

INDIVIDUAL TERRORISM?

The movement mourns the deaths this month of at least five activists killed in bomb blasts in the United States.

The tragedy of Ralph Featherstone and William (Che) Payne is particularly disturbing because of the clear possibility that the two black revolutionaries have been murdered. The official police theory that the two were killed when a bomb they were transporting accidentally exploded is inconsistent with the nature of the defense planned in the trial of H. Rap Brown, with the self-interest of Brown and his comrades, with the direction in which their car was heading (away from the court house) and all too consistent with the State of Maryland's effort to frame the SNCC leader on charges of being responsible for a black uprising in Maryland two years ago.

Friends of Brown believe the SNCC



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chairman himself was the object of the blast and that he luckily was not in the car at the time. There is a further theory that far from being killed when their own bomb exploded, the detonation was caused after Payne discovered the bomb under the seat and that it exploded when he touched it.

The situation is different in the case of the three killed in New York City in the explosion of a bomb in a townhouse owned by the father of a member of the Weatherman group. Police claim the home was a "bomb factory." There is no evidence in the case

other than what city officials wish to make public.

Government and police officials in New York and elsewhere lost no time in attempting to connect the fatal blast and three further explosions in the city in buildings occupied by war-profiteering corporations to other revolutionary groups—specifically the Black Panther party and the Young Lords. Even though both organizations reject individual terrorism—as opposed to the Weatherman group—police have sought to include them in the terrorist political spectrum, in line with government efforts to destroy the black and Puerto Rican groups. If possible, of course, the government will attempt to connect the entire left with the bombings and with terrorism as a political tactic. This task

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will be made easier since there are a few small groups within the broader movement which project the rhetoric of individual terrorism.

In reaction to the government's attempt to isolate the left under the terrorist label, it is important for the movement to publicly counterattack by pointing out that U.S. imperialism is the biggest "bomb factory" of all and that 50 or 100 sticks of dynamite could not begin to equal the explosive force of even one of the thousands of bombs dropped on human beings in Vietnam and Laos every day. Within the movement, moreover, we believe it is necessary to argue against and thoroughly discredit the tactic of individual terrorism.

It is not too hard to figure out why terrorism is attractive to some movement activists. It is primarily a reaction to the barbarism of U.S. imperialism. Subsumed within this are a number of factors. First, we believe, the resort to individual terrorism is an act of frustration borne of a sense of defeatism and impotence at ever being able to win the masses of people to the struggle to defeat capitalism and build a socialist society. It is a reaction against the seeming inability to make a dent, to win any measure of social change. And it is the product of a catastrophic misreading of revolutionary history.

A lack of understanding

The Guardian strongly opposes the tactic of individual terrorism. We believe it is retrogressive and harmful to the developing revolutionary movement. We believe it speaks a fatal lack of understanding of how socialist revolutions are brought about. Never in history has terrorism led to socialist revolution. It never has and never will. At best, individual terrorism has been inconsequential to revolutionary struggle; at worst it has destroyed or seriously delayed revolutionary potential.

As socialists we understand that capitalism can only be finally smashed in the United States through the revolutionary violence of an oppressed people against the counter-revolutionary violence of the U.S. ruling class.

But at what point in history do we find ourselves? Imperialism is at the apex of its power and is beginning to take the long road to defeat. Imperialism is being defeated in Vietnam in a prelude to worldwide defeat. In response to this situation, the ruling class is applying ever more vicious tactics of suppression throughout the world. Within the U.S. our booming economy is in the beginning stages of a crisis. Third-world peoples within the U.S., led by the blacks, are in ferment. The antiwar movement is a truly mass movement. Women are beginning to organize against their oppression. Students, youth and even many GIs are beginning to rebel. The conditions of the average worker are deteriorating. As the inherent contradictions of capitalism continue to sharpen so will the developing people's movements.

Needless to say, neither the objective nor subjective conditions exist in America to create a revolutionary situation at this moment. But conditions do exist to raise the political consciousness of millions and millions of Americans in preparation for developing a mass revolutionary movement with the working class and black and other third-world people as its focal points.

As objective conditions continue to improve for the revolutionary forces and as a mass base of revolutionaries is created, the real struggle to defeat the capitalist ruling class will begin. The struggle will take many forms, both legal and illegal. The conclusion will be the armed victory of the people.

What the proponents of individual terrorism propose, basically, is to skip over these necessary stages of preparation, to ignore history—past, present and future—to disregard the necessity for building a mass people's movement and to foresake mass political agitation and education. In return they offer themselves, often heroically and idealistically, as substitutes—for history, for the masses of the people and for the science of Marxism-Leninism.

"These harmful illusions," said Lenin, "can only result in early disappointment and slacken the work of preparing for the mass attack . . ." Elsewhere the leader of the first socialist revolution referred to advocates of individual terrorism as liberals who prefer to attack the line of least resistance rather than engage in the unromantic, long-range work of mass organizing and agitation—the only genuine method by which a revolution can be carried to a successful conclusion.

Today's advocates of individual terrorism—and they do not differ in any serious respect from the terrorists Lenin and all other socialist revolutionaries fought against—usually base their argument for immediate revolutionary action on two primary premises: First, such action will stimulate the masses to take sides with the revolutionaries; second, a handful of people might actually be able to accomplish concrete harm against the government or even cripple it. Both arguments are absurd and often cloak subjective desires to achieve immediate personal gratification, or at least an immediate outlet for what Lenin termed the "passionate indignation of intellectuals who are incapable of linking the revolutionary struggle with the labor movement."

First, individual terrorism has never stimulated the masses to take sides with the revolutionaries. In situations where armed violence by small groups has appeared to achieve this, the conditions for mass revolutionary consciousness had already been completed. In Cuba for example, one hundred years of struggle and agitation preceded the arrival of the Granma on Cuban soil. Fidel and his comrades—though themselves a small group at first—enjoyed the support of the masses of proletarians and peasants who helped them throughout the guerrilla struggle.

Opposite effect often produced

Far from stimulating the masses to side with the revolutionaries, individual terrorism can produce the opposite situation, and lead to the paralysis of mass revolutionary agitation as well. American workers are not going to be won to revolution because someone is throwing a bomb, especially if they (even mistakenly) think the bomb is being thrown at them.

Nothing would suit the ruling class better than to experience an increase in individual terrorist actions. At this point, the existence of bourgeois democratic forms and the developing progressive and revolutionary politics of important sections of the American people have created a relatively broad framework for revolutionaries to operate in the U.S. The ruling class is attempting to narrow that framework through fascist repression of the Panthers and through legal repression, such as the Chicago Conspiracy trial. One method of virtually eliminating that framework would be if the ruling class were able to convince the American people that the entire left was engaging in terrorist acts.

While we believe that most of those who advocate individual terrorism are moved by revolutionary ideals, there is no question that most terrorist groups, however secret they try to remain, are probably infiltrated by government

agents. Often—as in the Statue of Liberty bombing case a few years ago or in the recent New York bombing case—police agents disguise themselves as the most “r-r-revolutionary” of revolutionaries. In the past government agents actually played a leading role in terrorist groups, ultimately setting the group up for arrest or death, while extracting as much propaganda for the ruling class as possible. In the long run, individual terrorism and armed violence isolated from a mass base of conscious support has historically been the vehicle for repression of the left in general, regardless of the intentions of its advocates.

In this regard some believe, indeed, that individual terrorism might lead to fascism but then the lines would at least be drawn clearly, eliminating confusion as to who the enemy really is. This is an absurdity which could only be projected by those who have no contact with, no knowledge about and no confidence in the people.

Bourgeois democracy bad enough

Bourgeois democracy is bad enough. An utterly fascist America, when the forces of opposition at home are as yet small, would be a historical tragedy, not just for the American people but for all the people of the world.

The second rationale for individual terror is that it could terrorize the government into making concessions or actually cripple imperialism in a concrete way. This is the biggest folly of all, a gross underestimation of the power of the United States and a gross overestimate of the power of a relative handful of people. The U.S. is the most highly developed technical and military power on earth. Only the might of the people is stronger and capable of destroying imperialism, not the pitiful plots and bombast of small bands of individual terrorists who seek to substitute themselves for the people.

The American ruling class is not going to be terrorized and imperialism is not going to be crippled by a few dozen or hundred dozen bombs. Despite the revolutionary rhetoric, the effect of terrorism is no different from that of a bourgeois liberal pressure group—never threatening the citadels of political power.

To be critical of individual terrorism is in no sense to reject violent methods of struggle. To be critical of acts of individual terrorism is not to be critical of the spontaneous violence often occurring within mass revolutionary action. Those on the left who believe there can be a peaceful transition to socialism are simply blind to the nature of U.S. imperialism. To argue against small group violence isolated from a mass base of support is not to argue against armed self-defense against state violence.

But people's war means precisely that: people's war. There cannot be a successful revolution in this nation without the support of conscious masses of people. Since revolution is not going to be imported in this country on the back of a Vietnamese peasant (haven't we already burdened that back enough?) or be handed to us by heroic black revolutionaries alone, or rise out of the ruins of one or a dozen corporate executive suites demolished by home-made bombs, we must understand that we can only succeed by organizing the masses of America and creating revolutionary political instruments enjoying the support of those masses.

If we are serious, we cannot “leap” over the stage of agitation, education and organization of the masses of working people or substitute small armed bands for them.

The conditions exist today for mass agitation and action, together with socialist education and organization. At this point, this is what must be done.