

## REVOLUTION AND THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

### I. REVOLUTION

Lenin's major contribution to Marxist theory was to retrieve its complex revolutionary content from two particular deviations -- the empiricism of the 2nd. International which conceived the revolution as a pre-determined product of social evolution, and the historicism that reacted against this passivity by replacing the objective science of historical materialism with a 'theory of the proletariat' in which the real, complex working-class is made into an ideal, simple, Hegelian 'subject of history'.

The classical Marxism reformed by Lenin provides an objective social science that can analyse any concrete social structure with its given and specific complexity, and on this basis can define the social content of the revolution that can be made and the class alliance and political strategy required to make it. The revolutionary class alliance (the 'people') must be constructed at the political level by the Marxist cadre (the Party) and the counter-revolutionary bloc (the 'enemy') must be defeated, and its political organisations, above all the State, smashed, in order to carry through the revolutionary transformation.

The main force in the socialist revolution in Britain can only be the working class, but in their period of neo-capitalism the class structure is complex and new social groups arise, such as students, which we have to class as 'people' or 'enemy', from the point of view of the socialist revolution, on the basis of an objective analysis of their position in this complex class structure.

### II. THE STUDENTS.

The starting-point of a strategy for the student movement must be the question whether 'students' (in contemporary Britain) form part of the 'people' or of the 'enemy'. The transience of the situation that defines 'students' makes it necessary to examine both their origin and destination in the relations of production, as well as their specifically structured position within the higher educational system. Some fundamental structural facts are listed below.

A) Class background is a relatively unimportant determinant of student political potential except for the small minority of really bourgeois students whose future position is secured independently of their educational achievement, and the smaller minority of working-class students who received anti-bourgeois values from their parents and maintained these through primary and secondary education. The mass of students are economically and culturally independent of their parents, situation very often sealed by conscious rejection.

B) The large majority of students are destined for various skilled positions in the productive labour force and only a minority will obtain positions as direct agents of capitalist authority or in a direct servicing role to the capitalist class.

C) The stratification of the higher education system generates a considerable differentiation of social destination, with universities filling a higher proportion of 'elite' positions.

D) The competitive exam system is a form of existential oppression for students. It forces the acceptance of set curricular, generates the pedagogic role of the teacher, atomises students and tends to force them into a relation of mutual antagonism.

E) Students experience very sharply the sexual repression generated by the nuclear family. Exclusively young, and with the ideas of psychoanalysis highly available, students tend to create a culture of (partial) sexual liberation which is however contradictory to the requirements of their future role in the relations of production.

F) The great majority of students are motivated to compete in the exam system by the promise of the bourgeois life-style that will accompany a relatively privileged position in the labour-force or a managerial/executive position.

G) The position of a section of students, especially in social science departments, approximates to that of an intelligentsia without organic ties to the ruling class. Given the accessibility of Marxism, they are able in the classic pattern to become conscious of the contradictions of capitalist society before the working class that is in fact the secondary aspect of this contradiction.

These factors provide a complex series of differentiations within the student body in relation to the potential of revolutionary mobilisation. Some sections of students are serving a fairly unambiguous apprenticeship to a career of direct service to the capitalist class (eg law, accountancy, industrial relations); others have quite ill-defined career prospects (eg sociology). Some sections have greater chance of an elite position (universities); others will almost certainly become highly skilled workers (colls of tech). Some students are at the centre of production of bourgeois ideology (social science depts in larger universities) and are thus the potential producers of revolutionary theory. Future teachers will have a vital role in maintaining bourgeois hegemony, but are in a position to subvert bourgeois socialisation and turn it into its opposite. In their great majority students are part of the people, but the enemy is sociologically present. Most important, the boundary between people and enemy is fluid, both due to the exam system and the cultural component of class identification, and before they have been integrated into the bourgeois culture associated with a relatively privileged position in the labour-force the objectively popular sections of students, who form the great majority, can be won for the revolution.

### III. STUDENT MOVEMENT

Student consciousness in Britain as elsewhere has had both a syndical aspect (from academic reform to student power) and a political one. And the political aspect has so far been unambiguously present in the fiercest struggles. Syndical demands have very often arisen as the consequence of exposure of the political connections of the university (germ warfare, spies on campus, racialism, Vietnam, etc.). This is undoubtedly because of the confinement of the student movement so far largely to the higher echelons of the binary system and even to the social science departments there. Even with struggles more syndical in appearance and outside of the universities, Hornsey, for example, took place in an 'elite' art college and had strong political/cultural overtones re the role of art in society. In spite of some partial exceptions (eg Birmingham), the student movement has hardly begun to mobilise the far more oppressed mass of students in the science and technology departments, nor in the technical universities, polytechnics, T.T.C.'s, colls of ed, students more oppressed both by the exam system (crushing work loads), sexually (highly monogamous), and with far less prospect of a more privileged work position, even though the advance signals of their mobilisation are now being reported.

This uneven development has brought with it a certain advantage. Spontaneously, almost effortlessly, the student movement has created a national political presence (the equation: 'student = revolutionary' in the mass media and popular consciousness). This achievement is hesitatingly consolidated in the RSSF, which has immense potential now if it can overcome growing pains and generate a higher degree of organisational seriousness. It can play a vanguard role for the student movement, and if a revolutionary student strategy can be pursued, then its agents can only be the cadres organised around the RSSF.

(P.2.: after the closure of LSE, RSSF has suddenly begun to develop from a paper organisation into an effective one. Its co-ordination of demonstrations of solidarity with LSE in the leading student centres and the national demonstration it called were the first acts of a national student movement).

#### IV. FIELD OF OPERATION

The struggle inside the educational system must first be weighed against political work outside, ie working class agitation and servicing. The reasons are overwhelming why it is necessary to concentrate our efforts within the educational institutions for the next year or two.

A) experience is that at present even prolonged and systematic industrial work by students (in whatever organisation) produces negligible results, while efforts within the educational institutions produce by any criterion great gains here and now.

B) at present the number of student cadres prepared to engage in industrial work is very limited, but by our efforts inside the colleges we should be able to produce within two years many times the present number of cadres who will undertake whatever work is strategically most important.

C) the anti-imperialist movement that has been a major expression of student politicisation provides a vitally necessary element in revolutionary ideology within the imperialist metropolises, which would at present be endangered by making direct working-class agitation the main field of our political work.

D) the one section of the working-class where students can hope to build a revolutionary base in the immediate future is the apprentices and young workers who are brought together within educational institutions by the day release system.

#### V. RED BASE

The Red Base is the most important weapon that the student movement can produce for the socialist revolution, and makes the link with the working class at the political level. The Red Base does not mean that the late capitalist university can ever be a militarily liberated area (except during the revolutionary crisis). It means that

(i) bourgeois liberalism can be replaced by Marxism as the dominant ideology among the student mass.

(ii) real power can be won via mass mobilisation, over courses and exams, over buildings and facilities, that can be used to materially strengthen the forces of revolution.

The concrete results of the Red Base strategy will be:

(i) production in each large college every year of tens of students who develop into revolutionary cadres.

(ii) production in each large college of a red mass of several hundred or a few thousand students who reject bourgeois ideology and culture, and can be mobilised at any time for struggle.

(iii) premises and facilities of colleges can be taken over when required for revolutionary activity of any kind.

(iv) colleges can be centres for ideological and research servicing of the working-class movement, helping it develop along the path of revolution.

(v) **MOST IMPORTANT**, the university or college with a red strategic majority can function as a revolutionary political presence or foco, concretely expressing the ideas of socialist revolution to which the working class must be won.

Within the educational institution as elsewhere, the struggle has two aspects: the struggle with force (mass mobilisation - occupation - resistance - armed struggle) and the struggle with ideas. The strategy of the Red Base is premised on the fact that in any institution essential to the forces of production forms of

dual power can be created here and now. A politically mobilised mass of students can force major concessions from the authorities, and if these concessions are the only way of keeping higher education in production they will be granted. True, one university could be closed down if this would keep the rot from spreading (this may well now be attempted, at least partially, at LSE), and no doubt several colleges will be forcibly closed down from time to time, but the higher educational system as a whole can no more be closed than can a basic industry. The other alternative is of course physical repression, already carried out in many countries' universities and factories. But, given that the revolutionaries are serious, this only intensifies the struggle without resolving it; and it exacerbates the tendency for the struggle to spill over from the students to the working class, while destroying the liberal facade of the bourgeois state that is its most plausible justification in late capitalism.

## VI. REVOLUTIONARY CULTURE

It is important to provide a Marxist alternative to bourgeois ideology at all levels - critique in the classrooms, commentary on current affairs, and general routine ideological work. But the struggle for a red student mass cannot be won by ideological debate alone. As long as students are motivated to accept the competitive exam system by the promise of a privileged work position, by the bourgeois life-style held out to them by the Sunday papers, there is a material barrier to their acceptance of revolutionary ideas. Only by freeing them from the dual oppression of the competitive exam and the bourgeois aspiration can student revolutionary potential be truly released. Revolutionaries must therefore learn to communicate with the mass of students at a deeper psychic level; finding ways to show them the bankruptcy and vacuity of the bourgeois career, the bourgeois home, the bourgeois family, helping them liberate their repressed sexuality and aggression, helping them discover the alternative life-style that is involved in being (1) a revolutionary fighter (2) a comrade (3) sexually emancipated - none of which most hardened socialists are always models of.

## VII. MASS LINE

If the student mass, isolating the true bourgeois and the dyed-in-the-wool careerists, is part of the people, potentially anti-capitalist and therefore to be brought under Marxist hegemony, then the work of the Marxist cadres within the student sector must follow the mass line, and socialist-sectarianism is as counter-revolutionary as it is among the working class. The idea that we must convert before we can struggle, a mass of reds before a red mass, must be decisively rejected. Conversion itself requires involving students in struggle. 'Confrontation' by itself does not produce a revolutionary consciousness, but the experience of struggle is necessary all along;

- (1) to test in practice and break down bourgeois mystifications (eg academic freedom, impartial arbitration, representative democracy), and provide an ideological space that Marxism can fill.
- (2) to test different groups (professoriat, junior staff, union bureaucrats, different sections of students) - who are our friends and who are our enemies?
- (3) to test individuals by putting them in situations where they can make an existential commitment to revolution; thus also to develop experienced and trusted leaders.
- (4) to test and develop the strategy and tactics of struggle in the educational institutions in order to carry it each time to a higher level.

We must enable students to struggle at the level which they're at, confident that our ideas will win and that, once existing structures are put in question, mass democracy will be red democracy. This does not mean opportunism, it does mean that the difference between the consciousness of the Marxist cadre and that of the mass of students is recognised and that we put forward demands that students can and will struggle for now - and this means demands for mobilisation, not abstract 'transitional demands' that only consider the ideological moment of raising consciousness and neglect the moment of force, building a power base.

#### VIII. DARE WE WIN?

We must avoid the trap of seeing our goal as the realisation of a static 'student programme'. In the colleges and universities our goal is the power that comes from mass mobilisation and mass struggle, the power that is mass democracy in form and red democracy in content. But in the fight for 'all power to the general assembly' we must not shy away from the specific role of the Marxist cadre on the pretence that 'it is the class not the party that rules'. Within the mass mobilisation and the mass democracy, the Marxist cadres must prepare to play a leading role, winning the mass for their proposals and taking the initiative in carrying them out (eg as an ad hoc committee responsible and recallable by the general assembly). In the face of threats to close a college, we must show that we are prepared to run it - as a Commune - and that we don't fear our own strength. Because to control our institutions, to deploy their resources, act in their name and by our actions win the confidence of the mass of students and confirm them in the path of revolution, is what we want.