

U.S. 1970: The Radical Underground Surfaces With a Bang

At first it appeared a freakish accident—an explosion that destroyed a Greenwich Village townhouse, mysterious only in the disappearance of two young women, one nude and the other partially clad. But as police dug last week through the rubble, each day brought new discoveries: the body of a young man, then that of a young woman; lead pipes packed with dynamite, then another man's body. Unknown to its vacationing owners, the cellar of the elegant red-brick four-story townhouse on a quiet, respectable street had apparently been converted into an amateur "underground" bomb factory.

Even for New Yorkers, used to taking the bizarre in their stride, the gaping hole on West 11th Street came as a shock. Here was something out of Dostoevsky's "The Possessed." What was one to make of it? Had the revolutionary politics of the New Left spawned by the civil rights drive of the 1950's and inflamed by the Vietnam protests of the 1960's taken a new turn from "confrontation" to terror, at least on the movement's outer fringes?

Some of the answers obviously depend on the facts of the townhouse explosion, many of which remained to be cleared up. More light may be cast by police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation into other recent explosions, including a rash of bombings late in the week in New York City, Pittsburgh, Pa., Washington, D. C., and elsewhere in the country. Some may be the work of isolated cranks or right-wing extremists, such as those who demolished 23 buses used in a Denver, Colo., school integration program.

Death in Maryland

Also to be explained are the deaths of Ralph E. Featherstone and William Herman (Che) Payne, two young black militants and associates of H. Rap Brown, who were killed late Monday night when an explosive device shattered their car south of Bel Air, Md. On Wednesday, a bomb planted in the women's washroom ripped open the Dorchester County Courthouse in Cambridge, Md., where Rap Brown was to be tried—before a change in venue to Bel Air—on charges of arson and incitement to riot. At last report Maryland police were hunting a white woman as a prime suspect in that bombing.

The outbreak of explosions at a variety of establishment targets—corporate offices, police stations, draft and induction centers and the like—underscores a new mood among frustrated radicals. It appears to have been intensified by the outcome of the trial of the Chicago Seven as well as the various pending Black Panther trials.

Several militant black and white organizations share a rhetoric of violence and a Marxist-Leninist jargon, including the various factions of the New Left Students for a Democratic Society and the Black Panthers. Black extremists, however, veer off into black nationalism and black mysticism and this is what separates the Marxist-Leninist Panthers from such groups as Ron Karenga's US, Milton Henry's Republic of New Africa and the Muslims. All talk of the



Gary Settle

Bombings in New York and elsewhere last week focused new attention on militant radicals, including middle-class white youths who resort to violence in search of social revolution. Picture shows a girl taken by police in Chicago last fall.

Weatherman:

need to arm in self-defense if not for outright guerrilla war.

So far, only the Weathermen, named after a line in Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues"—"You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows"—have gone underground, in groups of four and five, to live out their revolutionary fantasies. Revolutionary Force 9, which claimed credit in a letter to United Press International for blowing out Scony Mobil, IBM and Sylvania offices in New York last week may be such an underground cell.

Weathermen Speak

The letter reads like a Weathermen communiqué. "To work for the industries of death is to murder. To know the torments Amerika inflicts on the Third World, but not to sympathize and identify, is to deny our own humanity. It is to deny our right to love—and not to love is to die. We refuse. In death-directed Amerika there is only one way to a life of love and freedom: to attack and destroy the forces of death and exploitation and to build a just society—revolution."

The explosion on West 11th Street was linked to the Weathermen through the identification of one of the bodies as Theodore Gold, a 23-year-old former Columbia student, and of one of the fleeing young women as Cathlyn Platt Wilkerson, a 25-year-old Swarthmore graduate and daughter of James P. Wilkerson, president of a Midwest radio chain and owner of the gutted house. Both are members of the Weathermen.

At midweek, Miss Wilkerson was said to be "alive and well" and possibly in Canada with a friend, Kathy Boudin, 23, a Bryn Mawr graduate and daughter of Leonard B. Boudin, a New York lawyer active in left-wing and antiwar cases. Whether Miss Boudin was the second woman fleeing the blast was unknown,

but both are due in Chicago tomorrow for a hearing on charges stemming from their alleged participation in a violent fracas staged last Dec. 9 by the Weathermen.

At a "war council" held subsequently at Flint, Mich., young Gold declared that "an agency of the people of the world" would run the United States economy and society after the defeat of United States imperialism abroad. When a critic declared that sounded like "a John Birchler's worst dream" and warned that "there will be more repression than ever," Mr. Gold replied. "Well, if it will take fascism, we'll have to take fascism."

Unlike, say, the Black Panthers who come from the country's ghettos, and who can legitimately claim to have a grievance, most of the Weathermen are the educated children of middle class, if not outright wealthy parents. They themselves possess enough in allowances to travel easily and mostly by air from disturbance to disturbance. What prompts them to live the life of terrorists? Are they sensitive idealists, turned off by the wrongs of our society and by "the greater violence of the Vietnam war?"

Lost Grip

Dr. John Spiegel of the Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence at Brandeis University offers this explanation: "The young people have had protests and riots and disorders—they've done everything one can do in the way of peaceful and unplanned protest, and not much has changed. To that degree there is an increasing sense of desperation, and a sense of vengefulness." Others, just as militant, however, resist the giving in to violence. Dr. Spiegel's explanation, too, ignores the extent to which many of these middle class youngsters are spoiled, wanting instant success and hungering for instant power.

Somehow these educated, af-

fluent *declassés* have lost their grip on the issues of war and peace, poverty, hunger and freedom and lost sight of their own professed goals of socialism and remind one of Ambrose Bierce's definition of a fanatic as "one who, when he has lost sight of his aims, redoubles his efforts."

Nonetheless, it is difficult to escape the feeling that these youngsters are demented. How else explain the admiration for Sirhan Sirhan, the murderer of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, or for Charles Manson, group leader of a band of alleged murderers. Among these youngsters, there are open jokes about assassinations, and a salivating over violence. Witness Bernadine Dohrn: "Dig it, first they killed those pigs [actress Sharon Tate and her friends], then they ate dinner in the same room with them, then they even shoved a fork into a victim's stomach! Wild!"

Historic Parallel

Predictions concerning the revolutionaries of this world are chancy, even though the carrying out of armed revolutionary struggle in such countries as ours would appear suicidal. The historic parallel that suggests itself is that of the Narodniki, children of the mid-19th century Russian aristocracy then being bypassed by a rising bourgeois, who went to the people, only to be scorned. The Narodniki then turned to violence and finally succeeded in killing Czar Alexander II, an act that brought on a repression so severe that it not only destroyed the remnants of the Narodniki but also the possibilities for a democratic Russia. Hopefully, we will not have to pay that price for the madness of a few, but it won't be for the want of their trying. At least that is what the gap in West 11th Street suggests.

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