

WORKERS' FIGHT

INTERNAL BULLETIN NO. 29

Special bulletin on the politics of the student movement.

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This bulletin includes the latest perspectives document from the student fraction together with reprints of various documents produced over the last four years on questions of student politics.

WF Position on Students

Our position on students as agreed by the NC is summed up in the following extract from a draft of MT's article on the IMG.

In Let us say the 19th century the cultural and social ties between students and their class of origin were so tight that students had to be assessed politically as a special fraction of the bourgeoisie. Today, however, students generally have a degree of financial independence, and their destinies are uncertain and probably among the ranks of wage labour and even trade unionism. We have to consider students as a group with political independence from the bourgeoisie. But neither are students working class. They do not live by selling their labour power they do not produce surplus value.

We regard students as being outside production, as not engaged in productive labour. From the point of view of economics, what is happening in universities and colleges is that a certain amount of socially necessary labour is being put in by lecturers, ancillary staff and so on, a certain amount of capital is being depreciated, and what is being produced is an enrichment of the labour power of the students. It's true that students work and that their work is essential to the production of that environment. But the class position of students is essentially no different from what it would be if made transparent by students (or someone on their behalf) paying for their education (a situation anyway, that in fact exists on a large scale in many advanced capitalist countries). The commodity produced remains in the possession of the student. Grants no more make students wage workers than unemployment benefit makes unemployed workers employed.

So we assess students as "declassed". The term "declassed" is a residual category, encompassing a variegated collection of marginal social groups. However, there are some conclusions we can draw already. Socialists do not have to confine themselves to picking off individual students - a student movement is not a reactionary force as it would be if students are bourgeois. On the other hand, a socialist movement attempting to base itself primarily on students is building a house on sand and will tend to degenerate into academicism or adventurism.

There is no necessary built-in class struggle of independent, epochal, historical significance in the student situation. However, students are organised together in large numbers by their work. And they have a limited possibility of wringing concessions out of college administration without the struggle necessarily reaching the level of a confrontation with the State.

Finally students though (except for a small minority) not engaged in producing ideas, have, as a result of their work, a certain sensitivity to ideological issues. Moreover they are closer to an international, not purely parochial consciousness. Struggles can be waged. What will be the nature of the politics of these struggles?

Political life does not take place through the direct action of social classes. The classes act through various forms of political representation - parties, non-party movements (eg VSC) trade unions, state apparatuses, etc. These forms are not straightforward 'reflections' of the classes they represent - each party etc has its own independent history, into which its social base enters only as one element. With working class political parties a definite law of inertia operates. The British Communist Party, for example, continues to play an important role even though politically utterly bankrupt. Where a revolutionary leadership could develop the self-reliance and assertiveness of the working class the reformist leadership acts as an indirect mechanism for the pressure of the capitalist class, and builds up an interaction where bureaucracy, prevarication, elitism, halfmeasures on the part of the leadership sustain and are sustained by apathy, short sightedness, servility, backwardness among the rank and file. Having built this up the reformist leadership fulfills a certain function which can't just be wished away. The C.P.'s attitude to the Industrial Relations Bill was utterly demagogic and

against

non-combative. But still, in terms of organised action the Industrial Relations Bill, the CP could point to greater achievements than IS the IMG and the SLL put together.

It is this fact of being rooted in a definite routine of class struggle that gives rise to the law of inertia. Now, as regards students, there are no definite routines of class struggle, no definite functions of the reformist leaderships. There is therefore an extreme mobility of forms of political representation of various sections of students. Moreover, having no independent class position students are naturally dependent for their ideologies upon the main social classes. In the era when the bourgeoisie was the rising class, they tended to follow the bourgeoisie; in the present era, when the proletariat is the rising class they tend to follow the proletariat. (We speak, of course, only of general tendencies).

The present student militancy dates specifically from three developments; an upsurge in struggle against imperialism (Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam, the black nationalist movement in the US); a crisis of reformism (1964-70) Labour Government, 'Fradn Coalition' in Germany etc; a decline in the basis in reality of the ideology of the 'career' (increasing mobility and insecurity in graduate unemployment). The ideologies of reformism were unable to accommodate the challenge posed by the anti-imperialist struggles; the decline in the 'Career' ideology opened the way for more cohesion in the student body.

The student movement, naturally, was fertile soil for all sorts of weird ideological mutations. Students are not, like the working class "disciplined, untied organised by the mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself."

What then are the politics of the student struggle? Some general rules apply. Precisely because there is no built-in routine of class struggle, students tend to pose demands which their struggles cannot realise. Consequently there are tendencies to utopianism and ultra-leftism of various sorts. Beyond that, everything depends on the transformation of the political forms of representation through ideological struggle, on forming a solid socialist core which fights for ideological influence among students.

Obviously Marxists cannot adopt a sectarian attitude to student struggles, or postulate political education taking place in complete isolation from these struggles. But we must stress that 'student economism' 'confrontation politics' and other adventurism merely leads, and has led, to defeat, even at its own chosen level of the struggle against the college administration.

Apart from the dubious and non-Marxist statement about "when the proletariat is the rising class students will tend to follow the proletariat" and an implied conservatism towards student struggles, the above statement seems adequate.

STUDENTS AND BRANCH WORK:

From the few reports received it appears that the attitude of most branches is that students do student work at college and branch work when not at college, instead of seeing student work as being part of activities of the branch. It would be absurd if student members did not discuss industrial work but there is apparently little supervision or discussion of student work by most branches. Before next term all branches should discuss the activities that student members will be engaged in. Reports to be sent to the student convenor.

SOCIALIST SOCIETIES:

Our main area of student work will probably be in the Soc. Socs. WF comrades should actively take part in Soc. Soc. activities to win a number of students over to socialist politics through meetings, propaganda on such questions as Ireland and by trying to link up student and worker struggles. Examples of this are linking up the Student Union autonomy issue with the IR Act and also the involvement of students in the miners' strike. Where possible local militants should be brought along to address student meetings.

The best people in Soc. Soc. will probably be attracted to the larger ~~groups (IS, CP, IMG)~~ groups (IS, CP, IMG) Those that seriously want to help in workers' struggles will be attracted to the groups that have the impressive organisation, weekly paper etc. We have no hope of winning people on this level. We have to win people on the basis of our politics. Student comrades should organise Soc. Soc. discussion meetings in which we can differentiate ourselves from the other tendencies and try to organise meetings with W.F. speakers.

Comrades should actively take part in all 'local' student struggles, but care must be taken if initiating such struggles that you are not leading people to inevitable defeat and victimisation.

ACADEMIC WORK AND THEORETICAL WORK:

There seems to be a general consensus of opinion on the left, particularly in WF that the less academic work a student does and the more likely he is to be thrown out of college, then the better the comrade is. This is stupid. Student members should keep sufficiently abreast of their subject and aware of controversies in their field to be able to argue for a Marxist position in seminars and classes, to produce criticisms of bourgeois ideas and to write education notes, and to write articles for the paper.

Students have the opportunity and facilities for both developing their own understanding of Marxism and also contributing to the theoretical development of the group. All students should set themselves, or be commissioned by the group to undertake, a project for WF supervised by the education and publications committee and the student convenor. This is not a burden but something comrades should enjoy doing as part of their own development and that of the group.

A.S.T.M.S

The NC decided some time ago that all student comrades should join ASTMS. By doing this students can take part in all the activities of trade union work except hold office. This could be a most important area of work and could form the basis of an ASTMS fraction.

L.C.D.S.U.

The LCDSU got off to a good start last year as the beginnings of a left-wing core of politically conscious students. Comrades should try and get their Soc. Socs. and Student Union to affiliate and to try and get delegated to LCDSU meetings. We must try to orientate LCDSU to linking up student issues with workers' struggles without falling into IS's trap of demanding a full political programme which excludes left sympathisers and which tries to build a mini-revolutionary party in the student movement.

One of our urgent tasks is to formulate our ideas on LCDSU correctly. Branch student organisers should send me their ideas on our activities in LCDSU immediately together with the state of LCDSU. z

THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE LCDSU

The basis for the founding of the Liason Committee was the existence of a large-scale radicalisation against the attack on student unions, expressed in the boycott of lectures by half a million students on 8th Dec 1971 and the large vote for LC candidates at the Easter NUS conference.

That large-scale radicalisation no longer exists at present. It does not follow that we should automatically drop the LC, as IS recommend. The liquidation of an organised expression of the principled political stand on 'public accountability' of Students Unions would represent a victory for the NUS reformists. And if large-scale radicalisation does not exist today, that

is not to say that it may not revive tomorrow.

However, it is clear that LCDSU must think out its position clearly if it is not to become simply yet another alias for the International Marxist Group. Some errors in analysis and perspectives which could be passed over in the interests of expediting unity in action some months ago must be taken up now.

1. What is at stake?

The LCDSU programme states:

"The very possibility of the independent political actions of students is under attack from the State. This is forced on the bourgeoisie because of their need to remove and organised opposition in the colleges before they can go ahead forthrightly with their plans for higher education. This is not therefore to be understood simply as the actions of a backward looking Tory government but springing from the most fundamental needs of capitalism..."

That is, the attack on SUs is ancillary to the 'technocratic reforms'.

But this view is simplistic. 'Technocratic reforms' have been going ahead for years. "Already the Government have cut the real value of student grants considerably, and they have channelled an increasing proportion of students into the poorly provided non-university colleges (The proportion was 31% of full time students in 1957/58, and 47% in 1967/68) Student accommodation has got worse and worse. All this has happened with comparatively little resistance." ("Workers' Fight" no 9). Political castration of SUs is not a precondition for 'technocratic reforms'.

There is a more specific motive on the part of the ruling class. SUs have been a public platform for revolutionary ideas, particularly for the revolutionary platform. "This purpose has been pursued consistently for the last three years with a skilful policy of victimising students and lecturers." (WF9) Now the Government "to assist them in their crucial task of defeating the massive industrial strength of the labour movement...attack the working class, and its allies at weaker points" they launch a sharper attack (WF9)

2. State, Government, Administration

The LCDSU has rejected alliance with College Administrations against the attack on SUs on the grounds that the attack = "springing from the most fundamental needs of capitalism" = "consequently a task for the State as a whole" (including army, air force, navy...?); and administration = Government = parts of State.

This argument as it stands is totally ultra-left. Even if we admit the doubtful assertion that College Administrations are part of the State, Marxists do not exclude on principle using one part of the bourgeois state against another (law courts, arbitration courts etc).

The way the political issues are located in dubious universal generalisations about the "fundamental needs of capitalism" and "the State" persistently collapses the LCDSU into ultra-left fundamentalism.

Thus we are constantly told that "the struggle must be seen as one against the capitalist state". What this is supposed to mean other than "everyone should be a Marxist" is not clear to us.

The relations of the LCDSU to the widespread anti-Toryism of the resistance to the attack on SUs has simply been to denounce this anti-Toryism. Instead of slogans which relate to develop, build on that anti-Toryism, we had the virtually incomprehensible "Unions for the Struggle! Unions against the State!" The sometimes hilarious obscurity and stylistic peculiarity of the LCDSU's literature is not merely a technical question, but an expression of an ultra-left and sectarian orientation.

3. Representation

The LCDSU programme states: "Representation and participation are simply a tactic of the state to ensure collaboration of students with the aims of the bourgeoisie, and we are therefore opposed to this ... The LCDSU will, however, struggle for the power of veto over any attempt to transform higher education. This is not to be understood primarily, if at all, in institutional forms. It is the description of the sort of struggles needed to effect even temporarily the transformations which colleges undergo. It is an indication of the line of mass struggle directly counterposed to, on the one hand, representation, negotiation, and pressure, and, on the other, the utopian 'free' institution"

Now, clearly, when the ruling class is attempting to transform higher education in a way antagonistic to the interests of the working class, socialists will seek to oppose that transformation. Or impose a veto on it, if you prefer to put it that way. What the programme means by "power of veto" apart from that, we would like to know.

However, if this veto is meant to be "directly counterposed" to representation so that students should - generally and on principle - boycott all representative bodies in the colleges, then we consider this universal boycott ultra-left. Representation is not the way to a 'red university' but it is not simply a tactic of the state". It may also be a concession won by mass struggle. Staff-student curriculum committees in departments and faculties can scarcely be regarded as organs of the capitalist State or the capitalist class, and bodies of the type of Senates are not simply identical with the Administration - they can be used as eg. bourgeois parliaments are used. (Would we advise a university Professor who was a revolutionary to resign from Senate on principle? or attempt to use his position on Senate as a platform for revolutionary ideas?)

Representation may well be - and usually is - used to de-fuse, coopt, and incorporate student militancy. The question is whether standing aside in the purity of a boycott is the best way of fighting this. Representation must be accompanied by demands that: 1) student representatives are not bound by committee decisions 2) representatives are mandatable and recallable 3) the agenda and minutes of all committees are entirely open.

4. United Front

At the last Irish Solidarity Campaign Conference WF members attempted to refer back the IMG-drafted manifesto. The response from the IMG comrades was that since the ISC was a United Front, it could not decide upon a common analysis, therefore our reference back could not be accepted. Or, to put it another way, since the ISC could not decide on a common analysis, therefore we should accept the IMG analysis!

The argument is rationalised in Red Mole 42 with the doctrine that the point of a UF is agreement on aims, with differing analyses. That is certainly not correct. (Do revolutionaries form united fronts with reformists to fight for the shared aim of socialism?) A UF presupposed a measure of agreement not only on aims, but also on methods.

We do not insist that the LC, as a UF-type body, accepts the analysis of the attack on SWs or the position on representation set out above - though we will oppose accepting contrary analyses or positions. What is important for the LC is the change in orientation which we have argued for, a change in orientation which should enable the LC to make more of a reality of the 'student worker solidarity' plank in its platform.

Furthermore, we advocate that the LC should press IS and any other forces in the NUS who take a principled stand on 'public accountability' for alliances over specific actions and at NUS conference.

SOME NOTES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT MILITANCY

1. Pre-1967/68 - differentiation in Labour Clubs etc. especially promoted by record of Labour Gov. This phase was not spectacular and is often forgotten, but it was important. Similar processes took place in the UEC in France, the SDSs in Germany and USA.
2. 1968 - explosion of direct action. It is not very useful to bemoan the disappearance of this phase, or to discount it on the grounds that it passed quickly. What do you expect?
3. October 1968 and January 1969 - halt. It is futile to condemn the student movement on the grounds of this halt - what else would happen to a movement which developed large militancy with very little response from the rest of society.
4. Developments since then -
 - upsurge of working class; student movement now following and copying slogans of workers' movement, far more than vice versa.
 - partly as consequence, political polarisation on student left. It is futile to bemoan this with pious cries against 'sectarianism'.
 - The Vice Chancellors and the NUS have moved to the Left and required far greater tactical skill (cf. their clumsiness in 1968) Cf. Nus's largely successful effort to establish some dominance among students, and the VC's very cool approach to the rent strikes.
 - massive wave of victimisation in '69 and '70, largely un-noticed and un-resisted, but exterminating the left on some campuses (eg. Essex). Also tightening up on admissions.
5. The radicalisation has not disappeared. But the theory that it would be immune to Stalinism and social democracy has fallen down. Even big mobilisations after 1968 (eg the early 1970 files mobilisation) have been more more 'controlled' (EP Thompson etc) than the 1968 actions.
6. Radicalisation has increased in the 'lower sector'. I think this is far more to do with 'spreading' effect of radicalisation from the initial centres to the 'periphery' - a general phenomenon in any process of radicalisation in any sector - than to the economic attacks against the 'lower sector'. For example, the first issue on which the 'lower sector' showed itself massively was the student union autonomy issue - even though the unions of many of these 'lower sector' students have no autonomy to defend in the first place.
7. On a whole series of issues (grants, accommodation, autonomy, etc) students have come slap-bang up against the state. In such a collision the odds are clear (though that is not of course an argument for abstentionism). Over the grants issue the NUS chose bad tactics (rent strikes involving the more conservative sections of the student body and scarcely touching the ~~more~~ newly radicalised 'lower sector' - and rent strikes are a tricky form of struggle anyway). Admittedly, with the best will in the world they would have been hard put to organise effective action (a big wave of simultaneous carefully-planned occupations would be probably the only hope).
8. One of the purposes for calling a WF student conference was to discuss a programme. I don't see the problem. Our programme for students is just the same as our programme for anyone else. As far as issues specifically affecting higher education are concerned, we have already taken positions explicitly or implicitly on the chief ones. Tactical questions will of course have to be considered in every concrete situation.
9. One thing is fairly certain for the start of the academic year is a

massive accommodation problem. We will advocate nationalisation of land, building companies, etc. repeal of Housing Finance Act; increased grants with sliding scale; squatting in Vice-chancellors' residences etc. housing problem to be seen as a general problem for all working people and not just for students. No abstentionism or accepting defeat in advance! But from the points above it is clear it would be wrong to stake our all on the prospective of a big successful struggle on accommodation.

We must carry out a comprehensive all-round activity of political agitation, propaganda, and education. Campaigns round North Wales 24 (use our Enfield base to sponsor conferences etc.) Marxist discussion groups. In the event of a big strike movement, we must prepare energetic solidarity mobilisation of students and use of university premises for strike aid purposes.

Martin Thomas
17.9.73

SOME NOTES ON THE IS PAMPHLET 'STUDENTS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM'

I agree with almost everything this pamphlet says. It is a useful and well-written summary of many of the advances in political analysis of the student movement ~~if we have made~~ made in debates on the left in recent years.

However if we look closely at what is not there, and at what is written between the lines, we see that the political content is extremely bad.

The basic analysis of the student revolt implicit in the pamphlet is similar (though, I think, less clearly and completely argued) to the account in the last WF Student Fraction Report (Internal Bulletin No.6) They also point out: "It is no surprise that a social group subject to the arbitrary physical and ideological changes of capitalism should fight to defend its legitimate interests... Stripped of sophisticated sociological jargon, the problem is not really so difficult." Nestling between the lines here is an attempt to play down the significance of the upsurge of revolutionary ideas among students - but, with that discounted, there is still a veuable point. Many activists concerned with the student movement have tied themselves in knots trying to provide a subtle and comprehensive analysis of the student revolt. In fact, once a couple of basic points are grasped, this effort would be far better directed towards an understanding of such general tactical questions as the united front. For example, as Brian Grogan quite correctly points out in his 'Red Mole' review of the IS pamphlet, "... student trade unionism is separable from a story about students ~~being~~ being some sort of worker and NUS being a trade union. Student trade unionism is a political practice which approaches student issues in a sectional way" - and as such would be wrong even if students were workers in the strictest Marxist sense.

The IS pamphlet points out that "students form an intermediate layer within society, lying between the two main classes ~~but~~ but not defined by any specific relation to the productive forces"... "there is nothing predetermined about the consciousness of students. Whether they move to right or left is in the end determined by the relative strength of the main classes... Students are capable of spontaneous ~~revolt~~ revolt; that revolt may or may not be political) - it is as likely to be about the price of sausage rolls in the canteen as about Vietnam". But, "it is a common political understanding which gives unity to student militancy" - there is no question of students being 'disciplined, united, organised, by the mechanism of capitalist production itself'.

So far, so good. But the cardinal fact is ignored. It is true enough in epochal terms that students' consciousness is "in the end determined by the relative strength of the main classes". But, as Grogan quite correctly states, "The consciousness and struggle of students develops unevenly in relation to that of the working class... Between now and the last analysis, the problem is

to seize on the deep-going radicalisation of students and develop the potential of a politicisation outside the hold of the reformist bureaucracies. In this way, the struggles of students may themselves contribute to the final balance of forces."

The IS pamphlet therefore falls into a sectarian position. On accommodation, for example, their solution is "We must join with the labour movement and demand the nationalisation of the land and building industry and give our support to the building of strong and militant tenants' associations". (While it is not true to say - as Grogan does - that this is "of no value whatsoever", it is certainly inadequate). On graduate unemployment, they suggest students should "fight politically for the trade unions to take up the demand for work or full pay".

Minimising the independent scope of the student radicalisation, they make the question of "worker-student solidarity" or "worker-student alliance" the touchstone for student politics. But what does this mean? In places, it seems to mean support for the current, i.e. largely economic struggles of the working class - as when the 1970/71 period is rated thus:

"the mass of students were further along the road (what road? - MT) to socialist ideas than ever before", apparently on the grounds that payments from students ~~xxx~~ to strike funds were more frequent (which was probably more due to movements in the working class than to any improvement in the student movement). This interpretation is clearly economicist.

Alternatively, it seems elsewhere to mean winning students to a politically working class point of view. "The education of the mass of students in socialist politics .. is therefore a primary task". Either this is the flattest commonplace, or the narrowest sectarianism. If the ~~xxx~~ authors of the pamphlet are serious about their politics ~~xxxxxxx~~ then IS politics are certainly the only genuine socialist politics - at the very least, they are not interested in recruiting students to other socialist trends. "Education in socialist politics", if it is more than a vague phrase, means recruitment to IS.

Following this line, the authors of the pamphlet managed to produce a programme proposed for the LUISU by IS which was nothing other than a potted version of the general IS programme, complete with numerous demands on the W TUC, critical support for Labour in elections, etc.etc. In the pamphlet, there are some formal denunciations of sectarianism. But they are empty. Take this one, for example. "The student movement, if it is ever to get anywhere, has to turn towards the working class, to link its struggles with those of the working class". Excellent. But what student movement - and how? Unfortunately the authors are not in the position of being able to propose immediate practical measures for functioning organisations. Boiled down, therefore, the statement means little other than "join IS".

Given the sectarianism, any attention that is directed by IS towards student struggles is likely, as Grogan notes correctly, to be infected by a mirror-image opportunism.

As part of the general attempt to minimise the student radicalisation, the pamphlet strives with some vigour to belittle the 1968 and the 1930s upsurges. Meanwhile they miss one lesson of the 1930s upsurge that is staring them in the face. Around the end of the 19th century, there was a massive restructuring of higher education. No appreciable student radicalisation followed. "The stagnation and decay of the productive forces in the inter-war period put few new demands on higher education" - but there was a big student radicalisation in the 1930s. In short, the restructuring of higher education, as such, has - contrary to all conventional accounts - fundamentally nothing to do with the student radicalisation. The IS pamphlet refers to "higher education on the cheap". This tendency exists, and given the generally politically sensitive state of the student movement, it has produced a response (though a remarkably small one). But in any case it largely post-dates the initial student revolt.

It should be apparent that, despite formal protests to the contrary, the IS pamphlet is highly hostile to IS's previous pamphlet "Education, Capitalism and the Student Revolt" and to much of IS's previous student intervention. Likewise, Grogan in his long review of the pamphlet makes no attempt to answer IS's fierce attack on Mandel's account of the student revolt. (The IS attack is full of mistakes, but the

Education, Capitalism and the Student Revolt: A fresh look by

Ken Green and Martin Thomas
(An article contributed to the IS Internal Bulletin in 1971, when WF was still in IS.)

In October 1968 IS produced a pamphlet "Education, Capitalism and the Student Revolt (ECSR). A new edition of ECSR has been in preparation for some time and it seems to us necessary to put forward some fundamental criticisms.

With 72 closely printed pages ECSR was one of IS's most bulky and detailed publications. "This explanation of the wave of student revolt sweeping all advanced societies is accepted in outline by all but a few empty headed sectarians". (Steve Marks IS 36). Accepted in outline at least, in that other accounts have used similar causal factors (or factors which look similar). (1)

The principal factors are (1) change in the career prospects for students, so that most of them are destined for (special sections of) the working class rather than ruling-class positions (p. 41-45, ECSR) (2) the decline of reformism in recent years (p. 48) and (3) a crisis of 'academic freedom' and 'liberal scholarship' (p. 50-53).

We have found that most readers of ECSR believe that it is the first factor changing job prospects that ECSR puts forward as the main explanation of the student revolt. This is obviously not correct. What we are told is "the ties between the student and bourgeois society, in terms of the student's destiny in that society, have been especially strained This straining of the objective bonds has laid a basis" (p. 44/5, emphasis added). So the first factor just fills in the background, it is not the fundamental explanation. We believe that ECSR is correct in refusing to choose 'proletarianisation' as the basis of explanation.

Nor is the second (failure of reformism) the fundamental explanation. ~~xxxxxx~~ These two factors (ie. the failure of reformism and the fact that students are above all young) . . . do not explain the recent student upsurge. They determine its form only." (p. 49) So we are left with the third factor, crisis of 'academic freedom'. "The basic cause of the student upsurge is to be found in . . . the changing form of manipulation required by the new capitalism". (p. 48) The reference can only be to the discussion on p. 50-53 'The Crisis of the Transition' and 'The erosion of Liberal Values,'

The Crucial Argument

So p. 50-53 contain the kernel, the crucial argument, of ECSR. The argument is that, as higher education has been transformed from an upper-class finishing school process to an instrument for training an expanded skilled white collar workforce needed by modern technological capitalism, "it is the liberal conceptions of academic freedom and disinterested scholarship that suffers in this process" (p. 50) But thousands of teachers preached the traditional liberal standards to their successful pupils.

As a result: "A whole section of students is bewildered to find that what awaits them at the end of a long and arduous climb is not the kingdom of the mind they were promised. Increasingly what is demanded of them is not pure science and scholarship, free debate and critical thought, not an up to date and expanded version of the old university (it does not matter whether this existed or not - it is what students are taught to expect), but participation in and apologetics for the world of money and militarism, poverty and

police forces": (p. 50)

(Page 19, on the other hand, states, referring to modern social sciences, "their real defining characteristic does not seem to be so much analogics as irrelevancy.") Thus the ideology of academic freedom "elaborated to defend the old interests of the high priests of the ruling class and can become the mobilising cry of a new army of the dispossessed." (p. 51) There is a wider context. "This disintegration of the old academic ideals is part and parcel of the general erosion of liberal values under state monopoly capitalism." (p. 51) So, in particular, students of the social sciences will become disaffected as a result of a clash between (liberal) ideology and (authoritarian) reality reflected in their studies.

But the argument does not stand up to examination. Doubtless there has been a reduction of academic freedom in the sense of independence of university administrators vis a vis the State. However, students have no interest in preserving that independence and there is no reason why reduction of that independence should lead them to revolt. As regards aspects of academic freedom really affecting students: internal university democracy, liberalism in academic matters, political freedom, there is no evidence of decline. If the ECSR analysis were correct, one would expect revolt to be the sharpest in the new universities and smaller at the older ones. This has not been the case.

The indications are, in fact, of an increase in academic freedom. In loco parentis type regulations have been steadily relaxed, and are more or less non-existent at most new universities. The diversity of inquiry available in modern university courses is greater than formerly. Compare, for example, the mathematics course at Warwick University, offering a wide variety of choice, of selection of non-mathematical subsidiary courses in character, with the maths course at Cambridge University, which was until very recently entirely orthodox and rigid.

Or consider the social sciences. In nearly all universities social science courses are available which offer considerable freedom to the individual students, and contain considerable quantities of radical bourgeois thought, or not infrequently, Marxism. In a citadel of traditional academic freedom Cambridge, a social science course under the direction of thoroughly respectable academics was introduced only last year and against considerable opposition from dons claiming "sociology today = Cohn Bendit tomorrow". As regards political freedom most students' Socialist Societies today enjoy state subsidies. An example to contrast: the CP run 'October Club' in Oxford was banned in 1933 for criticising the Officers' Training Corps! (2). Many left-wing students have been disciplined in recent years but these measures have in general taken place after militant action. That is, they weren't the original cause of the student upsurge.

Nor does the broader argument that there is today an "abandonment of liberal forms by the bourgeoisie" (p. 2) hold water. Plainly during the '50's and '60's there was if anything an extension of liberalism. The false ECSR argument is borrowed straight from the "British Road to Socialism" that concentration of power in the hands of a few big monopoly capitalists necessarily means less liberalism than when we are oppressed 'democratically' by a larger number of smaller capitalists. ECSR has a saving clause: "it does not matter whether this (the traditional university) existed or not - it is what students are taught to expect". But (1) there is no evidence offered that students are taught to expect it (we certainly weren't) (2) if the traditional liberal university never existed, then student disaffection

would always have existed. And what is all the talk about 'crisis of the transition' supposed to show, anyway, except that the liberal university once existed and is now being destroyed?

The Revolt of the Middle Class?

There is more involved than just empirical inaccuracy. There is also an error of method. We can see this most clearly if we refer to one of the sources of ECSR's ideas. ECSR states: "With a very few exceptions, the best analysis we have found has been 'Populist Students and Corporate Society' by Harold Jacobs and James Petras in International Socialist Journal February 1964." (p. 2) No other analysis is cited by ECSR.

Jacobs and Petras give two causes for the student revolt. Firstly, "a good part of the current generation of American middle class students have been raised . . . (on) the permissive and non-authoritarian ideas of Dewey and Freud" and therefore have an "emotional antagonism" to the "manipulative and bureaucratic milieu characteristic of the large American university." Secondly, "the discrepancy between democratic ideals and corporate ~~xxx~~ reality." Not a single item of empirical evidence is quoted in support. As for the first 'cause' - substitute 'office' or 'factory' or 'school' or any other institution for 'university' and the argument is just as good - the whole of American middle class society should therefore be in a state of revolutionary upheaval. In fact there is no necessity for "emotional antagonism" to lead to political struggle. The emotional antagonism can be suppressed by adaption of the ideal to reality, or by simply accepting the discrepancy between ideal and reality - or it can be expressed in individualist drop out fashion - or it can simply remain, without leading to any action.

The second 'cause' is even more factious. It provides an all-purpose non-explanation for any occurrence of any sort of unrest anywhere, at any time. Jacobs and Petras are in fact prevented from producing any specific analysis of the student revolt by their contention that big universities are "microcosms of the whole" society. Thus anything true for the university, in the small, will be true for society, in the large. Their picture of the whole society is of an integrated pyramid of 'corporate society'. So the only fact they can register about universities is that they are bureaucratic authoritarian institutions. No detailed or concrete account of the student revolt can be produced - still less a Marxist one, which would start from relations of production rather than relations of control and dominance.

The Jacobs-Petras approach is carried over into ECSR. (A long quote from J&P is given on p. 54 with the comment "this analysis admirably describes the development of many student struggles".) The roots of revolt are in a conflict between ideals and reality. It is not explained how and why that struggle should generate a change of ideals (i.e. liberal students becoming socialist).

Clearly one manifestation of a situation where students previously dominated by liberal ideology are trying to turn to socialism will be shattering of liberal illusions. This will include a realisation of the discrepancy between democratic ideals and undemocratic reality. But that isn't to say that the discrepancy is the cause of revolt, any more than it is true that working class revolt, in the final analysis, due to a discrepancy between expectations of good wages and the dictates of economic stringency.

Another Theory

The wooliness of the argument of ECSR is made clear by a comparison

with the other explanation of student revolt published by IS, in the Cliff Birchall pamphlet on France. Presumably, the Cliff Birchall explanation is meant to be the same as ECSR's. But in fact it is different. The main part of the Cliff Birchall analysis (p. 12) starts by telling us that with the "third industrial revolution", "the intellectual element becomes crucial to the development of the economy and society." This could just mean that more skilled intellectual workers are needed. Alternatively it could be a copy introduction of the ideas of the neo-Marxists Adorno and Marcuse, who hold that in modern capitalism the base and the superstructure are becoming integrated through the 'intellectual element' being increasingly intimately involved in and dominating production or of the garbled nonsense of eg. Tom Nairn, who, in 'The Beginning of the End' states that "The ultimate phase of capitalist productivity is the mass production of consciousness as a commodity." Some sort of interpretation along these alternative lines seems necessary to sustain the argument that follows.

We continue: "The central contradiction of capitalism is that between the production of what Marx called use values and the production of value. The first are natural, the second is specific to the capitalist order of society." The "production of use values" and the "production of value" are not of course the same. Although all production of value is production of use values, some production of use value (eg domestic production) is not production of exchange value. But it's difficult to see a contradiction between "production of use values" and "production of value." Moreover, production of value is not specific to capitalism, but exists in any society with commodities.

The student revolt in the Cliff Birchall pamphlet is put forward as a product of this "central contradictions". "In the university this is reflected as a contradiction between the ideal of unlimited intellectual development, free from social, political and ideological restraint, and the tight intellectual reins imposed by capitalism." Apart from the fact that both are in terms of ideal vs. reality, this has nothing in common with the ECSR analysis. In ECSR the student revolt is a product of a definite transition taking place in a particular historical period, a one off phenomenon, due to very secondary and indirect developments (academic freedom is scarcely a central pillar to capitalism). For Cliff and Birchall, the student revolt is a direct product of the central contradiction of capitalism in the epoch when "the intellectual element becomes crucial to the development of the economy and society." (How this happens when ~~some~~ students are "outside production" p 14 and therefore presumably out of the direct scope of the central contradiction of capitalism is not explained. Nor are we shown the central contradiction of capitalism, a contradiction that is, in reality, in the objective structure, can be reflected in particular sector as a contradiction between ideal and reality.)

ECSR as a Theory

Our criticisms have concentrated on a small, though important, part of ECSR. Our limited comments are, we hope, sufficient to show that loose rhetoric about needs of capitalism vs aspirations of the intellect is not good enough for a Marxist analysis. Our theory as expressed in ECSR has just been a ceremonial ornament, not a guide to action. The programmatic proposals at the end of ECSR are at most tenuously connected with the main analysis. It could even be argued that the demands are inconsistent with the analysis. For according to the analysis, there is no ~~point~~ point in raising any demand which can be granted, since it will not set in action the dialectic of politicisation "relatively small groups acted in ways which accorded with the liberal pretensions of the university structure but were clearly opposed to its manipulative

ends... reaction of the authorities... direct repression... broad mass
fo students... react with outrage to the betrayal of the ideals... begin
to group for alternatives... for some a complete redefinition of their
position in revolutionary terms." (p54 58)

In effect, IS students have been free to oscillate arbitrarily between
emphasising 'proletarianisation' of student destinies, analogies between
universities and factories (ECSR p. 51 55) the "intellectual element crucial
to the development of the economy and society" so that students are very
nearly working class and emphasising that students have middle class
origins, that they can't win much in struggle (p. 10) and that they are
"outside production" so that students are very nearly bourgeois, and are
best siphoned off individually into factory leafletting etc.

Debates on student strategy within IS and between IS and other tendencies
have been carried out either on an ad hoc pragmatic basis or as by products
of broader debates. They have never been referred to a serious study of
the student situation.

We do not believe that the production of an adequate Marxist theory of the
student revolt is a first priority for IS. However, we insist that IS needs
to repudiate ECSR and that if a new pamphlet on the revolt is to be produced,
it should be the product of a serious scientific investigation and not an
updated version of ECSR.

A future article, currently in preparation will offer some primitive
suggestions towards the construction of a theory.

Meanwhile comments on this article should be sent to Ken Green
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(1) Accounts using factors similar to those in ECSR have appeared in 'Marxism
Today' the Penguin 'Student Power' and a publication of the FI "World
wide radicalisation of Youth'

(2) N. Wood 'Communism and British Intellectuals'

... Comments on IS pamphlet continued...

but the Mandel article under attack is complete gibberish.) The development of
higher education seems like a nice solid material thing to base a Marxist account
of the student revolt on, and for that reason gets a mention everywhere. It is
dragged in to justify economism (the 'economic' issues are central) or ultra-
leftism (the 'fundamental needs of capitalism' are at stake).

Martin Thomas 14-9-73

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Background

The expansion of higher education in the mid-sixties, following the recommendations of the Robbins Report (1963), produced a dramatic expansion in the total number of students, particularly in the public sector (ie Polytechnics etc). By the early '70's students in higher education represented 15% of their age group (still a very small proportion compared to many European countries). This expansion in the public sector particularly was the response to the need felt by British capital for a larger reservoir of trained technicians, scientists, and managers.

This transformation of the higher education system meant that increasingly the majority of students would not be a privileged few destined for the nexus of the Oxbridge old-boy network and the upper echelons of the ruling class, but would instead go into technical, scientific, and middle management posts. However, this change does not mean that students are becoming proletarianised (as the CP have claimed). Students have no definite relationship to the means of production and are ~~are~~ a group in transition, often between one social stratum and another. They are a de-classed group, whose consciousness is in the main petty-bourgeois. This consciousness arises both from the individualistic work situation at college and from expectations of the sort of job they eventually will find. (The majority of graduates go into teaching...)

In its early period of existence, the National Union of Students was a reflection of all the worse sides of the student milieu, and contributed to preserving that milieu as it existed by being affiliated to a right-wing CIA-funded international student body. The NUS was dominated by right-wing Labourites who used the union as a vehicle for their careerist aspirations in the LP, and on the ground the student unions were usually passive bodies with no union democracy. The individual unions were also only weakly linked into the NUS structure, whose main function was to serve as a travel bureau.

This conservative structure was massively shaken up, and almost completely transformed over the period 1968-72 by waves of student militancy. This movement began in a small way at the LSE in March 1967 with an occupation over the suspension of the union president by the Principal, Adams. The occupation was, significantly, led by socialists, but evoked little response from students elsewhere. But following the events of May-June '68 in France, an enormous surge of student militancy occurred in Britain. There were the bitterly fought occupations at Hull and Hornsey College of Art; the formation of the

Revolutionary Socialists Students Federation; the wave of VSC demonstrations, culminating in the October Grosvenor Sq demonstration in which nearly 100,000 students participated. The year ended with yet another struggle at LSE which concluded with the defeat of the occupation and the expulsion of two lecturers. The defeat of LSE represented very much a water-shed, separating the mood and struggles of '68 from what was to follow.

This tremendous outburst of militancy was undoubtedly inspired by the events in France and by the radicalisation produced as a result of the world-wide movement in support of the Vietnamese. Undoubtedly these were the 'triggers' which fired off an underlying feeling of frustration and discontent, a feeling produced by the transformation of higher education itself. As a result of the massive expansion of education, students found themselves having to cope with poor facilities, over-crowding, and also face a rigid and restrictive set of rules for their behaviour imposed upon them by dictatorial college authorities, who claimed to have the rights of parents over the students. It was from these conditions that the pre-conditions for the struggles of '68 arose, and which actually motivated many of the individual struggles themselves. It is a mistake to think, as does IS, that this period was more concerned over 'political' issues, whereas students are now concerned over 'bread and butter' issues. In reality, the two have always been interlinked.

Such motivations pushed students into action during the period 1970-72, often in opposition to attempts by college authorities or the government to restrict the effectiveness of student unions (eg. 'files' occupations of 1970; campaign against Thatcher proposals). However, despite the continuation of real ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ grievances, many of the most contentious issues have either been resolved, or found to be insurmountable. The Tories were unable to restrict student union autonomy, and since '68 many of the old restrictive rules have been relaxed. The low level of the grant still remains the biggest issue, but the grants campaigns of 72-75 have resulted in little being gained - only the same merry-go-round of demcs, collapsing rent strikes, and victimisations with students' living standards continually falling. This has produced wide-spread demoralisation, reflected in the declining level of the grants campaign itself.

The coming year

Because of the factors above, coupled with the lull in the level of the class struggle since the election of the Labour government, the right-ward tendency of NUS politics first observed by the student fraction over a year ago will certainly

continue. This may well be exacerbated by the economic recession, although the effects on the student's expectations etc is not too clear. It is apparent, though, that student politics on an international scale are moving to the right in countries like USA and Germany.

Still, it is unlikely that the control of NUS by the CP-dominated Broad Left will be seriously challenged from the right, but the Broad Left itself will probably grow as the result of the drift from revolutionary politics. Paradoxically, IS should grow over the next year simply as a result of their 'turn' towards student politics and their massively increased intervention in student unions. Squeezed between these pressures, the IMG are losing and have lost influence, and are finding themselves having to resort to dubious gimmicks and Popular Front antics (eg Open Forum) to gain a periphery.

Our tasks

Given the general disorientation of the student left and its tendency to indulgence in the politics of rosy optimism, we can come forward and present a clear, realistic view of the present stage. This can only be done, with partial exceptions, on a propaganda level. We need then to argue for:-

- 1) Revolutionary unity. For co-ordination against the right and the CP, although always bearing in mind the inherent limitations of Soc Socs and other united fronts. We should not, however, come forward as professional 'conciliators' - fight for our politics even if it causes a split.
- 2) Combat growing NF influence by campaigning for No Platform for Fascists, and being prepared to put it into effect even without the support of the whole union.
- 3) internationalism, but not the sham internationalism of much of student politics. Concretely this means taking the issue of Ireland vigorously into NUS, although giving support to other solidarity campaigns where practicable.
- 4) more attention to be paid to propaganda work and less to the capture of posts through the creation of an election 'machine'.

In order to do this effectively, we need to discuss student politics more in the group. Students will in the near future probably provide us with many of our recruits - yet student work and the student fraction is a disgraceful shambles. Part of this attributable to the past laxity of fraction convenors, particularly myself, and also to the general lack of concern for student work. This situation must be remedied. The student fraction has begun to put its own house in order. We have elected MO'S as convenor, decided to have two fraction

meetings each term, and to produce a regular fraction bulletin. We hope that a discussion of student work at the Aggregate ~~xxx~~ will also further the work of the student fraction.

Neal Smith 5/4/75

General outline approved by student fraction unanimously.

Since the writing of these perspectives, recent events seem to have confirmed the outline of the general tendencies in the student movement. The NUS conference placed the Broad Left firmly in control, with the IS increasing in influence and the IMG losing out.

At the same time the right in the shape of various nebulous coalitions showed an increased strength. Of significance also is the large vote that went to the NOLS candidates. I think that it may now be worth making a more detailed look at the local Labour Clubs in student unions.

The struggle at Lancaster has ended in defeat. Despite a large demonstration of support from unions all over the country, the students at Lancaster appear demoralised and reluctant to fight against the victimisations that have taken place. Once again the national structure has shown itself to be totally incapable of organising an effective counter-attack against victimisations, and this can only further dampen students' willingness to engage in struggle.

Despite the generally pessimistic tone of the perspectives document, I believe that we are only facing a lull in student activity. As the value of grant declines even further and facilities at college worsen due to the education cuts, students will find themselves being forced to struggle or to witness the collapse of NUS into irrelevancy. The present AUT strike and the protests about education cuts will intensify as the situation worsens. Healey has spoken of cuts in public expenditure in the Autumn - if these occur and affect higher education, as they almost certainly will, then the possibilities exist of forming a common front between students and certain sections of staff, who will also be hit hard by the cuts. Here lies the possibility for the student movement to get out of the dead-end in which it finds itself. I hope to develop this idea more fully by the Aggregate in conjunction with other student cds, and present an amendment to the student perspective document.

Neal Smith 6/5/75.
