

T H E O F F S P R I N G O F



METROPOLITAN ANNIHILATION

**ARMED STRUGGLE
AND THE 1960S**

STUDENT MOVEMENT

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Components of Capitalist Society in the United States and West Germany and the Armed Struggle of the 1960s Student Movements

War is the Highest Form of Struggle for Resolving Contradictions

In 1966, Chairman Mao Zedong started what would become known as the *Cultural Revolution*. Calling upon young students, formed into militant Red Guard battalions, Mao exclaimed that “to rebel is justified,” ordering the student youth to “bombard the headquarters,” and to “oppose the four olds,”¹ breaking away from orthodox Marxism-Leninism. These political developments in the communist student left, which ideologically ruptured from the old communist parties formed in the 1920s, would be mirrored across the world. This rupturing of newly-formed radical leftist parties and their new ideological development would become known as the New Left: a youth-led revolutionary movement composed of numerous groups inspired by Mao’s Cultural Revolution, the fight for civil rights in the West, and the struggles for national liberation taking place across the Third World.² Amongst these new

groups were a distinct number of armed factions, arising from the blossoming student movements in West Germany and the United States. Taking inspiration from depictions of urban guerrilla war by Carlos Marighella and the *foco theory* teachings by Che Guevara and Régis Debray,³ these students would resort to violent protest as a way to incite proletarian forces towards a near-spontaneous revolt against capitalism in order to create the new socialist society.

Hung up in the dizzying sense of revolutionary possibility during the late 1960s (in the words of the former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal, “[r]evolution seemed as inevitable as tomorrow’s newspaper”),⁴ two groups in West Germany and the United States came to especially emphasize the militant and violent struggle that was taking place between student leftists and the state. These two groups were known as the West German-situated Red Army Faction (RAF) and the U.S. based

How and why do white, formally educated, and typically middle-class students living in similar liberal democratic capitalist countries, turn to the gun?

Weather Underground Organisation (also known as Weatherman or the WUO)—two groups who made the transition from open legal student action organisations to insurrectionary underground factions influenced and guided by Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought (ML-MZT).

Through an evaluation of the aims, goals, and ideological makeup of the RAF and the WUO, the following article seeks to establish how and why white, formally educated, and typically middle-class students living in similar liberal democratic capitalist countries, turned to the gun. The key question of this piece seeks to not only explore revolutionary violence on the left, but also how nominally young white students can come to resort to, and empathize with, the same violent struggles of colonised peoples against their oppressors. The question means to analyse how the ideological lens and material conditions of a young and vibrant left-wing

force that employed violence as a practical use for change, came into fruition by the late 1960s. This piece further strives to investigate the nature of violence between leftists against opposing forces within capitalist society and the continued political relevance of these struggles beyond the late 20th century, at a time of rising neo-imperialist war and fascist power.

In order to contextualise and investigate the armed struggles of these two groups, this article means to analyse three key components of capitalist society in the late 1960s that helped push white leftist students living in liberal democracies to use violent protest. Precisely how these components of Western capitalism came to influence the student's propensity towards violence, and help create the conditions for armed struggle and its advocacy by student activists, shall be the primary investigation of the essay.

The first section seeks to look upon the influence of Third Worldist ideology on the RAF and the WUO during a decade of imperial warfare, most emphatically seen in the Vietnam War. The section means to analyse the viciousness of imperialism on colonised peoples, their response via the means of armed national liberation struggle, and how these events came to affect the white student left's own position on the use of violence. Besides the Vietnam War, issues such as the Palestinian liberation struggle and the internal colonisation of black populations in America will also be explored in order to gauge how the white student left positioned itself in this global conflict and came to confront its own society's white supremacy.

The second section of the article shall analyse the tendencies of anti-communism in West German and U.S. societies and how the violent reaction by the forces of the state apparatus in both countries came to push the white student left underground. The section will inquire into questions such as the collusion between U.S.



state forces and far right groups and the legacy of Nazism in West Germany, in order to explain the rhetoric of prevalent anti-fascism in both countries' student movements and how this came to prompt their turn to violence. As well as analysing the RAF's and WUO's own readings on neo-fascism post-World War II, the section will explore the crossover between surviving fascist structures in the post-war West and decaying capitalist forms of reaction in response to times of crisis.

The third and final section examines the impact of consumerist, mass media society in the post-World War II West and how the "spectacle" of post-industrial capitalism impacted the thinking of New Leftists and influenced their actions. The relationship between armed students and the media will also be scrutinised in order to analyse the role consumer society plays in creating the conditions for "spectacular" acts of terror.

The article shall then conclude that although the two groups no longer exist, and indeed failed in their short-term goals, their legacy is still prevalent post-Cold War due to the continuation of national liberation struggles and the endurance of the aforementioned components of capitalism that first led to the armed rebellions of the white student left.

The Wretched of the World: Imperialism and Third World Revolution in the Western Radical Left

Major political developments in the Global South would come to have a decisive impact on the new generation of leftists coming into fruition by the 1960s. In terms of creating the conditions for violent struggle amongst the student left, one of the most important developments was U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Regarding the war and its highly destructive elements, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) president Paul Potter stated that:

[T]he people in Vietnam and the people in this demonstration are united in much more than a common concern that the war be ended. In both countries there are people struggling to build a movement that has the power to change their condition. The system that frustrates these movements is the same. All our lives, our destinies, our very hopes to live, depend on our ability to overcome that system.⁵

The system Potter is referring to is imperialism, the policy of extending the rule or authori-



Student organizing in the US organized itself around opposition to the war of aggression in Vietnam

Pictured above, a Weatherman poster announcing the *Days of Rage* protests in 1969

ty of a capitalist empire or nation over foreign countries, or of acquiring and holding colonies and dependencies as part of the final and highest stage of capitalist development in order to ensure greater profits for the bourgeois class. In the industrialised and developed part of the world, banks are merged and industrial cartels are formed as monopolies are created in order to expropriate capital from the underdeveloped nations' economies. Taking inspiration from Vladimir Lenin's writings on imperialism, New Left students would come to see the Vietnam War (as Lenin saw the First World War) as "an annexationist, predatory, plunderous war".⁶ Whilst many students believed their organisations to be the vanguard agent of change under the Leninist concept, a New Left understanding of the situation broke with orthodoxy and came to regard imperial warfare in a specifically Western context. Imperial war was seen largely as a symptom of the degeneration of Western civilization, of the futility of bourgeois rationality, which had become the same as technological rationality. Antiwar protest, direct violent confrontation with the enablers of the imperialist bloodshed, was thus a politics of redemption according to New Left activists.⁷ From this basis, the student left in the US and West Germany would begin to develop their own ideological understandings of the war and how best to oppose it.

As the war in Vietnam dragged on throughout the 1960s, the student left in both West Germany and the U.S. began to escalate the scale of its opposition to the war. By 1965, United States B52's had begun bombing cities in North Vietnam as well as surface-bombing rural districts in South Vietnam. In response, on Feb. 5, 1965, 500 students split off from an anti-war demonstration through West Berlin and attacked the U.S. embassy. In the attack's aftermath, posters went up stating "For how much longer will we tolerate mass murder committed in our name?"⁸ This early action

and its reasoning would come to define the newly formed anti-imperialist struggle of armed actors within the student left in the U.S. and Germany. American and West German New Left communists in this era were united, above all, by their mutual commitment to a revolutionary brand of anti-imperialism, whose defining principle was that the prosperity of advanced industrial societies depended on the economic exploitation of developing countries, evident in the intensity with which the imperialist nations of the First World battled left-wing rebellions in the Third World. Che Guevara's global call to "create two, three, many Vietnams!"⁹ succinctly conveyed that the greatest contribution First World radicals could make to Third World struggles would be to bring the war for socialism home to their own nations.¹⁰

Through analysing Weatherman's own communiques and writings, it becomes clear that this strain of revolutionary anti-imperialism heavily influenced the groups turn to violent action. When commenting on the Days of Rage (a militant protest in which Weatherman-led working-class youths would, armed with 2x4's and other weapons, attack police and destroy property in the affluent Gold Coast neighbourhood), Weatherman leader John Jacobs believed that:

Weatherman would shove the war down their dumb, fascist throats and show them, while we were at it, how much better we were than them, both tactically and strategically, as a people. In an all-out civil war over Vietnam and other fascist U.S. imperialism, we were going to bring the war home. 'Turn the imperialists' war into a civil war', in Lenin's words. And we were going to kick ass.¹¹

As can be seen, Weatherman's propensity for street fighting and further armed actions was shaped by their anti-imperialist reading of the

Vietnam War. Through seeing themselves as part of a planet-wide revolution, Weatherman were to be regarded as part of an international anti-imperialist army. WUO leader Bill Ayers had set out this global perspective in both the Weatherman Manifesto of June 1969 and the "Strategy to Win" pamphlet in September of the same year. This formulation of anti-imperialism as a core tenant of Weatherman philosophy would push the group into a position that underground resistance would best serve to defeat imperialism at home, in support of the colonised masses.

Weatherman's view that they were bringing the war directly to the heart of the empire would go on to guide the groups bombing campaign against various institutions the WUO alleged contributed to global imperialism and the subjugation of Third World peoples. Citing historical examples from the Third World such as the success of terrorism in the Algerian Revolution, the National Liberation Front's executions of government officials in Vietnam and the Tupamaros in Uruguay, Weatherman justified their insistence on violence with "the historic rationales behind our political theories."¹² These theoretical justifications would go on to lead to the bombings of the Pentagon on May 19th 1972 (the birthday of Ho Chi Minh and Malcolm X), of the New York headquarters for IBM, Mobile and General Telephone and Electronics (accusing them of profiting "not only from death in Vietnam but also from Amerikan imperialism in all of the Third World")¹³ and the Oakland offices of Anaconda Copper (a financial supporter of the U.S. backed Pinochet regime in Chile). These bombings and the WUO's rationale behind them, give credence to the view that Third World revolt and the ideology of anti-imperialism had pushed New Left students towards a position of violent struggle. Weatherman reasoning and theoretical writings from the group further support this argument that Western



student leftists had found themselves allying with Third World revolutionaries in a violent struggle against imperialism.

Insights into the West German student left and the RAF also displays the influence of anti-imperialism in moulding the student movement towards more violent means of action. The RAF co-founder and first generation leader Andreas Baader would expand upon this in his remarks on the group's turn to armed struggle, articulating in one communique that "The colonised European comes alive, not to the subject and problem of the violence of our circumstances, but because all armed action subjects the force of circumstances to the force of events... I say our book should be entitled 'THE GUN SPEAKS!'"¹⁴ Taking inspiration from Maoist teachings that "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun,"¹⁵ and that "the triumph of the revolutionary Third World over the reactionary First World depended on bringing the battle from the margins to the centre of the empire,"¹⁶ the Red Army Faction would build upon existing

grievances with NATO and Vietnam in the student left and take them into a position of fully fledged armed struggle against imperialism.

Through their visits to Vietnam in the mid-1960s, German student leftists based their affinity with the Vietnamese rebels on what they saw as the close parallels between West Germany and South Vietnam. Both countries had occupying U.S. armies and governments whose true purpose—behind the rhetoric of defending liberalism against Soviet backed agents—was to contain indigenous revolts. The poet Erich Fried starkly asserted this connection with the following poem: "Vietnam is Germany/its fate is our fate/The bombs for its freedom/are bombs for our freedom/Our Chancellor Erhard/is Marshall Ky/General Nguyen Van Thieu/is President Lübke/The Americans/are also there the Americans."¹⁷ From this relationship came first solidarity with the Vietnamese people and, later on, active involvement in their struggle. This involvement came to fruition when in May 1972, the RAF bombed two U.S. bases

killing 4 soldiers and injuring 18 others in response to recent U.S. bombings in North Vietnam which the RAF denounced as "...genocide, the slaughter of a people, Auschwitz."¹⁸ The violent praxis of a group of white student leftists in solidarity with the Vietnamese communists was rationalised by RAF fellow travellers on the left as a way in which to strike out against an imperialist army wherever they may reside. The leftist legal aid group Rote Hilfe, gave the very same defence of the bombings explaining that "If imperialism is a worldwide system, and that it is, then the struggle against it must be waged worldwide. It will and must be a violent and armed struggle, or it will not be waged at all."¹⁹ Furthermore, the first generation RAF leadership's defence lawyers at trial argued that the US government had violated international law with its military intervention in Indochina and because West German air bases were used, they could be considered as legitimate targets for international retribution.²⁰

Further violent actions by the RAF and the WUO can also be attributed to the strain of anti-imperialist thought within each group. The WUO's affiliation with America's black power groups (the Black Panthers specifically) and the RAF's relationship with the Palestinian resistance groups can both be looked at as deliberate acts of engagement in a worldwide struggle against imperialism, with colonised armed organisations at the helm. The West German New Left looked at the Palestinian struggle in increasingly positive terms as the '60s dragged on, seeing the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and its secular leftist armed factions as engaging in an emancipatory struggle against an aggressive settler colonial state. By 1968, "Radical anti-Zionism and solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle became in the eyes of Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS) a revolutionary duty, equally as much as support for the Viet

Cong."²¹ This ideological development in the West German student left would go on to determine joint RAF-PLO armed actions which included the armed hijacking of Lufthansa Flight 181.

Likewise, the WUO's armed actions in conjunction with black militants (such as the Brink's robbery of 1981 which left three police dead) were influenced by a belief that the white skin privilege of the white working class virtually precluded the possibility of an alliance with oppressed blacks living in the internal colonies of ghettos. The black colony within the U.S. would thus have to carry out the war of liberation on its own, with aid from only a few enlightened white revolutionaries, specifically the Weathermen who would act as a vanguardist white fighting force against racism. This view of supporting black resistance by any means was expressed by one anonymous Weatherman who asserted that "We understood that to say we dug the Black Panthers and yet not be willing to take similar risks, would make us bullshitters and racists."²²

This section contends that the rise in anti-imperialist thought processes in the student movements of West Germany and the U.S. had come to influence the acts of violent protest by the RAF and the WUO. The chapter's investigation thus offers the view that it is the white student left's greater affirmation of solidarity with Third World resistance groups that emboldened the white radicals to partake in acts of violence against the institutions of global imperialism. It is precisely because of this turn to anti-imperialism that the student left used the tactics of bombs and bullets as a means of change.

Decaying Reaction: Anti-Communism and Fascist Repression in the Post-World War 2 West

As the New Left grew political power in the West, so too did the counter-revolutionary role of the state within these capitalist societies. The New Left theorist Herbert Marcuse catalysed this moment as the time when the state abandoned the “repressive tolerance” that Marcuse said was at the heart of liberal democracies such as the U.S. and West Germany, which gave way for repression pure and simple.²³ Given the historical role of white supremacy in the U.S. and Nazism in Germany, this repression would come to be seen by the New Left students as a form of fascism that sought to crush their burgeoning movements by any means necessary. The Black Guerrilla Family (BGF) founder George Jackson defined this fascism in capitalist society as the following: “Fascism must be seen as an episodically logical stage in the socio-economic development of capitalism in a state of crisis. It is the result of a revolutionary thrust that was weak and miscarried — a consciousness that was compromised.”²⁴ Jackson developed this New Leftist understanding of fascism as a form of capitalist repression further, stating:

The purpose of the chief repressive institutions within the totalitarian capitalist state is clearly to discourage and prohibit certain activity, and the prohibitions are aimed at very distinctly defined sectors of the class—and race—sensitized society. The ultimate expression of law is not order—it’s prison.²⁵

These repressive institutions (which the French Marxist Louis Althusser would distinguish as the Repressive State Apparatus, i.e. the institutions of the police, the army, and the

courts, which enable the ruling classes to ensure their domination over the working class)²⁶ would likewise be heralded by the student left’s armed organisations as a fascist monolith that dominated Western society. In the U.S., the Weather Underground would see this in terms of America’s history of white supremacy and the way in which institutions repressed minorities and communists through violent and covert operations. Within West Germany, the Red Army Faction outlined the fascism in their nation simply as a continuation of Nazi ideology that had been allowed to resurface in order to counter the country’s New Left. These definitions of fascism in society allowed the student leftists to justify their violence as a moral response to fascist brutality unleashed upon their movements.

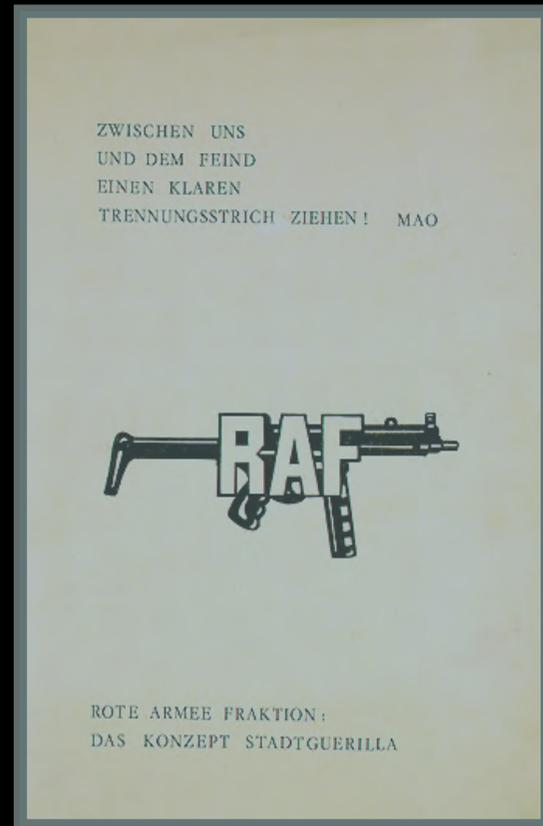
The Red Army Faction’s armed struggle against the West German state itself was seen by the group as a way in which to physically confront Germany’s Nazi past and its continued presence in the post-war years. The group’s very name was a use of situationist detournement, combining the names of the Soviet Red Army and the British Royal Air Force in a facetious nod to what both did to the original German Nazis.²⁷ In their fight against the West German state, and detailed in the group’s communiques, the RAF equated the political and judicial custodians of the Federal Republic with the Nazis. This reading of West German fascist continuity found material manifestations in the makeup of high-level political society within the nation. As of 1965, 60 percent of West German military officers had fought for the Nazis, and at least two-thirds of judges had served the Third Reich. In addition, some high-ranking officials in the Federal Republic had been Nazis. Most notorious was the Christian Democratic Union’s (CDU) Kurt Kiesinger, who years before becoming federal chancellor in 1966 had held an important position in the Nazi propaganda ministry.²⁸ The

absence of a complete break with Nazism in West Germany affected the young leftist students in a profound way, leading them to a path of violence that sought to compensate for the virtual absence of violent resistance in Germany to the Nazi regime. In this capacity, lethal violence promised to liberate RAF members from the psychological and political burdens of the past and break the chain of German guilt.²⁹

The Red Army Faction's anti-fascist struggle against the state was thus informed by the belief that Nazism had never truly been purged from German society and it would be up to the militant youth to do what their parents could not do and expunge fascism from society. The second-generation RAF leader Hans-Joachim Klein outlined this armed anti-fascism stating:

From the beginning the RAF has always said: the important thing is to exacerbate contradictions in such a way that the situation becomes more and more openly fascist. The important thing is to make the latent fascism that's predominant in West Germany clearly visible. After that the masses will rally round.³⁰

The role of the RAF's armed campaign summarised here suggests that through violent actions the group would awaken the German people to the realities of fascism felt by the students through making it more prominent, due to the inevitable excesses of repression by the state apparatus. This brutality was already felt by the students on two prominent occasions that served as a catalyst for the radical students' turn to violence. One such event was the police shooting of student demonstrator Benno Ohnesorg during a protest against the state visit of the Shah of Iran. In response to the killing, future RAF founder Gudrun Ensslin exclaimed ominously: "This fascist state means to kill us all. ...Violence is the only way to answer violence. This is the Auschwitz gen-



The RAF, De-Nazification, and the German Student Movements

Pictured above, the RAF publication, *The Urban Guerilla Concept*—written by RAF co-founder, Ulrike Meinhof.

eration, and there's no arguing with them."³¹

The killing and its reaction would develop an atmosphere amongst the student left that they were being targeted in much the same way as Jewish people during the reign of the Nazis. This view became ingrained in the minds of the most radical students when the second prominent event of fascist reaction occurred to the student left. On April the 4th, 1968, the distinguished New Left student leader Rudi Dutschke was critically wounded in a shooting by the far-right fanatic Josef Bachmann, an avid reader of the notoriously anti-communist Springer press who had ran a Red Scare campaign against Dutschke. Amidst the violent reaction by the students (which included the fire-bombing of Springer press news vans and the beating of Springer affiliated journalists)³² the Berlin Evangelical Student Union also released the following statement relating to the Springer press: "Since the Third Reich, the object of attack has been switched: the hooked Jewish nose in *Der Stürmer* has been replaced in the cartoons in *BILD* and *BZ* by the beard of the student, considered subhuman like a gorilla."³³

These events and the lack of adequate de-Nazification in West Germany would go on to prompt and justify numerous anti-fascist RAF actions. The most infamous of these violent actions was the kidnapping and execution of Hanns-Martin Schleyer, the president of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations and former SS officer under Holocaust architect Reinhard Heydrich. Through this action, the RAF had wished to confront the state with its own contradictions and highlight the fascist reaction felt by members of the group as students and communists. In a communique regarding the action, the RAF stated: "By taking Schleyer prisoner, we confronted the FRG state with its problem of legitimacy—using this bureaucrat from the Third Reich and its successor state, a state which was entirely

shaped from the outside and imposed internally."³⁴ Likewise, the assassination of Supreme Court President Günter von Drenkmann by New Left students was justified by his Nazi past, a line of thinking exemplified in the New Left tract *Revolutionärer Zorn* who wrote in response to the killing that "fascism comes as the punishment when one fails to advance the revolution."³⁵ These major events in West German radical history focus upon the relevancy of fascism in the students' struggle and further show precisely why New Left students strayed towards violence.

The Weather Underground meanwhile had a similar understanding on the legacy of fascism from the previous generation and the need to exterminate it through militant means, in the same regard as the West German student leftists. For example, in an act of international solidarity with their fellow student leftists, activists in New York (including future Weathermen David Gilbert and Jim Mellen) called for emergency demonstrations against the local office of the Springer press affiliated *Der Spiegel*. The event would turn into a riot after an anarchist collective from New York's Lower East Side called "Up Against the Wall Motherfucker" burned a German flag which gave both Mellen and Gilbert their first violent confrontations with the police.³⁶ The link between the West German students' fight against fascism and the Weather Underground would be furthered during the events and analysis of the Weatherman's Days of Rage. Before the riot, Weatherleader Bernadine Dohrn stated to the group: "We are not going to be good Germans in a Fascist State."³⁷ hinting at the lack of action by the Germans against the Nazi regime, a sentiment shared by the RAF.

Further impressions on the Days of Rage by the student left provided more insight into the anti-fascist rhetoric of the WUO. The Seattle Weatherwoman Susan Stern described the political impact of potential deaths during the ri-

ots as the following: “Mr. and Mrs. America would . . . see our bodies being blasted by shotguns, our terrified faces as we marched trembling but proud, to attack the armed might of the Nazi state of ours.”³⁸ The Yippie student activist Stew Albert provided another anti-fascist narrative that justified the moral impulse of the violent event, stating:

What if you picked up a history book and read that in 1938 a thousand University of Berlin students ran through the streets on behalf of the Jews in the concentration camps, breaking car windows, knocking over fat old German ladies, and beating up members of the Gestapo? The Pope would bless them, Mao would write an essay on them, Nehru probably would have liked them, trees would be planted in Israel for them, even Nixon would have dug them. On a moral level, they’re perfect.³⁹

The view that the U.S. was similarly fascist to Germany would be explained, and used as a basis for violence, by the WUO when it came to examining U.S. white supremacist violence and an akin anti-communist agenda which gave the pretext for Weatherman to turn to violent protest.

Weatherman’s shift to the armed underground was also strongly influenced by the repressive measures of the state, specifically against communists and Black Power activists. One such measure was the targeted killings of activists by law enforcement which was to have a decisive impact on the WUO’s turn to a bombing campaign against the police. A key example of these killings was the 1969 murder of Fred Hampton, a 21-year-old leader of the Chicago Black Panther Party who was drugged, shot at, and then finally executed at point blank range whilst he slept next to his pregnant girlfriend in his apartment.⁴⁰ The assassination of such a renowned figure in the

"What is a policeman?
He is the active servant
of the commodity, the
man in complete
submission to the
commodity, whose job
it is to ensure that a
given product of
human labour remains
a commodity, with the
magical property of
having to be paid for,
instead of becoming a
mere refrigerator or
rifle — a passive,
inanimate object,
subject to anyone who
comes along to make
use of it."

-Guy Debord



Black Power movement greatly impacted the left and Weatherman specifically as they had worked with Hampton within Chicago. Speaking on the murder, Weatherman David Gilbert would go on to say that “It was the murder of Fred Hampton more than any other factor that compelled us to feel that we had to take up armed struggle.”⁴¹ However, a second act of repression would further highlight links between white supremacy, state institutions and fascism in the United States. In Greensboro, on November 3rd, 1979, five members of the Communist Workers’ Party were killed in a drive by shooting by members of the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party. It would later be revealed that FBI informants and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents had colluded with the far-right shooters in order to put a stop to Maoist organising within the black community in Greensboro.⁴² This repression from the state apparatus and collusion with far-right forces highlight the similar feeling within the U.S. left that fascism had ingrained itself within the nation and would need

to be militantly confronted.

The investigations within this section posit that both the WUO and the RAF’s analysis of post-war fascism had provided both groups with a moral incentive to target members of the repressive state apparatus that they saw as no different to the Nazis before them. This thought process would be realised in the final words of RAF commando Holger Meins on his deathbed from hunger strike with his defining statement that “In the final analysis, you’re either human being or pig.”⁴³ Similarly, a leader of the White Panthers—a group allied with Weatherman—issued the following public statement on violence against agents of the state: “I don’t want to make it sound like all you got to do is kill people, kill pigs, to bring about revolution, but ... it is war, and a righteous revolutionary war.”⁴⁴ These statements, and the analysis provided in this chapter, illustrate why a perceived atmosphere of fascist repression in the West provided the vindication for the student left to use violent means.

Obey, Consume, Conform: Consumer Capitalism and Culture in the Late 20th Century

In the post-war years following the destruction from World War Two, a new economic era for Western nations began as a result of the rising hegemony of the United States and its corporations through the Marshall Plan. With new-found markets becoming established and goods now flowing through Euro-America, a form of advanced capitalism would come to be entrenched within the West. The writer Fredric Jameson defined this society as “New types of consumption planned obsolescence: an ever present an ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes, the penetration of advertising, television and the media generally to a hitherto unparalleled degree throughout society.”⁴⁵ The analysis of this new post-industrial form of capitalism, which emphasised the role of products, signs, and individual consumers in society, was to be a key segment of New Left thinking and would go on to influence the countercultural views of young militant students. This line of thinking would be best outlined and explained by the Situationist International founder Guy Debord who diagrammed the new functions of the capitalist state in consumer society, commenting:

What is a policeman? He is the active servant of the commodity, the man in complete submission to the commodity, whose job it is to ensure that a given product of human labour remains a commodity, with the magical property of having to be paid for, instead of becoming a mere refrigerator or rifle — a passive, inanimate object, subject to anyone who comes along to make use of it.⁴⁶

This belief, articulated by Debord and the Situ-

By the end of the armed campaigns, most of both groups' membership were either dead, in prison, or had turned their backs on armed resistance in favour of becoming functioning members of capitalist society.

tionists, expanded upon Marx's writings on alienation and the fetishism of commodities by stating that the hardening of the role of commodities in advanced capitalism had placed the need by state forces to protect consumer products far above the protection of working people. It was a view to be shared by both the Red Army Faction and the Weather Underground who aspired to overcome the individualism and decadence they saw as integral to consumer capitalism through cultivating an appreciation of the collective enterprise and of the kinds of discipline required for their dangerous political work.⁴⁷ The attempt to form a counter to consumer society would direct both groups to use violent protest as a way in which to bring down the cultural commodity-driven values that governed advanced capitalism. However, the spectacle of mass media, now ingrained as a part of consumer society, would also subtly influence the armed student

“We must move to a place beyond all known issues [...] What we want is salvation from a meaningless annihilation. To not be cremated for Coka-Cola and plastic flags [...] on the moon.”

-Sam Melville



groups' use of armed actions as the relationship between the students and capitalist mass media developed further and further with each passing armed attack. This rapport would display the ways in which the society of the spectacle would only come to increase the spectacular nature of both groups violent acts and thus displays, as this chapter shall argue, that the proliferation of mass media (and the media's attempts to commodify and profit from spectacular violent acts and even the students own violent deaths) would come to increase the militants' tendencies to use violence as a tactic.

The development of the Red Army Faction's anti-consumerist and anti-materialist ideology began with what was to be the group's very first destructive action. On April 2, 1968, future RAF leaders Gudrun Ensslin and Andreas Baader set fire to two department stores in Frankfurt. Whilst the action ostensibly protested the Vietnam War, the choice in target was a specific one that targeted the consumer mindset of modern West Germany in a deliberately militant way that sought to undermine the whole system. Future RAF leader Ulrike Meinhof would convey this very point, writing in support of her future comrades that "The progressive moment in the burning of a department store doesn't lie in the destruction of commodities but in the criminality of the act, its breaking of the law."⁴⁸ This anti-consumerist notion would be intrinsic to RAF ideology that developed into believing that the West German superstructure represented a repressive totality, rooted in a commodity fetishism that exerted a pervasive "Consumterror" ("terror of consumption").⁴⁹ The RAF would collectively detail this development, writing in 1972:

The system in the metropolises has managed to drag the masses so deeply into its own filth that they seem to have largely lost the feeling for their position as exploited and oppressed, of their situation

as object. So much so, that for a car, a pair of jeans, life insurance, and a loan, they will easily accept any outrage on the part of the system. In fact, they can no longer imagine or wish for anything beyond a car, a vacation, and a tiled bathroom.⁵⁰

The communiques of the RAF highlight a key component of the group's armed struggle which consciously rejects the narrow pursuit of self-interest and superficial comfort through ever-expanding consumption that was alleged to be at the heart of advanced capitalist culture. Another RAF communique linked the group's violent struggle directly with consumer society stating that "Those who don't defend themselves die, those who don't die are buried alive in prisons, in reform schools, in brand new kitchens and bedrooms filled with fancy furniture bought on credit. **START THE ARMED RESISTANCE NOW! BUILD UP THE RED ARMY.**"⁵¹ Through these visceral and eye-catching communiques, combined with their spectacular armed actions, the group borrowed methods from Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty that (like the RAF) sought - through transgressive and horrific theatrics - to shock an audience out of their cultural desensitization from mindless consumerism.⁵² These communiques and actions all point towards an underlying viewpoint of the RAF that sought to directly confront consumerism through militant actions and violence.

The Weather Underground meanwhile also faced a similar quandary confronting consumer culture within the United States. Deeply rooted within this quandary was the issue of being authentic in an atmosphere of alienation from the rise of product-based sign value.⁵³ This belief in authenticity held by the Weather Underground was shared across the U.S. New Left and especially within the countercultural student bodies that inhabited leftist spaces at the time. The New Leftists Ralph

Larkin and Daniel Foss summarised this position stating that to be "real" in the face of mass consumer capitalism meant "being what one becomes upon rejection of the conventions" learned through one's mainstream socialization. "From one's current perspective," these "amounted to 'bullshit,' 'lies,' 'brainwashing,' a 'phony mindfuck,' etc."⁵⁴ In other words, in order to triumph over consumerism, one would have to reject the cultural conventions through militancy against the very system and forge one's own authentic self through confrontation. This viewpoint would come to be epitomised by the Weather Underground fellow traveller and New York Collective leader Sam Melville whose group bombed numerous corporate buildings and U.S. army offices. In his communiques to the world explaining his actions, Melville stated that "...corporations have made us into useless consumers, devouring increasing quantities of useless credit cards and household appliances. Jobs are mindless. Vast machines pollute our air, water and food."⁵⁵ Writing from prison, he would further state that "We must move to a place beyond all known issues... What we want is salvation from a meaningless annihilation. To not be cremated for Coka-Cola and plastic flags . . . on the moon."⁵⁶ These actions and writings display the influence that consumer society played in driving New Left students further into militant actions.

The shared aims and views between Melville, the WUO and other militant students, presents how the turn to armed actions occurred due to the desire (in a culture that produced floods of shoddy and "plastic" commodities) to be authentic in one's life (that is, to be authentic revolutionaries) and to demonstrate this authenticity in the most militant fashion (first by street-fighting, then by bombing).⁵⁷ Weatherman's anti-consumerist agenda was further evidenced when the group sprung out counterculture figure and LSD gu-



ru Timothy Leary in a jailbreak, stating that “He was a political prisoner, captured for the work he did in helping all of us begin the task of creating a new culture on the barren wasteland that has been imposed on this country by Democrats, Republicans, Capitalists and creeps.”⁵⁸ For the WUO, the jailbreak emphasized not only the need for militant action in getting results but also the need to create a new authentic culture which breaks completely with the alienating, capitalist and consumerist society felt in America. A view best summarised most simply by WUO leader Bernadine Dohrn who once commented that “After the revolution there won’t be any commercials.”⁵⁹

However, advanced capitalist culture in the West would also have a unique effect on the armed actions of the militant student groups by the time of the late '60s. The spectacle of mass media in both the US and West Germany would play into numerous groups’ praxis when considering violent actions of a spectacular nature. This was demonstrated by Baader’s belief

that “The revolution won’t be built through political work, but through headlines,”⁶⁰ a belief which espoused that the media’s highlighting of spectacular actions such as bombings and hijackings could wake the masses up to their own alienation. By the end though, in both the US and West Germany, the most violent and spectacular New Left student groups would end up becoming products themselves in the commodified news cycle of mass media. In the words of Debord, the revolutionary groups “became fodder for the media machine.”⁶¹ and in spite of trying to create an anti-spectacle through bombings (which were supposed to interrupt the spectacle of everyday life) the eventual deaths of many student militants in armed actions would end with the commodification of the students’ corpses.

For the RAF, this moment would be the deaths of founders Ulrike Meinhof, Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe in Stammheim prison and the public display of their bodies for the press to capture. The use of mass media was deliberate and was used to un-

derline the defeat of the RAF's first generation by the state in a spectacular fashion. In the U.S., this moment would be best captured not by the Weather Underground but by the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) another New Left armed organisation with roots in the student movement which engaged in dialogue with Weatherman. Like the RAF, the SLA explicitly used media orientated strategies (such as the kidnapping of Patty Hearst and her eventual active participation, caught on camera, in an SLA bank heist) and were also portrayed as 'folk devils' by the mass media. Finally, like the RAF, they were to die spectacularly in a shootout with police that ended with the firebombing of the group's base. Their charred corpses were, like the RAF founders, captured and put on display by the nation's news media.⁶² Both events show how, despite the New Left students' attempts to use the media spectacle to their own advantage, the group's members would remain little more than commodities in the eyes of mass media society. Both the media and the student's usage of each other as tools though did increase the propensities for violence to occur from both state and leftist actors and thus shows the role consumerism played in driving spectacular violence forward.

Within this section, consumer society's alienating aspects (as well as its spectacle in the form of news media) have been analysed as major reasons for the turn to more violent and attention-grabbing armed actions by the most radical New Left students. The investigations in the section have offered up the conclusions that the rise of commodities, the need to be authentic and militant in a 'hyperreal' society and the influence of mass media all contributed to rising violence from the New Left students' organisations. In the end, both the society of the spectacle and the fetishization of the commodity incited alienated students to use militant acts in their struggle against the state.

The End of the Rule of the Pigs is in Sight:

Concluding Comments

In answer to the question of capitalism and youth violence, the analysis offered in this investigation of student revolutionary violence in the late 1960s proposes that key components of Western capitalism did influence the student leftist's propensity to use armed protest. Examinations on both discussed groups offer key insights into the thought processes of the most radical student leftists. The lines of thinking convey a sense of great conviction to not only make revolution in the First World, but also to confront the flagrant injustices committed in the name of capitalist ideology. In confronting this ideological force, the groups happily committed themselves to a process of revolution that emphasized violence in the overthrow of the ruling class. For example, Weatherman once prophesied that "Our humble task is to organize the apocalypse!"⁶³ and, in confronting the heavy response from state forces, stated that "If it takes a bloodbath, let's get it over with."⁶⁴ Similarly, the Red Army Faction delved into violence further and further as the struggle continued, once stating that:

...the apologists for the hard line will find out that they are not the only ones with an arsenal at their disposal. They will find out that we are many, and that we have enough love—as well as enough hate and imagination—to use both our weapons and their weapons against them, and that their pain will equal ours.⁶⁵

These statements encapsulate both groups' struggle against the capitalist state. A struggle which led both groups down a path that relied on violence more and more as either a means for survival or for reprisal against what they saw as further injustices committed on the world stage.

Neither the Red Army Faction nor the Weather Underground's campaigns of armed actions brought about the immediate end to imperialism, fascism, or consumerism in the capitalist West. By the end of the armed campaigns, most of both groups' membership were either dead, in prison, or had turned their backs on armed resistance in favour of becoming functioning members of capitalist society. The campaigns did, however, confront these key components of capitalism and may have acted as an embryonic form of what further resistance could look like in other times of revolutionary possibility in the First World. The lessons learned from the 1960s New Left students by today's revolutionary left will be important to study, as capitalism further develops into its late-stage format. With poetic optimism for this potential future of new left-wing armed actors, the RAF concluded in their final statement that "The revolution says/I was/I am/I will be again."⁶⁶

When concluding on the violence, struggle and repression felt in the New Left students' campaigns against capitalism, the position of the radical and revolutionary left and the reasoning behind the violence would be best recapitulated by the artist Jean Genet in his statement to the world:

Violence and life are more or less synonymous. The grain of wheat which germinates and breaks through the frozen soil, the beak of the chick which cracks the eggshell, the fertilization of the female and the birth of the young can all be accused of being violent. Yet no one would put on trial the child, the women, the chick, the bud, or the grain of wheat. The charges brought against the Red Army Faction and the trial of its violence are real enough. But Germany, accompanied by the rest of Europe and America, are trying to fool themselves, and the trial against the violence is precisely what that brutality consists of. The greater the

brutality and the more demeaning the trial, the more violence becomes imperative and necessary. The more destructive the brutality, the more the violence which is life will require heroism. As Andreas Baader has said 'Force is an economic power.' We owe it to Andreas Baader, to Ulrike Meinhof, to Holger Meins, to the Red Army Faction in general, to have made us understand not only by their words but by their actions outside and inside prison that only violence can stop human brutality. More or less unconsciously, everyone knows that behind these two words – trial and violence – is hidden a third one. Brutality. The brutality of the system.⁶⁷

The statement by Genet best epitomises the meaning behind the New Left's struggle against capitalism. It was a violent one but one that was motivated by imperialist bombing in Vietnam, fascist murderers in Greensboro and consumerist alienation in the Western metropolis. It was precisely this brutality that led to New Left student violence.

Endnotes

1. Cheek, Timothy. *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*. p. 198
2. Bacciocco, Edward. *The New Left in America: reform to revolution*. p. 21
3. The strategy of foco theory posits that a dedicated band of revolutionaries can launch very small-scale, roving semi-guerrilla warfare at any time, which will serve as a focus and inspiration for the rapid growth of more general guerrilla warfare and/or a general uprising capable of seizing political power. The theory is that these paramilitary roving bands can themselves create the necessary conditions for revolution through their vanguard actions and moral example.
4. Abu-Jamal, Mumia. *We Want freedom: A*

- Life in the Black Panther Party*. p. 105
5. Gitlin, Todd. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. p. 177
 6. Lenin, Vladimir. *Imperialism and Capitalism*. p. 33
 7. Aronowitz, Stanley. *When the New Left Was New*. p.34
 8. Vague, Tom. *Televisionaries: A Red Army Faction Story*. p. 8
 9. Guevara, Che. *Message to the Tricontinental*. p. 9
 10. Varon, Jeremy. *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*. p. 7
 11. Gillies, Kevin. *The Last Radical*. p. 7
 12. Stern, Susan. *With the Weathermen: The Personal Journal of a Revolutionary Woman*. p. 210
 13. Berger, Dan. *Outlaws Of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity*. p. 131
 14. Vague, Tom. *Televisionaries: A Red Army Faction Story*. p. 50
 15. Zedong, Mao. *Problems of War and Strategy*. p. 224
 16. Goldsworthy, Rupert. *CONSUMING//TERROR: Images of the Baader-Meinhof*. p. 3
 17. Varon, Jeremy. *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*. p. 34
 18. Moncourt, Andre. *The Red Army Faction, A Documentary History: Volume 1: Projectiles for the People*. p. 178
 19. Varon, Jeremy. *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*. p. 213
 20. Vague, Tom. *Televisionaries: A Red Army Faction Story*. p. 67
 21. Martel, Christoph. Nur die besten Absichten: Das prekäre Verhältnis der deutschen 68er zu den USA und Israel. p. 25
 22. Varon, Jeremy. *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*. p. 110
 23. Berger, Dan. *Outlaws Of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity*. p. 61
 24. Jackson, George. *Blood in My Eye*. p. 137
 25. *Ibid* p. 99
 26. Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. p. 92
 27. Vague, Tom. *Televisionaries: A Red Army Faction Story*. p. 32
 28. Varon, Jeremy. *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*. p. 33
 29. *Ibid* p. 13
 30. Goldsworthy, Rupert. *CONSUMING//TERROR: Images of the Baader-Meinhof*. p. 92
 31. Sánchez-Cuenca, Ignacio. *The Historical Roots of Political Violence: Revolutionary Terrorism in Affluent Countries*. p. 209
 32. Drake, Connor. *Terrorists' Target Selection*. p. 156
 33. Goldsworthy, Rupert. *CONSUMING//TERROR: Images of the Baader-Meinhof*. p. 38
 34. Moncourt, *The Red Army Faction, A Documentary History: Volume 2: Dancing with Imperialism*. p. 298-299
 35. Gassert, Philipp. *Coping with the Nazi past: West German Debates on Nazism and Generational Conflict*. p. 266
 36. Varon, 2004, Jeremy. *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*. p. 36
 37. *Ibid* p. 85
 38. *Ibid* p. 76
 39. *Ibid* p. 86
 40. Churchill, Ward. *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*. p. 69-70
 41. Berger, Dan. *Outlaws Of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity*. p. 120
 42. Waller, Signe. *Love and Revolution: A Poli-*

cal Memoir : People's History of the Greensboro Massacre, Its Setting and Aftermath p. 475.

43. Goldsworthy, Rupert. *CONSUMING//TERROR: Images of the Baader-Meinhof*. p. 110

44. Eckstein, Arthur. *Bad Moon Rising: How the Weather Underground Beat the FBI and Lost the Revolution*. p. 115-116

45. Jameson, Frederic. *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern*. p. 19

46. Debord, Guy. *The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy*. p. 3

47. Varon, Jeremy. *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*. p. 9

48. *Ibid* p. 41

49. *Ibid* p. 42

50. RAF, *The action of Black September in Munich - on the strategy of the anti-imperialist struggle*. p. 6

51. Vague, Tom. *Televisionaries: A Red Army Faction Story*. p. 21

52. Goldsworthy, Rupert. *CONSUMING//TERROR: Images of the Baader-Meinhof*. p. 18

53. A term made popular by Jean Baudrillard which showed how the use of the commodity as a form of communication in contemporary culture and society has come to the point in which the real has disappeared and is replaced by models "more real than the real".

54. Larkin & Foss, *Lexicon of Folk-Etymology*. p. 363

55. Pickering, Leslie James. *Mad Bomber Melville*. p. 35

56. *Ibid* p. 73

57. Eckstein, Arthur. *Bad Moon Rising: How the Weather Underground Beat the FBI and Lost the Revolution*. p. 50

58. Berger, Dan. *Outlaws Of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity*. p. 139

59. *Ibid* p. 158

60. Goldsworthy, Rupert. *CONSUMING//TERROR: Images of the Baader-Meinhof*. p. 75

61. Scribner, Charity. *Buildings on Fire: The Situationist International and the Red Army*

Faction. p. 32

62. Goldsworthy, Rupert. *CONSUMING//TERROR: Images of the Baader-Meinhof*. p. 179

63. Buhle, Paul. *The New Left Revisited*. p. 230

64. Varon, Jeremy. *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*. p. 309

65. Moncourt, Andre *Daring to Struggle, Failing to Win: The Red Army Faction's 1977 Campaign of Desperation*. p. 19

66. RAF. "The Urban Guerrilla Is History...": *The Final Communiqué From The Red Army Faction*. p. 20

67. Burns, Tim. *Against the Grain: More Meat than Wheat*.

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