The case of the Weathermen: social reaction and radical commitment

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"A new Weatherman catchword was "barbarism". The Weathermen see themselves as playing a role similar to that of the Barbarian tribes, such as the Vandals and the Visigoths, who invaded and destroyed the decadent, corrupt Rome. (Some Weathermen even suggested changing their name to the Vandals. This would have a double meaning: first a reference to the barbarian tribe; second a reference to the line from Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues" - "The pump won't work cause the vandals stole the handle"). The name Weathermen comes from a line in the same song - "You don't need a Weatherman to know which way the wind blows" (1).

Given the rapid spread of militant political deviancy in the U.S.A. and the U.K., there is little indication that sociologists are seriously attempting to study or analyse the phenomenon. Indeed, with a few notable exceptions, the emergence of groups like the Weathermen and Mad Dog in the U.S.A. and the Angry Brigade in Britain has led merely to shoulder-shrugging, easy dismissal, or such theoretical gems as the statement that these deviants are either "out of their caps", or "financed by C.I.A."

This is not surprising, for, despite the emergence of a mass student revolt in May 1968, despite the rise of violent revolutionary youth movements, there is still little but anecdotes and speculation to guide one in the study of political deviancy. This fact in itself expresses and crystallises the objections which many radical deviancy theorists have felt towards social theory —


Author's note: Unless otherwise stated all italics are mine.
namely its inability to deal with the unorthodox except in a trivial manner.

Indeed, much of even the very best of recent American theorising looks mundanely like "commonsense" when faced with the task of analysing political radicalism. An example here is Lemert's clear statement of the Social Reaction perspective. He notes the turn away from that sociology which rested on the belief that crime and deviance give rise to social control and he states:

"I have come to believe that the reverse idea, i.e. that social control leads to deviance is equally tenable and is a potentially richer premise for studying deviance in modern society" (2).

Now this may have been fruitful in redirecting criminology and sociology in its research, but it is no news to anybody who has looked at the radical left that, one important common strand in their arguments has been that many of the imperatives for their actions flow from the recognition of the repressive existence of social control. At its crudest, the position of radicals has always been that social control prevents social change, and that therefore social control leads to the need for social revolution, or political deviation. Of course Lemert meant much more than this by his statement — as the rest of his work indicates — yet even the most advanced social reaction positions do little more than indicate that the powerful have a virtual monopoly over the way in which social action is defined and treated. Important as this recognition is, with all its implications for detailed research, it remains re-cognition. Moreover, when Howard Becker stated the following, he was dealing with yesterday's papers as far as the left was concerned:

"The question of what the purpose or goal (function) of a group is and, consequently, what things will help or hinder the achievement of that purpose, is very often a political question ... if this is true, then it is likewise true that the questions of what rules are to be enforced, what behaviour regarded as deviant and what people labelled as outsiders must also be regarded as political" (3).

This, then, is the real paradox. How do we apply social or deviancy theory to the understanding of a deviant group whose perspectives and reflexivity are often as developed, and in some cases, superior, to the framework which is intended to explain them? If we intend to move beyond mere description then we have a rationale for our study, but it is precisely at this juncture that present social analysis is weak. It is, therefore, not so surprising that, as Stuart Hall has indicated, political deviancy does not
figure prominently in the study of deviant behaviour. He states:

Becker suggests that this is because, in many forms of social deviancy, 'the conflicting segments or ranks are not organised for conflict; no one attempts to alter the shape of the hierarchy'. This, despite the definition of deviancy as a 'social problem', the labelling process, and the enforcement of social controls all contain an intrinsically political component. Horowitz and Liebowitz argue that 'deviance has been studied by employing a consensus-welfare model rather than a conflict model'. This has tended to suppress the political element in deviant transactions with straight society" (4).

Now it seems to me that the problem goes deeper than this question of our models, and is in itself fruitful in that it can force us to re-examine some of the salient assumptions of deviancy theory. It is for this reason that I wish to use an analysis of the Weathermen to repeat and develop one or two criticisms of existing theory which have appeared elsewhere (5). What recent developments in deviancy theory have done is to enable many theorists to rid themselves of the ridiculous. By the ridiculous I mean the kind of social theorizing which wrote off much deviant behaviour as clinically pathological or irrational. It has rid us of the need to take seriously statements like the following which reflect little more than the ideological prejudices of the psychiatric profession. Taken from a piece by Seymour L. Halleck, it reminds us why we are often self-congratulatory and complacent about the advances deviancy theory has made. Writing on "Why Students Protest" he asserts:

... there can be no true understanding of such a complex human phenomenon as protest without examining the specific psychological needs of individual protesters. Psychiatrists often find that a patient will join a protest movement immediately following a failure in school or rejection by a close friend. In such cases, activism must be understood as something more than an intellectual or idealistic commitment. There appears to be an inverse relationship between teaching of despair and activism.

At the time of Berkeley Free Speech controversy, admissions to the student psychiatric clinic dropped markedly. I have noted similar trends at the University of Wisconsin. During a massive protest of the draft which resulted in a sit-in, three of my patients cancelled their therapy hours. In each case they remarked that psychotherapy seemed meaningless when there were so many important things to do" (6).
Now deviancy theory certainly teaches its students to distrust psychologising and to seek analysis which is truer to the deviant phenomenon, but whether it can really move beyond attacking this perspective is questionable. Its attraction and success so far depends on its superiority over the comments of professional psychiatrists, psychologists, and criminologists whose theories take flight into mysticism. Deviancy theory looked radical for it enabled its students to mock those who resorted to a language similar to that of their paymasters. "Those bums at Berkeley" as President Nixon would have it, or, in the words of a departed Minister of Education, Edward Short: "... it is high time one or two of those thugs were out on their neck ... they are just a mixed group of wreckers, some maoist, some just Brand X revolutionaries" (7). Amongst this melee of stigmata and stereotyping deviancy theorists have looked radical in their explanations. Yet, as the transactionalist wing of deviancy theory has shown, explanations and definitions of reality are transacted between the powerful and others. In this respect — despite much belief to the contrary — the sociology of deviancy is no exception. For as radicals have always insisted, sociology has no special claims, it must be constantly questioned for it too is social thought which is produced in a power-governed society.

The Social Reaction Approach

Now what does all of this say about the utility of present deviancy theory. Aside from encouraging scepticism, it suggests we should thoroughly examine the assumptions of deviancy theory, we must take our theory seriously, for we only understand the world in terms of those theories. There is no a-theoretical approach to some "real" world: the world is situated and located via our theory, and, in this sense, there are only two types of theory: the good and the bad. Some of it is bad — for much deviancy theory perpetuates reification; it accepts an estranged society as normal and reads off its problems from such an assumption. Here, another paradox appears, for it is in the under-studied area of political deviancy that such limitations would be clearly exposed, as Horowitz and Liebowitz note in their seminal article, written in 1968:

"The traditional distinction between social problems and the political system is becoming obsolete. Behaviour which in the past was perceived as social deviance is now assuming well-defined ideological and organisational contours; while political marginals are adopting a
deviant life-style. This merger of social deviance and political marginality creates a new style of politics, based on strategies that are traditionally considered illegitimate. The result of this trend is estimated to be an increase in the use of violence as a political tactic, and the development of a revolutionary potential among the expanding ranks of deviant sub-groups” (8).

These insights have been rapidly confirmed — for the end of the Sixties and the beginning of the Seventies have indeed witnessed an increase in the use of violence as a political tactic, and has in consequence forced some of us to transcend our Ivory Tower theories. In England, the first really cogent attack on deviancy theory was produced by Taylor and Taylor in their radical article „We Are All Deviants Now”, in which they suggested that much deviancy theory is underpinned by little more than a conservative theory of values. They argued that:

„The 'magic' words in this type of theorisation are values, goals, norms and status. Individuals in society are seen as playing a gigantic fruit-machine, but the machine is rigged and only some players are consistently rewarded. The deprived ones then resort to kicking the machine or to leaving the fun-palace altogether (e.g. attacks on property or involvement in drug-taking sub-cultures). Nobody appears to ask who put the machine there in the first place, and who it is who takes the profits. Criticism of the game is confined to changing the pay-out sequence so that the deprived can get a better deal. What at first sight looks like a major critique of society (that is, anomie theory) ends by taking the existing society for granted. Much of the same may be said about labelling (or transactional) theory which also attracts its share of radical adherents. This concentrates on the way in which those who accidentally or unintentionally break the rules governing the playing of the machine are dealt with by society, by describing the way in which people are defined by others (by social reaction) as delinquents, drug addicts, or mental patients. In other words, it is concerned with those who by their actions turn others into social problems. Again, what starts out as an attack upon the official and unofficial power-holders in society (e.g. probation officers, teachers and policemen) emerges as a complex theoretical edifice with arguable psychological assumptions and considerable political ambiguity. Of course there are definers and defined but what do the definers represent? What interests are they defending? How do their actions reinforce the existing nature of capitalist society? No answers to
such questions are provided: the definers are a group of free-floating 'baddies'"" (9).

It is to this latter theory that we now turn — for labelling theory appeared to many of us to offer a radical promise which may now appear unfulfilled. We must know why. The short answer is that whilst it acts as an explosive demystifier of cruder, more reified theories, in itself it is not so much a theory as a method. What labelling theorists or transactionalists have done is to inform the study of deviancy by borrowing from phenomenology. They have insisted that a definition or label is something endowed on action, and that it is not the action itself. They have thus insisted that the same action can be endowed with several meanings, and that these may vary. But if it is true that certain social meanings are only acceptable in certain social contexts, then the social meanings of acts and the choice to commit them are not as variable as many of these theorists would have them be.

This leads us to confront one of the central weaknesses of such theory-namely the statement of Howard Becker's that "deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits" (10). For Becker's statement can only be true of physical action, that is an action to which no social meaning has yet been given. I would suggest that deviants, like every other actor, frequently endow their action with meaning; and that, further, this meaning is not re-invented on each occasion that individuals engage in physical action. Rather is it derived from a fairly constant stock of social meanings which exist to describe physical acts. It is only by crudely opposing physical to social action that the transactionalists or more especially Becker and Lemert can claim that an action is only deviant when so defined by others. Their approach is then, almost unwittingly, directed towards the problematics of the definition. However, most deviant, and especially criminal, acts, have quite-clear social meanings. Where is the criminal who engages in the robbing of banks, who is unaware that he is engaged in the social act of stealing? Taking an object (a physical act) without the owner's permission will always be described as stealing, in those societies where the institution of private property exists.

My objection, then, to one central assumption of the transactionalist position is that we do not act in a world free of social meaning. For with the exception of new behaviour it is often clear to people what actions are deviant and what are not deviant. In contrast to transactionalist theorists, I would assert that most deviant behaviour is a quality of the act, since the way in which we distinguish between behaviour and action is that
behaviour is merely physical and action has meaning that is socially given. In the now classical example of the marijuana smoker, it is obvious that this activity is motivated by hedonism — but there is a fundamental difference between engaging in an action for pleasure which is approved by everybody, and engaging in a pleasurable act which is regarded by large numbers of people as deviant, and in this case, as illegal. The awareness that an act is deviant fundamentally alters the nature of the choices being made. We have here shifted the focus away from the view of the deviant as a passive, ineffectual, stigmatised individual (what Gouldner has called 'man on his back') towards that of a decision-maker who actively violates (11) the moral and legal codes of society, although neither view is true of all deviants. This is of the utmost importance in the consideration of political deviancy, for our theory must allow of a creative, but purposeful, deviant who consciously decides to transgress law and order. It is precisely its reliance and dependence upon the cruder phenomenologically-derived arguments that meant that much recent deviancy theory which superficially appeared to offer an advance, in fact had grave limitations. For the processes by which social obligations become defined and established is not centrally viewed by such theorists as entailing a process of struggle between large, competing groups, interests and structural positions. Thus, the outcome — the everyday conception of what is right, the commonsense world in which both normals and deviants live — is not fully seen as having been shaped by entrenched positions of power and interest. One can go further, for insofar as it is legitimate to view deviance as a challenge to authority at either the instrumental or oppositional level, it must be viewed as ultimately predetermined by structural inequalities and ideological consensus, no matter how complex the mediatory variables. From this viewpoint, structured inequalities, preserved and protected by the powerful, act as causal forces preventing the realisation of actors' interests by means other than deviant ones. From this kind of perspective, political deviancy begins to be comprehensible, for it is my contention that much deviancy — both political and non-political — must be viewed as a struggle or reaction to normalized repression. A breaking-through, as it were, of accepted, taken-for-granted, power-invested commonsense rules. My view of this repression follows Gouldner's statement in *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* that:

"The powerful are both ready and able to institutionalise compliance with the moral code at levels congenial to themselves. *Power is amongst other things this ability to enforce one's moral claims.* The powerful can
thus conventionalize their moral defaults. As their moral failures become customary and expected, this itself becomes another justification for giving the subordinate group less than it might theoretically claim under the group’s common values. It becomes, in short, *normalized repression*” (12).

What I am suggesting here, following Gouldner, and others, is that much deviancy can usefully be seen as a conscious breaking-through of this moral code. Indeed, whether deviants merely *neutralize* this moral code in order to justify their break-through, or whether they develop an *ideological opposition* to the code will be an important feature in any explanation or classification of deviancy. Moreover this view of deviancy deals with what we can now isolate as the missing element of power in the creation of deviancy. For, if we examine the creation of deviancy and reaction in this way, we do not end up with a completely indeterminate picture: we see that the institution of private property in a structured and inequitable society divides men from men as owners and non-owners. It is in the light of this division that the activities of thieves, police, magistrates, and property-owners become explicable.

Alvin Gouldner came very near to this kind of criticism of modern deviancy theory when he argued that:

“Becker's school of deviancy thus views the underdog as someone who is being mismanaged, not as someone who suffers or fights back. Here the deviant is sly but not defiant; he is tricky but not courageous; he sneers but he does not accuse; he 'makes out' without making a scene. Insofar as this school of theory has a critical edge to it, this is directed at the caretaking institutions who do the mopping-up job, rather than at the master institutions that produce the deviant's suffering” (12).

Yet Gouldner’s criticisms are too narrowly focused, for the social reaction perspective on deviance is a necessary element in any fully developed theory; what follows in this paper is an attempt to examine its difficulties and weaknesses in the light of the rise of deviant phenomenon which seriously threatens its working assumptions. What is required for modern deviancy theory is not its wholesale rejection but its incorporation into a more radical perspective.
In the following examination of the Weathermen I have attempted to lay bare the ideological road along which the weathermen have travelled, my intent is not criticism but rather upon documentation of the self-conscious shifts in their outlook and practice. In tracing the emergence and development of one form of political deviancy it is my sincere belief that both the utility and the shortcomings of the work of Becker and Lemert is implicitly demonstrated. The brief history of the weathermen which follows is startling for their emergence seemed improbable. Indeed the impact of the weathermen upon the average American was aptly summed up by a Chicago police chief who explained the inability of the police to contain the weathermen during their ‘days of rage’ with the statement that they weren’t prepared for violence and destruction, because before that event there had always been a gap between what the radicals said they would do, and what they did.

However it’s not simply that this gap between words and deeds make the weathermen useful illustrative material for a partial re-examination of deviancy theory but rather that they are representative of a whole number of trends in contemporary deviant behaviour which seem to be leading deviants into demonstrating a self-consciousness and awareness which much deviancy theory would seem to be incapable of analysing. Commenting on contemporary deviant activity one astute observer noted that:

„Behaviour which in the past was conceived of as deviant is now assuming well defined ideological and organizational contours. The politicization of groups such as drug takers and homosexuals is only the most obvious manifestation: any attempt to resist stigmatization, manipulation in the name of therapy or punishment is a self conscious move to change the social order and in any conception of the political process in terms other than looking at such matters as voting figures, these activities are political. On the other side, political marginals such as the Yippies, the Weathermen, the Situationists, the Black Panthers are creating new styles of political activity based on strategies traditionally considered criminal” (13).

From this kind of perspective the importance of the weathermen lies not only in their powerful impact upon American Society but in the merging of marginality, criminality, and deviancy in an explicitly political grouping. Moreover we can use our data on the weathermen and political deviants in
general to indicate the direction that criminology and sociology will have to take if it is to rise above mere ideology. The weathermen phenomenon provides both empirical and theoretical evidence for treating sceptically some central propositions of the social reaction perspective, for the weathermen are a self conscious group of revolutionaries culturally rooted in their recent experiences of American Society. Their very name celebrates the youth culture they sprang from, a youth culture whose many contradictions have found frequent expression in the work of Bob Dylan, superstar, superpoet and freaky. They quote Dylan's metaphor, that 'you don't have to be a weatherman to know which way the wind blows', and elevate it to an analysis of political trends. Like the Yippie, Jerry Rubin they insist that one must DO IT, unlike Rubin, they don't believe that revolution can be fun. As a self-conscious group of criminal revolutionaries they have experienced the full force of social reaction. In examining them we shall be examining deviancy theory in two ways. Firstly we shall use their talk, their ideology, to counter the view of all criminals as creatures who are sadly determined by external forces. As one critic of the social reaction approach put it:

"One sometimes gets the impression from reading this literature that people go about minding their own business and then — 'wham' — bad society comes along and slaps them with a stigmatised label. Forced into the role of deviant, the individual has little choice but to be deviant" (14).

Now anybody who examined the weathermen would be foolish to write theories that pictured the deviant as a subject in need of pity. To reject this viewpoint all we have to do is listen to weathermen rhetoric which seems often to be deliberately and explicitly setting out to justify criminal positions, not in terms of neutralization but in terms of oppositional imperatives.

In the words of a leading Weatherman, John Jacobs, ex-Columbia Univ. student, (speaking at a Weatherman Conference shortly before going underground) the history of today's youth begins with the beat generation in a world which can best be explained via a 'white Devil' theory of history, taking up the need to be, 'Crazy violent motherfuckers'. JJ as he is known, declared that Weathermen's position was that "We're against everything which is good and decent" (15). At this same conference Bernardine Dorhn stated that the leadership of Weathermen, the weatherbureau, digs Manson, "Dig it, first they killed those pigs, then they ate dinner in the same room with them, then they even shoved a fork into a victim's stomach..."
'Wild'... In between such raps, the people sang a medley of weathermen songs, high camp numbers such as, "I'm Dreaming of a White Riot", "Communism is what we do", and "We need a Red Party". Spirited chants broke out too: "Womens Power!", "Struggling Power", "Red Army Power", ... "Charlie Manson power", "Power to the People", "Off the Pig" (16).

Faced with such rhetoric, in full knowledge that this is accurate reporting, one is staggered. But however, one receives such statements, unless one holds to some notion of collective insanity (and one assumes social theorists would reject such an explanation) it is impossible to understand unless we accept that beliefs are choices. For there are no set of determinates known to sociologists which would force deviants to talk and act the way the weathermen do. The second criticism of social reaction theory which emerges from a study of the weathermen is bound up with the social psychological assumptions of such theory. Most of their theories of deviance are decontextualised. That is, the importance of the deviants' world view, the meanings which the deviants themselves attach to their initial actions are seen as unimportant or arbitrary, unless they are the result of social reaction. But this assumes society stops and starts; that the interplay of action and social reaction are separable. In fact they are dialectically related. Deviants are part of society all the time. The transactionalists or labelling theorists aren't transactional enough. There can be no understanding of deviant action and consequent social reaction, unless we grasp the role of deviant beliefs in relation to the beliefs of larger society. In this sense the social reaction perspective has been very mechanical for it fails to stress that deviant beliefs bring about different kinds of social reaction. There is a difference between being revealed as a homosexual who believes he has genetic faults and being revealed as a homosexual who argues that "gay is good" and that it's liberating. Again the traditional social reaction perspective has failed to grasp the acceptance of and seeking for social reaction, which much political deviancy involves. A clear example of this occurred during the May "events" in France in 1968, students reacted to the accusation that they were under the influence of the "German Jew" Daniel Cohn-Bendit by parading through Paris under banners emblazoned with the slogan "We Are All German Jews". This embrace of the deviant label served not only to highlight the spurious (in this case, irrelevant) nature of the label; it also helped to solidify the movement in the face of attempts at a stereotypical dismissal. Moreover even a superficial look at the
discussions and objectives within the Weathermen group will enable us to see that political deviancy at least involves the deviant, in careful consideration of the image he projects onto society, and the importance of this for his future actions in view of likely social reaction. As one Weatherman convert put it:

"The Chicago National Action was conceived by the Weather Bureau as an anti-imperialist action in which a mass of white youths would tear up and smash wide-ranging imperialist targets such as the Conspiracy Trial, high schools, draft boards and induction centres, banks, pig institutes and pigs themselves. The main reason why we chose such a wide range of targets was our desire to project the existence of a fighting force that's out, not primarily to make specific demands, but to totally destroy this imperialist and racist society (17).

Perhaps the most lucid exposition of the Weathermen view of this action is put by the same convert who importantly was not new to the American movement, he goes on to describe the self-criticism sessions on the Bus to Chicago in a fashion which reveals a clear attempt to come to terms with possible reaction:

"The heaviest part of our struggle on the bus was the discussion on what 'winning' meant in Chicago. Why in past street actions, when we could have offered a pig, did we hold back? Why are we afraid of escalating the struggle and of winning? Why are we, in short, afraid of pushing out our politics and our struggle to the very limit in each tactical situation? Without answering this question, and without successfully overcoming this fear, we would not be able to fight in Chicago.

As the struggle on the bus developed, we realized the reason for our fear. We were afraid winning in a particular tactical situation would entail the escalation of the struggle; that is to say, the ruling class and their pigs would increase their attacks on us. It would mean that the next time, we would have to fight much harder on a higher level" (18).

\textit{Part of the problem with labelling or social reaction theory stems from its obfuscation of the role of thought. In erecting decontextualized psychological theories it has unnecessarily limited itself. The centre of this confusion lies in those theories erecting a fairly spurious distinction between primary and secondary deviation. For this distinction blurs the role of beliefs in commitment to a deviant role or identity. The weathermen on the bus to the Chicago action discussed and fought out the necessity of ,escalating the}
The debate was not simply over "how do I see myself" but rather over "can I take what others are liable to do to me next time". One suspects that many non-political criminals and deviants ask themselves similar questions. That is, much commitment to a deviant identity does not revolve around "am I really a weatherman", or rather "am I really a homosexual or thief" etc., but rather "are my objectives worth what I am risking". In short, commitment must be a function of a set of beliefs tested against reality as much it is a function of social reaction, yet it is precisely this question which is hidden in the psychologism of much present transactionalism. Let's look more closely at the context in which the weathermen believed the system emerged and then return to an examination of deviancy theory.

The American political tradition is full of gaps when compared with the European. It has no real history of Social Democracy or Communism and its radical tradition is more populist, derived from the Wobblies; it's a violent, racist, wealthy society with the richest working class in the world. It has within it millions of young, moderate, middleclass college students, directly affected by the Vietnam war, affluence and the black movement. The consciousness of recent American radicalism bitterly embodies these contradictions. The weathermen emerged from S.D.S. (Students for a democratic Society), which was a liberal college-based integrationalist movement in 1962. A movement that constantly moved to the left as "normalized repression" and consequent political impotence led it through support for sit-ins, draft resistance, conspiracy trials and Black Power. Against this background the weathermen appeared.

The phenomenology of the Weathermen is the attempt to refuse pessimism, and the struggle to engage in meaningful activism. Thus they captured part of the leadership of S.D.S. early in 1969 with what could be seen as a reasonably plausible perspective on American Imperialism. This was the biggest National Council Meeting that S.D.S. had ever seen, over 1200 delegates and members turned up. About 3 to 400 of those present were allied to a group called Progressive Labour (P.L.) an American Maoist organisation whose caucus in S.D.S. was called W.S.A. (Worker, student, alliance) they mostly sat wearing red buttons saying smash racism, and were immediately criticised by the rest of the S.D.S. for factionalism, a "get P.L." movement developed and P.L. was attacked. In a sense, progressive labour drowned itself in that whilst it condemned all nationalism, it refused to recognise the special and particular oppression of the black people. The National Collective of S.D.S. opposed P.L. and called them chauvinists, as

struggle" in terms of whether it was a correct strategy, a belief question.
one defender of the Collective put it to P.L., „You are a white American chauvinist, not an internationalist”, „you must look to the world proletariat”. The american working class is bourgeoisified, it is no longer relevant” (19).

During this conference P.L. were expelled from S.D.S. which itself fell into two factions, RYM I (Revolutionary Youth Movement), the Weathermen, and RYM II who eventually split, leaving Weathermen by themselves. By 11 September of 1969 we got the following philosophy emerging from Weatherman leader and S.D.S. Educational Secretary, Bill Ayres, in an article curiously entitled „A Strategy to Win”, he said:

„... if it is a world-wide struggle, if weatherman is correct in that basic thing, that the basic struggle in the world today is the struggle of the oppressed people against U.S. Imperialism, then it is the case that nothing we could do in the mother country would be adventuristic. Nothing we could do because there is a war going on already, and the terms of that war are already set”.

Later in the same article, Ayres elaborates:
„But the more I thought about the thing, 'fight the People', it's not that it's a great mass slogan or anything but there's something to it” (20).

Weathermen beliefs spring not from some insane genetic or psychological distortion, but from that thinking which Norman Mailer has characterized as the „Inevitable logic of the next step”. (cf. Armies of the Night). Even their most horrendous statements can seem to follow logically from their analysis of American Society, as a Society based on White Skin Privilege. In itself not a difficult notion to accept. For the Weathermen this belief propels them into constant action to smash „white honky-tonk pig racist America”. For they see themselves as agents of the Vietcong, „bringing the war home”. Indeed at their last conference in Flint, shortly before they went underground, the reductio ad absurdum of their viewpoint was expressed by the late Ted Gold, who along with two other Weathermen died when their Greenwich Village, bomb factory-house was blown sky-high on March the 6th 1970. At that conference Gold stated that:
„An agency of the people of the world” would be set up to run the U.S. economy and society after the defeat of the U.S. imperialism abroad.

A critic spoke up: „In short, if the people of the world succeed in liberating themselves before American radicals have made the American revolution, then the Vietnamese and Africans and the Chinese are gonna move in and run things for white America. It sounds like a John Bircher’s
worst dream. There will have to be more repression than ever against white people, but by refusing to organize people, Weatherman isn’t even giving them half a chance”.

“Well”, replied Gold, „if it will take fascism, we’ll have to have fascism”. Weatherman — virtually all white — continues to promote the notion that white working people in America are inherently counter-revolutionary, impossible to organize, or just plain evil — „honky bastards”, as many Weathermen put it. Weatherman’s blank view of the post-revolutionary world comes from an analysis of American society that says that „class doesn’t count, race does” (21).

Now a Weatherman’s commitment to an extreme deviant position vis-a-vis societies belief system flowed from societal reaction in only a negative sense. For prior to the days of rage in Chicago they were not hunted, wanted men, they deliberately worked towards Chicago because they were committed to the belief that „blacks were going up against the wall alone” and that it was wrong to allow this to happen. This viewpoint, coupled with the belief that white youth were potentially revolutionary whilst the mass of society was reactionary, led them to decide that doing serious damage to property and the state would demonstrate that they could win, that they were a serious force, and it would turn social reaction away from blacks only to blacks and whites. Now this kind of history of commitment to deviant acts directs attention to the dialectical interplay between deviant beliefs and deviant actions in a situated context; whilst a social reaction analysis of radicalism would move us towards a different view of deviant commitments. For instance Lemert, a leading transactionalist, confronts the whole question of a self-commitment to deviation by pointing to the inadequacies of the structural approach advanced by Merton and others. He suggested that there are two kinds of research problems in the study of deviation.

(i) how deviant behaviour originates;
(ii) how deviant acts are symbolically attached to persons and effective consequences of such attachment for subsequent deviation on the part of the person” (22).

In this work, Lemert utilizes this important distinction between what he terms primary and secondary deviation. For Lemert primary deviation is „assumed to arise in a wide variety of social, cultural and psychological contexts, and at best to have only marginal implications for the psychic structure of the individual: it does not lead to symbolic reorganization

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at the level of self-regarding attitudes and social roles”.

Whereas secondary deviation is conceived as:
“deviant behaviour, or social roles based upon it, which becomes a means of defense, attack or adaptation to the overt and covert problems created by the societal reaction to primary deviation” (23).

The significance of this distinction is its concern to give some description of the process of commitment. At the level of primary deviation, deviation has to be explained in different terms from those in which secondary deviation is dealt with. The causes of primary deviation for Lemert, are wide and varied, or as Becker puts it:
“there is no reason to assume that only those who commit a deviant act actually have the impulse to do so. It is much more likely that most people experience deviant impulses frequently” (24).

But secondary deviation is seen as different.
“In effect, the original causes of the deviation recede and give way to the central importance of the disapproving, degradational and labelling reactions of society” (25).

In short the secondary deviant internalizes and is committed to deviancy for reasons different from his original action. Now this kind of analysis of commitment to deviancy seems to me to be faulty, improven, and ridden with unjustified psychological assumptions. As a recent critic of this approach has stated:
“to see the full irony of this possibility — that social control can lead to deviance — interactionist analysis has been directed towards examining the social-psychological implications of official registration. Unfortunately, the theoretical links between social control and further deviant behaviour have never been completely forged, yet alone subjected to adequate empirical testing” (26).

Moreover as the same critic suggests in looking at the distinction between primary and secondary deviation.
“The distinction between the two is either in terms of etiology or the extent to which the offender has a deviant identity. Thus Lemert suggests that secondary deviation refers to a ‘special class of socially defined responses which people make to problems located by societal
reactions to their (primary) deviance’, and it is committed by people ‘whose life and identity are organised around the facts of deviance’” (27).

These distinctions are unworkable in theory and unproven in practice. If we take political deviancy it is clear that the „original causes of the deviaton” may in no way „recede” simply because of social reaction. Indeed it may be argued with more justification that social reaction to radical ideas, in the form of „normalized repression” is the cause of initial commitment to political deviation. Furthermore it is by no means clear except in the case of political deviants that there are many deviants „whose life and identity are organised around the facts of deviance” for most deviants are not full-time deviants. The exceptions are mainly highly organised criminals and political revolutionaries — What appeared to many deviancy theorists to be a radical theory is revealed as a totally inadequate account of commitment to deviancy. Indeed it seems that the concern of much of this approach avoids the question of initial deviation and drives it towards a dubious stress on the psychological impact of social reaction. Yet it is perfectly possible to conceive of deviants who never experience the kind of social reaction that Lemert and Becker are talking about, yet are constantly committing deviant acts e.g. smoking pot, stealing, agitating, engaging in sexually deviant acts etc. Implicit in the social reaction approach is some peculiar fascination with the attempt to erect a priori explanations of why some people become „hard core” criminals and deviants and others don’t. But explanations of this kind will only be revealed by looking at social contexts and beliefs. In any case the search for hard as against soft deviation seems to me to be largely based on the assumption that these people are radically different from us. We have criticised the social reaction approach as un-social and psychological; in doing this the claim is not being made that social psychology is unnecessary but rather if we are to have such explanations they must in no way be ahistorical. If we substituted the terms socialization for deviation, it would become immediately apparent that contextually embedded beliefs and experiences are primary determinants of commitment. For what would primary as opposed to secondary socialization mean unless we had some theory which clearly differentiated between them. Yet the social reaction theorists have no real theory to explain why secondary deviation is more important in commitment to deviancy than is initial deviation. Let us return to the Weathermen to examine this question. Up until the „Days of Rage at Chicago” the Weathermen were an open, extreme radical group whose decision to stress the importance of the
blacks was influenced by the powerful and relatively successful strength of the Black Power movements like the Black Panthers who were taking the brunt of repression in American Society. Their decision to „bring the war home“ to Chicago was a result of the beliefs that led to their „initial deviation“. The events at Chicago which were discussed at their conference in Flint, Michigan, shortly afterwards led the Weathermen to reject any mass white support.

As Harold Jacobs has suggested:

„Prior to the 'Days of Rage', Weathermen still retained its faith in the revolutionary potential of white working class youth. But rather than criticising itself for the low turnout in Chicago, it instead began to turn its back on white people ... Much of Weatherman's political activities after this reflected a despair at organizing white people. At Flint, Weathermen decided to become nothing but a support group for the blacks and the Vietnamese“ (28).

Chicago was a turning point for the weathermen, for it marked their isolation from the rest of Society, one might say, Chicago forced them underground, for they expected a mass response to their confrontation strategy. Their own tactics drove them underground. A non-weatherman, John Gerrassi describes Chicago as follows:

„The first major Weatherman battle fought last October in Chicago. Weatherman has expected thousands to show up for the declared objective to break up the loop (Chicago’s rich business district). Firearms were forbidden although they knew the fighting would be heavy and deaths likely. Only 500 scared, self-conscious collective members arrived. They were outnumbered by the police almost ten to one, with the National Guard on call nearby. „Well“, shouted a Weatherman leader, „you know why we came, and what we said we’d do. This is only the beginning. Whether it’s also the end or not depends on us, now. So let’s do it”. And they charged. The fighting was probably the hardest yet in the history of the New Left. Thousands of police, with tear gas and clubs and then with guns against a wild but tightly disciplined group of white kids, protected by helmets, boots and steel genital guards, using lead pipes and chains. The city watched in amazement as the Weathermen, meekly at first, then increasingly stronger, pushed through, dispersed, regrouped, dispersed again and got through from their staging area to the Loop where they did as they had said — smashed windows and wrecked stores. More than 200 Weathermen were arrested and eight were shot (none died), yet the next
day, they were back. This time, the main thrust was to come from the Weather women. There were only 65 of them, surrounded by 150 cops. The girls were more scared than the day before, feeling more isolated. Then Bernardine Dorhn, a 31 year old former lawyer and member of the Weather Bureau, told the women, "the fear that people feel in this demonstration has to be put against the hunger, fear, death and suffering of black, brown and yellow people in this country and all over the world". Then she led them out of Grant's Park across from the Hilton Hotel and into the police lines waiting. The Weather women fought well too, and downed many cops, but they were stopped. Still, they were back again the next day, and so through the week. At the end, 284 were in jail with bail of $1,000,000 (29).

Chicago failed for, following it, most weathermen went Underground, their support in America is minute, their actions are described by other Left groups as "insane". The development of an outlaw viewpoint soon emerged with its culmination in the bomb the bourgeoisie thesis. Bringing the War home from the underground, can mean little but inactivity or bombing. The Weathermen chose to bomb. The philosophy was simple:

"Look, even when we lose we win. We know how The Man is. The Man is repressive. The Man is fascist. The Man would like to put all in Baltimore, Belsen. Every trash we do, every bomb we plant, is forcing The Man to repress that much more and that much more visibly. He has to buy more pigs, and more machines and the taxes go up and the people get screwed even more.

Look, we are costing The Man money, and we make him paranoid. Twenty pigs hit already - right! Every pig is looking over his shoulder, they go round in twos and threes. They can't get recruits" (30).

Finally even this strategy has been abandoned. Underground the Weathermen appear to have reached Desolation Row. However there is little doubt that they have born more than their own limitations, for they have introduced a new note of seriousness to all discussion in the American movement. Bombing and bomb threats jumped so high in the U.S.A. that in 1970 a National Bomb Data Centre was established in Washington, according to its reports between January 1st 1969 and April 15th 1970. 40 people were killed, 384 injured and 22 million dollars worth of damage was done in 4,330 reported bombings. Indeed Nixon's new Crime Control Bill has sections which provide the death penalty for those convicted of fatal bombings (31).
Moreover thousands of extra FBI agents have been hired to deal with the Youth revolt; in this atmosphere Governor Reagan has stated that, if it „takes a bloodbath to remove the student problem, let’s get it over with.”

Now if one viewed the Weathermen phenomenon from the social reaction perspective presumably one could argue that the social reaction to Chicago drove them underground. That, underground secondary deviation occurred and their „life and identity are organized around the facts of deviance”. The problem with such a perspective is that it would be just as well for a movement that didn’t go underground and simply went meekly to jail, or again a movement which used the trials as an agitational platform as did the earlier Chicago conspiracy trial defendants. For all the perspective states is that secondary deviation is different from primary. But in fact this is not even empirically true — some of the people who went underground weren’t even at the „Days of Rage” they simply accepted the weathermen’s view of revolutionary action, advanced at the Flint conference. Moreover the implications of the social reaction approach is that increased social reaction leads to increased deviation but as countless revolutionary movements know it may well have the opposite effect. Indeed most politically deviant groups are sensitively aware of the fact that their own activities can increase or decrease deviancy amplification depending upon how their actions are understood by larger society. The Weathermen stopped bombing recently and engaged in selfcriticism for exactly this kind of reason. They sent out a „communique” signed complete with fingerprints by Bernardine Dorhn, announcing like Dylan’s recent L. P. a „New Morning” changing weather. A few extracts are enough to indicate its mood.

The deaths of three friends ended our military conception of what we are doing ... Because their collective began to define armed struggle as the only legitimate form of revolutionary action they did not believe that there was any revolutionary motion among white youth. It seemed like black and third world people were going up against American imperialism alone ... this tendency to consider only bombings or picking up the gun as revolutionary, with the glorification of the heavier the better, we’ve called the military error. After the explosion, we called off all armed action until such time as we felt the causes had been understood and acted upon. We found that the alternative direction already existed among us and had been developed within other collectives. We become aware that a group of outlaws who are isolated from the youth communities do not have a sense of what is going on, cannot develop
strategies that grow to include large numbers of people, have become „us” and „them” (32).

The debates around the question of the „military error” and the suspension of bombings until the causes had been understood demonstrate a dialectically sensitive interplay between theory and practice, beliefs and reality, which is rarely allowed for in deviancy theory. Yet it's exactly this kind of interplay which is fundamental to deviant commitment, even if most openly recognizable in political deviancy.

Conclusions

We have looked at radical commitment as a way of examining deviant commitment and its treatment within the social reaction approach. We may conclude that no absolute advance has been made since the rejection of the viewpoint of the founding father of Criminology C. Lombroso, that radicals were in the same grouping as hereditary criminals (33). For although an advance upon more conservative theories of deviance the social reaction approach to deviance and commitment leaves much to be desired. We have revealed that its assumptions tend to be psychological rather than sociological. That it is ahistorical in its treatment of deviant meanings and that it plays down the role of power. In refusing to see that most deviance is a quality of the act, these theorists have erected a massive ideological edifice upon shaky foundations. Moreover this wreck has stood in the way of more profitable directions for deviancy theory, for it appeared in a radical guise. The aim of this paper was to demonstrate that some deviants can exhibit purposefulness, choice and commitment, in a very different manner than that allowed by the social reaction interpretation. Much evidence for the weaknesses of the social reaction approach is external but much of our critique has been immanent, that is to say from the inside of such theories. More evidence could be derived from Lemert's own treatment of radicalism which is a case study of the inadequacy of the social reaction approach. Indeed his attempts to explain radicalism lead him to make such statements as the following,

„a cross-sectional role analysis of the radicals in a given society will reveal not only a number of symbolically disordered persons, but also a large number — perhaps the majority — of persons who profess the extremist beliefs because of general or special situational pressures” (34).
The social reaction approach is in fact revealed as profoundly un-radical as its predecessors. Meanwhile the rise of contemporary political deviancy and its merger with more traditionally deviant life styles has provided us with opportunity to reassess our position and work towards new understandings. It must be stressed that the weathermen have been used here illustratively. We have in no sense given a full analysis of that movement, yet my view is that they are a consequence of substituting Blacks or youth for class, and only make rational sense in terms of such beliefs. The difficulties encountered in explaining, understanding and accounting for such a deviant phenomenon highlights the inability of contemporary social theory to move much beyond social history whatever its guise. Indeed if this limited study has any absolute conclusion it is that history must be brought back to social theory for its advances are empty without it. Finally, if we are reflexive, Bob Dylan's dialectical poetry can provide relevant quotations for both the weathermen and modern deviancy theory, for „there's no success like failure, and failure's no success at all”.

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