

THE LINES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

Weather Underground

By Mark Brothman

The Weather Underground Organization has exploded, and the sheets of paper being left not only in its clandestine infrastructure, but in the aboveground left as well.

Documents obtained by *The Open Road* indicate a serious and possibly final split within the WU over whether to continue its recent policy of attempting to commandeer the U.S. aboveground left through a controlled, ecologist-oriented mass organization.

The documents indicate that some or most of the guerrilla organizations' membership now replicates recent WU practice on the grounds it was opportunistic and that it represented an abandonment of the most advanced elements of popular struggle, including women, Third World Groups, prisoners, and national liberation movements at home and abroad. As well, plans for the entire membership to surface and play leading roles in the envisioned new mass organization have apparently been shelved.

Bernardine Dohrn, former first secretary of the WU, declares in the documents that "the split in the WU is real. To all Third World comrades and organizations we have known and related to... all our relationships with the old organization are formally dissolved.

Dohrn, who earlier had endorsed the WU's recent approach to mass activity, now identifies with the "Revolutionary Committee of the WU" which includes the old Central Committee's "deadly, grave crimes committed against the women's movement, against revolutionary anti-imperialist politics and organization in the oppressor nation."

"According to Dohrn, 'the aim of the WU was nothing less than to establish itself with its white and male supremacist politics, as the leadership of the whole U.S. revolutionary movement.' The WU felt that 'invasion' (surfacing) would spur a nationwide defense campaign that would help generate a new organization."

The policy has been well underway during the past two years, with the WU ceasing all armed actions and instead establishing a nationwide network of aboveground Prairie Fire Organizing Committees (PFOC) to carry forward the mass work. But the split seems to have left the PFOCs in a shambles, seriously impairing their ability to function.

Whether this means the WU's recent attempt to reassume its traditional militant clandestine posture is still questionable at this point, although the Revolutionary Committee says it "intends 'to maintain and develop the history of the WU in armed struggle.'"

Economist Demands

The Revolutionary Committee documents say the WU watered down its politics in order to "expand

the main base" of its support among the working class. WUO strategy was to subordinate the women's, anti-imperialist and national liberation struggles to the economist demands of the working class for higher wages. The effect was "to cover the flag labels (bourgeois) Meany and Woodcock." The RC criticizes this strategy on the grounds that revolutionaries should "support the most advanced, not waiting for the most backward."

One of the documents, *Self Criticism of the WUO* (issued Oct. 1), condemns the WUO's recent position that the women's movement is essentially a bourgeois phenomenon. "In every respect, the WUO has reinforced the domination of women by men... The WUO had no comprehension of the revolutionary content of the independent women's movement, and a consistent line that women could only be revolutionaries if they worked in the oppressed areas. At one point, this meant the anti-imperialist movement, for the last two years it was the 'class struggle'."

An RC document, dated Nov. 20, says that Dohrn was set up as an "archtypical exceptional woman in opposition to all other women to enforce and to cover for male supremacy."

Dohrn now denounces her former role as that of "a token woman... I opposed the politics of the WUO and glorified the purely economic struggle." In a transcribed tape message, she says she no longer "speaks for the rest of the central committee — Bill Ayres, Jeff Jones, Celia Sojourn, Joe Reed. Nor do I speak for the old organization."

She says the WUO ignored women fugitives and instead squandered time, money and cadre on opportunist and bourgeois men fugitives. "The most glaring example of this," she says, is the WUO's support of Abbie Hoffman. Instead of organizing support for prisoners, the WUO "removed cadre from prison work in order to do opportunistic place organizing. We dismantled defense committees and destroyed activities in support of the black struggle." The RC slashes at the WUO for doing "nothing to support the Black Liberation Army" (BLA) which has been under severe attack by the State.

The documents also condemn the WUO's role in the Hard Times Conference, held in Chicago in January, 1976, which brought together about 3,000 individuals from groups such as the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, Black Panther Party, East and West Coast versions, Viet Nam Veterans Against the War and the American Indian Movement. "The WUO, through the PFOCs, was the prime mover behind the conference, but its drive for a new mass organization, led by the WUO, was stymied by its proposed 'program for hard times' was rejected by the delegates."

Another WUO initiative, the making of the feature

film *Underground*, is assailed as "a crime against national liberation movements, women and the anti-imperialist left... it was a conscious attempt to organize support for the individuals in the film—not to strengthen the revolution... the portrayal of ourselves as gentle, reasonable, well-educated and WHITE was a move to dissociate ourselves from the alleged 'extremism' of prison struggles, the BLA, FALN, SLA... as armed struggle itself."

Says Dohrn, "Along with the attempt to control the Hard Times Conference, we had control on the movie and the establishment of a legal apparatus to implement this strategy of invasion."

The document claims that in October, 1973, the WUO was completely disorganized "because of white and male supremacy within the organization and because of the politics of New Morning, a revolutionary group which criticized the "military error" — the WUO's "tendency to consider only bombings or picking up the gun as revolutionary and proclaimed the revolutionary potential of freek culture."

Guerrillas Without Warfare
Three years and numerous bombings later, according to the documents, Bill Ayres was to lead a move to rebuild the crumbling organization. After another intense debate, the WUO published *Prairie Fire*, a 186-page political statement that reaffirmed the WUO's traditional attitude toward self-determination, anti-imperialism and the women's struggle, and condemned the earlier "unpractical support to youth culture."

Above all, *Prairie Fire* was a call for aboveground organizing: "We need organization... we all feel the need to be part of a whole, larger than ourselves, to see our individual contributions add up to something meaningful."

In keeping with their new emphasis on aboveground organizing, the WUO began publishing *Oswatimie*, a quarterly magazine, in the spring of 1975. In the first issue they asserted that "the left is not dug into the people's discontent... Left analysis is seen mainly in papers circulated among leftists, left sections are heard mainly in meetings of the left." Then instead of digging

"into the people's discontent," they dug themselves. *Oswatimie* became an increasingly in-group publication devoted to internal theoretical squabbles. Extracultural activities were virtually ignored; "working class consciousness" became synonymous with revolutionary consciousness; the independent struggles of Blacks, women, prisoners and Third World people were submerged in a melange of "class struggle," freek culture was buried as an embarrassing opportunistic phase; and Leninism was enthusiastically embraced.

By late 1975 Weather politics had reached the point where many revolutionaries were suggesting that the

which give them an edge of vested interest and tie them to a certain extent to the imperialists. . .

Days of Rage

Their 1969 national action, the Days of Rage in Chicago, brought together a "Red Army" of about 100,000 pipe-swinging Weatherpeople for four days of violent clashes with police.

In early 1970, a step ahead of a whole raft of federal indictments arising out of the Days of Rage, the "Weather Machine" reorganized into a network of tight affinity groups and went underground. For the next four years, they conducted a systematic campaign of armed actions, with their bombs

reaching right into the Pentagon and the Capitol. They also carried out numerous retaliatory blasts (after George Jackson's murder, the Attica massacre, the coup in Chile, the SLA shootout. . .).

The WUO has made a significant contribution to the North American revolutionary process. Whether the movement was at high energy or in despondent lulls, the WUO has responded to outrages by the State with clean, tactically tactful actions. They have been a powerful force in raising consciousness around sexism, racism, imperialism and militant tactics. The publication of *Oswatimie* and *Prairie Fire*, and the filming of the movement were clandestine victories in themselves. Seven years of busy underground activity with hardly any arrests is an unqualified track record for contemporary North American guerrillas in terms of secure organization.

Authoritarian Ideology
Despite these exemplary successes the WUO has been unable to catalyze a great deal of aboveground activity. They have followed the pattern of movement groups who, by adhering rigidly to authoritarian Marxist-Leninist organizational forms, isolate themselves from people and attempt to form elitist working relationships. Just as they made a "military error" when they looked at those unwilling to "pick up the gun" as their enemy, they recently erred by dismissing non-Leninist revolutionaries as "incorrupt line" leftists.

According to the RC, the WUO "attacked the BLA for being 'militarist,' refused to give any form of aid or support on the alleged basis that they were not Marxist-Leninist, or organized along the lines of Democratic centralism, as defined by us. The same was true for Native American fighters." Much of the women's movement was shrugged off as "anti-communist" as, according to Dohrn, wrote that "elevated differences on Communist organization and Marxism-Leninism above oppressor national solidarity with national liberation struggles."

Although Weather has always considered itself Marxist-Leninist, the split between its "official" authoritarian ideology and its certain "unofficial" anti-authoritarian impulses has been the source of constant tension. In *New Morning* for instance, Dohrn wrote that "one of the most important things that has changed since people began working in collectives is the idea of what leadership is. People—and especially groups of sisters—don't want to follow academic ideologues or authoritarians."

While the recent documents express many anti-authoritarian criticisms, Dohrn and the RC seem unwilling to seriously look at concepts of non-hierarchical organization. They recognize the need for long-term, coordinated, strategically defined organization; the need for armed struggle; the need for a mass organization "to pull together friends and comrades, whether three or thirty." Yet they never even consider that anti-authoritarian organization may be anything other than chaos. Alongside their attacks on an elitist leadership, the RC manages to come up with statements like "anarchism has also manifested itself within the organization through spontaneous concepts of strategy for revolution; and in concepts of organization and leadership that were not collective and not founded on political struggle."

Dohrn states clearly that the other central committee members' proposal for surfacing is not necessary to diminish the lustre and the impact of any Weather-people who do come out.

While the split may have put an end to the dream of taking control of the aboveground left, it may also have impaired the WUO's ability to wage clandestine warfare. Because of the uncertain future, it appears the movement is faced with the prospect of two, three, many Weather Undergrounds.

A complete text of the WUO's documents entitled "The Split of the Weather Underground Organization Struggling Against White and Male Supremacy in Our Movement" is available for \$1.00 from John Brown Book Club, P.O. Box 22383, Seattle, Washington 98122.



Weatherpeople in Chicago streets during 1969 Days of Rage.