



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on September 28, 2010

## Denial of Emeritus Status to Bill Ayers Causes Brouhaha

The refusal of the University of Illinois at Chicago (UCI) to grant emeritus status to retired education professor Bill Ayers has caused a mini brouhaha of sorts in radical media and academic circles. Ayers, a founder of the radical Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the terrorist Weather Underground Organization (WUO), joined the university's education faculty in 1987. He retired on August 31 of this year.



The *Chicago Tribune* [reported](#) on September 24:

In a very unusual move, University of Illinois trustees Thursday denied giving emeritus status to controversial retired professor William Ayers.

The vote, at a U. of I. board meeting in Urbana, was unanimous and came after a passionate speech by board chair Christopher Kennedy, who invoked the 1968 assassination of his father, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, in saying that he was voting his conscience.

The other trustees, without comment, also voted against the appointment.

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According to the *Tribune*, Mr. Kennedy delivered "an emotional statement" to the board in which he declared he could not confer the title "to a man whose body of work includes a book dedicated in part to the man who murdered my father."

Kennedy was referring to the 1974 book, *Prairie Fire: The Politics of Revolutionary Anti-Imperialism; Political Statement of the Weather Underground*, written and signed by Weather Underground leaders Ayers, Bernardine Dohrn (who became Ayers' wife and partner in crime), Jeff Jones, and Celia Sojourn, which included Robert F. Kennedy's assassin, Sirhan Sirhan in the dedication.

Many of Ayers' defenders point out that Ayers has acknowledged in a [2008 video interview](#) that including Sirhan Sirhan in the *Prairie Fire* dedication was "stupid," as though that concession should settle the matter. But was it merely "stupid"?

The dedication page at the beginning of the book says it is "To All Who Continue to Fight and To All Political Prisoners in the U.S." Besides Sirhan Sirhan, It lists dozens of revolutionaries, terrorists, fugitives, and convicted felons in this dedication, including convicted armed robber and cop killer Joanne Chesimard (aka Assata Shakur, now an escaped convict and revolutionary heroine living in communist Cuba); convicted WUO terrorist and armored car robber Marilyn Buck; and convicted murderer, kidnapper, and Black Panther Party leader Elmer Geronimo Pratt.

*Prairie Fire* is a manifesto of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism that did not shrink from declaring violent "revolutionary war" against the United States. It declares:



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We are a guerrilla organization. We are communist women and men, underground in the United States for more than four years. We are deeply affected by the historic events of our time in the struggle against U.S. imperialism....

We need a revolutionary communist party in order to lead the struggle, give coherence and direction to the fight, seize power and build the new society....

The only path to the final defeat of imperialism and the building of socialism is revolutionary war....

Revolutionary war will be complicated and protracted. It includes mass struggle and clandestine struggle, peaceful and violent, political and economic, cultural and military, where all forms are developed in harmony with the armed struggle....

Our final goal is the destruction of imperialism, the seizure of power, and the creation of socialism.

The entire *Prairie Fire* book has been scanned and placed online, along with informative notes at: [http://www.zombietime.com/prairie\\_fire/](http://www.zombietime.com/prairie_fire/)

Ayers' defenders argue that *Prairie Fire* should be considered irrelevant in judging Ayers, since it was published 36 years ago when he was different man pursuing a different path. He has since proven himself, they say, as a "distinguished educator."

This is the message, for instance, in a September 24 [report by NPR's Tony Arnold](#), who quotes UCI's Vicky Chou regarding the "exciting" contributions of Ayers through the Small Schools Workshop. "But for now, at least," concluded Arnold, "any [of Ayers'] achievements have been overshadowed by a book dedication from nearly 40 years ago."

"Professor Ayers has a 47-page resume of academic accomplishments," Barbara Ransby told the *Chicago Tribune*. "I am sure his publication and service record far exceeds that of many of our retired colleagues who have been granted emeritus status by the University in the past," she said. Ransby, who was only identified by the *Tribune* as "a professor of history and African-American studies," said the decision to deny Ayers emeritus status "is a real threat to academic freedom, and the foundation of a democratic university." The decision, said Ransby, should be based solely on "academic merits" and not on "political sentiments, however strongly felt they may be."

The *Tribune* didn't mention that Professor Ransby is not exactly a disinterested party, being a longtime radical associate of Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn. Along with Dohrn, she is a member of the board of directors of the [Movement for a Democratic Society \(MDS\)](#), a reincarnation of the SDS formed in 2006 by many of the original members of the radical 1960s group. Ayers is not an MDS board member, but he participates in MDS activities and events. And like many other MDS members he retains his 1960s revolutionary zeal and refuses even to renounce his past violent actions. As we have reported previously, [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn are implicated as top suspects in the still unsolved 1970 murder of San Francisco police officer Brian McDonnell, as well being leaders and conspirators in many other bombings, shootings, and robberies. Ayers has infamously gloated about getting off scot free: "Guilty as hell, free as a bird America is a great country."

In his memoirs of life on the run from the law, *Fugitive Days*, Ayers says, "I can't imagine entirely dismissing the possibility" of bombing again in the future. In a September 11, 2001 interview with the *New York Times*, Ayers said: "I don't regret setting bombs. I feel we didn't do enough." He also claimed, in the same interview, that the Weathermen had "showed remarkable restraint," in their rampage of bombings.



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## **Cold Case Could Coldcock Comrade Ayers**

However, Professor Ayers may have crowed too soon, and it is possible that failing to receive the coveted emeritus status may be the least of his worries. Contrary to claims by both Bill Ayers and Barack Obama that they barely knew each other in Chicago, the evidence continues to build that they worked very closely together, along with other of Ayers' and Dohrn's 1960s radical and outlaw associates. (See [here](#), for instance)

The attention focused on the Obama-Ayers ties by conservative media and bloggers re-energized an effort by San Francisco police investigators and retired veterans of the FBI's Weathermen task force to reopen the bombing-murder cold case of Officer Brian McDonnell. On October 21, a special press conference will be held at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. as part of the "Justice for Victims of Weather Underground Terrorism" project. Sponsored by USA Survival, a public policy group founded by Cliff Kincaid, editor of Accuracy in Media, the conference will feature, in addition to recently uncovered evidence, testimony by Larry Grathwohl, a former top associate of Ayers in the Weather Underground and undercover FBI operative, as well as Max Noel, a former FBI agent and member of the San Francisco Weatherman Task Force.

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*Photo: Bill Ayers, right, embraces his former family pastor Dr. D. Curtis Minter of Loveland, Colo. prior to Ayers speech at the University of Wyoming, April 28, 2010 in Laramie, Wyo: AP Images*



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