Washington, a high-ranking CIA official came to see her. Would she provide a list, the official asked, of those she spoke with? Appalled by the request, Derian declined. She knew that, were she to give the CIA the list, the lives of those she had

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spoken with would be in danger. While as a representative of the U.S. government, Derian was working to undermine state terror, other branches of that same government were doing all they could to prop up the very regimes that were torturing, kidnapping, and killing.

The Carter Administration was torn by this division. Despite the seriousness of Carter's intent on assessing foreign governments by their human rights record, the record of his administration and those of other American presidents before 1990 was one of strong support for dictatorial regimes in Latin America. While Derian did much to publicize human rights violations in the hemisphere, she accomplished little in ending the state-sponsored violence. In *The Condor Years*, John Dinges explains the grim obverse of the contradiction expressed in the Derian-CIA encounter—how the U.S. government came to back South American dictatorships in the 1970s, and to support their co-operative international war on their enemies, real and imagined. This book charts the secret agreement—“Operation Condor”—between dictatorships in Uruguay, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, and Chile to cooperate in the kidnapping, torture, and assassination of supposed opponents to their respective regimes in South America, North America, and Europe.

Dinges is an outstanding investigator. There is no better overview of Operation Condor than this book. The story Dinges tells is not new. But it is told more grippingly here than elsewhere, and more thoroughly researched in documentation that has recently been made available to the public. The new material includes thousands of U.S. government documents released during the Clinton Administration on the nature of U.S. support for the dictatorships in Argentina and Chile. Dinges explains how the Condor plot was hatched in Santiago in 1973. He documents dozens of Condor assassinations, including the killing of the Chilean exile Orlando Letelier in Washington in 1976. And he shows the tacit, implicit, and explicit support the United States offered the dictatorial regimes and their international assassination project. U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was among the most fervent of Cold War backers for the rule of right-wing terror in South America, encouraging the military governments in South America in their use of torture and assassination as valid and necessary tactics in the destruction of political opponents.

Despite the fact that the book was published so recently, the story Dinges recounts is ongoing in that each of the nations concerned continues to grapple with its unhappy past. There have been important new developments since the book's publication. These include the death of Augusto Pinochet and the immediate impact of that death on the Chilean polity. Moreover, *The Condor Years* also appeared before the recent indictment of former Argentine president Isabel Perón for her role in state-sponsored terror. (Dinges wrongly characterizes Perón as largely passive in the unfolding state terror in mid-1970s Argentina.)

One weakness of the book is its overemphasis on the U.S. role in Operation Condor. This comes in part from Dinges's over-reliance on American government records and

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his lack of attention to South American documentation. The author is too quick to explain Latin America's ills as a function of U.S. imperialism. It's not that the U.S. government doesn't share the blame for Operation Condor. It does. But by stressing the U.S. role to the extent that he does, Dinges ignores a variety of motives for state terror in each of the countries involved, motives not necessarily primed by Washington. In Chile, for example, while the CIA and other U.S. government agencies played a central role in the overthrow of democratic government in 1973, the Pinochet dictatorship

was a product of many other factors as well. These include, for example, the growing division between the middle and working classes in Chile, and the way in which the military drew on that division in structuring economic and social policy in the mid-1970s. Dinges pays too little heed to these and other domestic social and political developments in South America. As a result, he misses a number of key causes and consequences of Operation Condor.

The book includes an important chapter on Pinochet's 1998 detention in England in response to an extradition request by a Spanish

federal judge. Dinges shows convincingly how that detention and Pinochet's eventual return to Chile primed a renewed search for justice in several countries with regard to the state violence of the 1970s. In addition, the significance of this book rests in part as an account of Operation Condor as a still unfolding political and judicial problem in many nations. As such, it shows the extent to which the 1970s are still sadly fresh in the minds of Latin Americans, and how human rights violations from that period continue to influence how people understand current political developments. ♦

THE FORCE OF VOCATION: THE LITERARY CAREER OF ADELE WISEMAN

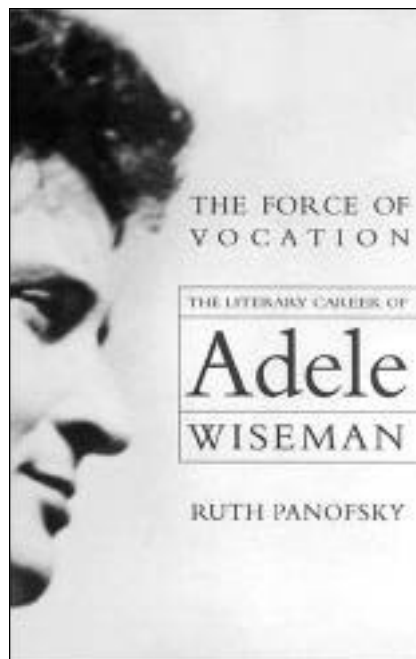
Ruth Panofsky. University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg, 2006. 204 pages.

Reviewed by Paul Headrick

Adele Wiseman's literary career began with a brilliant success. Her first novel, *The Sacrifice*, was published in Canada and abroad, positively reviewed, and won the 1956 Governor General's award for fiction. Wiseman was only 28, full of confidence and ambition. The promise of that beginning, however, wasn't fulfilled, at least not in the conventional sense. "The course of Wiseman's career can be read as the progressive loss of readership and literary recognition, with little economic gain over a lifetime," Ruth Panofsky writes in the preface to her brief biography. Panofsky offers a different reading of Wiseman's career, emphasizing her commitment to her art and her resistance to the distorting demands of the market.

From the start, Wiseman showed determined independence. After graduating from the University of Manitoba in 1949, she was

accepted into the graduate writing program at the State University of Iowa, precursor to the prestigious



Iowa Writer's Workshop. Instead of following the obvious path, however, Wiseman left for London to write her first novel on her own. When she returned to Winnipeg two years later, she had completed a draft of *The Sacrifice*.

While emphasizing Wiseman's independence, Panofsky doesn't ignore the importance of a variety of mentors early in her career. Margaret and William Stobie, professors at the University of Manitoba, critiqued early drafts of *The Sacrifice*, arranged for a reading on the

CBC, and brought the work to the attention of famed editor Robert Weaver. But Wiseman was ambivalent about her mentors. Weaver commented that, "Too many people knew about Margaret Stobie's involvement with *The Sacrifice* and Adele really wanted to think of it as her book, not as a collaborative effort." Wiseman eventually distanced herself from the Stobies.

Wiseman did not follow her success with another novel, though her publisher was eager for her to do so; instead, she gave years to the writing of a play. *The Lovebound*, set on a Jewish refugee ship in 1939, would have required a running time of four hours. Wiseman resisted all suggestions for revision and turned down an offer to have the play adapted for radio. Panofsky expresses some frustration with this attitude: "Today, it is difficult to accept Wiseman's fervent commitment to *The Lovebound*, especially in light of its repeated rejection by agents and publishers who understood the contemporary market for dramatic work." Throughout *The Force of Vocation* Panofsky focuses on Wiseman's career, resisting the temptation to analyse her subject's psychology, but here she offers a welcome speculation, attributing Wiseman's persistence with the play to her inability "to assimilate the world's lack of response to the great number of Jews who sought succour in various countries prior to the onset of war in Europe." *The Journal of Canadian Fiction* pub-

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