

FOR RSSF CIRCULATION

A REVOLUTIONARY STUDENTS' ORGANISATION

The first question which must be answered before discussing the structure of the RSSF, is whether it is seen as the nucleus of a revolutionary movement or of a revolutionary party, and, what in the present context the difference between these is.

Fundamentally the difference between a revolutionary movement and a revolutionary party is that the former is concerned primarily with creating revolutionaries, the latter primarily with creating the revolution. At the present stage it would be unrealistic to contemplate the creation of a revolution as anything but an ultimate objective. Thus the RSSF can have no pretention to be the nucleus of a revolutionary party, nor is it likely that it will ever evolve into a party. Long before the revolution the leading role would have passed to the workers and a workers' party. Thus in discussing the structure of the RSSF we need not concern ourselves with revolutionary tactics, but with the tactics for creating revolutionaries.

Can Students be Revolutionary?

Is it possible for students to become a revolutionary force? Individual students may become revolutionaries by joining revolutionary groups, but how can students en masse support the proletariat? In short, through having the same enemy.

In class terms students are in an ambiguous position in capitalist society. They do not form a class in themselves, but at the same time they are not an appendage of any other class. Whatever their class origins, they are being prepared to enter the bourgeoisie, but do not yet belong to it.

A large proportion of what is loosely termed the bourgeoisie, is objectively defined negatively with respect to capital, for example the technicians at all levels, lower managerial workers, even the most "bourgeois" of intellectuals, and thus it is to be expected that a large proportion of these

people would desert their adopted class in a revolutionary situation, as indeed happened on a fairly large scale during the events of May in France. In fact the allegiance of these people would be vital for the success of a revolution in an advanced capitalist society, for without them the economy would very soon collapse. It could be argued that the students are the first element of the "bourgeoisie" to desert, by refusing to join it.

Students tend to form a sort of transient intellectual proletariat, and as intellectuals the students again do not form part of a class a priori. An intellectual, as the custodian of the ideology of a class, and the mediator of the ideology to that class, can be a member of any class, though as the hegemony of the bourgeoisie depends crucially on the absolute dominance of its ideology, it is natural that it will have a massive intellectual superiority, so long as its hegemony persists.

Thus the students, because of their detachment (in class terms), do present the possibility of becoming a revolutionary force at a fairly early stage, and increasingly so as their position comes more and more to be defined negatively. But should they organise independently or should they attempt to insert themselves into the working class?

Students and the working class

So long as they are students, they cannot actually go and join the working class on the shop-floor, and thus, though this may be the answer for a few individuals, it is no answer for the mass. On the other hand they cannot insert themselves into the working class as specialist intellectuals without the mediation of an existing revolutionary organisation of the working class. Otherwise their action with the working class is in fact merely proselytising to them. This unidirectional relationship immediately becomes patronising, since the worker cannot situate the intellectual and so a meaningful dialectical relationship cannot develop and the intellectual's message remains divorced from the worker's reality, and so meaningless to him. The intellectual mistakes this for stupidity, and so simplifies his message, making it still more remote, the relationship more patronising and the gulf between intellectual and worker still wider.

The problem of the relationship to the working class will only be finally resolved for revolutionary students by the formation of a revolutionary party which is firmly entrenched in all progressive sectors of the society. Just

as this party cannot substitute itself for the proletariat, neither can students substitute themselves for such a party.

Needless to say such an organisation does not exist. Many revolutionary groups have working class members, but never as more than individuals. The CP, though an organisation of the working class, is no more revolutionary than the Labour Party, at least in action. In any case the crucial requirement is the mediating vanguard of working class intellectuals, and this is most certainly absent in any significant strength: one of the fundamental tasks of the RSSF must be to foster the development of this vanguard.

Thus it is doubly important for revolutionary students to organise and mobilise as students. Negatively, because they can mobilise in no other way. Positively, because if the worker can situate the student, as a student engaged in his own situation, a dialectical relationship can develop in which the worker relates his struggle to that of the student and so generalises his individual experience. In this way intellectuals from outside the working class can effectively ally themselves with the working class, and a meaningful relationship, mediated by the common struggle, can develop.

The strategic importance of a student challenge

[1] THE STRUCTURAL IMPORTANCE OF IDEOLOGY

The revolutionary significance of the students depends on the possibility of their mounting an ideological challenge to the bourgeoisie, capable of a development that will snowball the contradictions of capitalism right through education to society as a whole.

To grasp this revolutionary significance it is essential to understand the importance of intellectuals in the maintenance of the bourgeois hegemony, and the absolutely fundamental importance of this ideological and cultural domination. Only by breaking the grip of bourgeois ideology on the working class can the revolutionary idea gain a hold and the revolutionary movement gain momentum. Without replacing this with a revolutionary socialist ideology, the working class will remain forever on the defensive.

The most serious barrier to the development of a revolutionary movement in this country is precisely the lack of a challenge to the hegemony of the bourgeoisie, and the absence of a revolutionary socialist ideology, particularly

in the working class. Of course the working class does have a class-consciousness - it is conscious of itself as set apart from the bourgeoisie, and even standing in opposition to capital. But this corporate consciousness is infused with bourgeois ideology, and it is this infusion which prevents the working class from challenging the bourgeois hegemony, rather than the bourgeois control of the means of violence. It is the repressive role of this hegemony which must be revealed, before we can confront the true violence of capitalist society. Usually the mechanisms of this repression are difficult to identify because they are part of the normal language of the society, a language spoken by conservatives and revolutionaries alike. Today we have a clear example of the process in action. At the moment there is no consensus over violence. The bourgeois press and media have seized on this word, ripped it from any context, and are attempting to depoliticise it, demobilising potential student demonstrators by confusing and bewildering them by an abstract moralism, which they can neither accept or reject - the non-existent quality of 'violence in itself'.

In the long run it will be essential to annihilate working class corporatism. Though the working class feels itself standing in opposition to capital, it sees in this opposition, not a contradiction to be actively resolved, but a static difference of interests which must be balanced. It is important to remember this when propagandising the working class. It is easy for anti-capitalist demands to merely reinforce the corporate consciousness and not to sow the seeds of a revolutionary consciousness. Thus to oppose the incomes policy as an attack on working class living standards is not a revolutionary position - it challenges not private property and the location of power, but the means by which private property aggrandises itself; it merely pushes the workers even further onto the defensive, at the expense of a revolutionary consciousness.

A society's ideology penetrates and controls all aspects of its daily life throughout every class and sector. It can only be successfully challenged at its point of production. The long run strategic importance of the student rising lies precisely in its challenging the production and penetration of the ideology from one of its key bastions.

[2] STRATEGY

The initial stage in the development of a revolutionary consciousness in the working class is the appearance of revolutionary working class intellectuals forming the

revolutionary vanguard of the working class. But these people will not arise in a vacuum. If members of the working class are to appear with a revolutionary ideological challenge to the bourgeoisie, it is essential that something should attract them to come forward. One of the most effective ways in which they may be attracted is by the development of such an ideological challenge in a situation which they can relate to their own.

The educational system, particularly the tertiary sector, is the obvious location for this initial challenge. Firstly, because it is in the educational system that the contradictions between bourgeois ideology and capitalist reality are at the moment most immediately apparent, largely because the integration of education into the capitalist economy as just another productive sector is taking place without any substantial change in an ideological position which stresses, and must stress, the independence of the educational sector and intellectual inquiry as an aspect of capitalist freedom. The intellectual is the last who must understand that he is only as free as befits the requirements of capital, and he is the first to question it.

If this challenge is to be extended to the working class, the latter must be able to relate their own position to that of the students. This is only possible if the students are themselves fully aware of the position of the educational system in capitalist society today, and thus make their struggle a struggle over the location of power and the domination of capital - a generalised struggle in which the workers can recognise their own interest.

The workers most likely to be attracted to the students will be those closest to them in their experience. These will be, firstly, the young workers, for obvious reasons, and secondly, the technical workers, whose position is nearest to that of students in that they have total responsibility for their work, without control over it, they are encouraged to be critical and independent, but only between rigidly defined limits.

The students have already begun to present an ideological challenge to the bourgeoisie, and in this lies the fundamental significance of student unrest. But so far this challenge has been largely negative. The commodity nature of the student has become more and more evident, culminating in the claims of the populists, from local councillors to Enoch Powell, that "society" actually owns students. With these developments the contradiction between the ideological rationalisation and the

reality opened, and this was inevitable, given that independence is essential for fruitful intellectual activity and yet subjection to the power of capital essential for capitalism.

The movement towards a student self-consciousness was also prompted by the much more transparent contradiction between the brutal cynicism of modern imperialism and bourgeois liberalism. But this served merely to push the movement off. The situation has now developed to the stage in which students are questioning their own position in society and the whole society itself.

However the challenge has been largely negative. Bourgeois ideology has been repudiated by large and growing numbers of young people. But the second moment, which converts a utopian nihilist challenge into a socialist one - the development of a socialist ideology, is only just beginning. Thus at the moment we see a plethora of nihilist and utopian groups: hippies, situationists, anarchists, etc. Thus students do not yet constitute a revolutionary socialist challenge.

The immediately fundamental task of the RSSF must be to develop this nihilist challenge into a socialist one. This involves both the development and sophistication of the critique of bourgeois ideology, and originating socialist theory among the mass of students. These of course are two moments of the same thing.

Thus there are two closely related moments in an RSSF strategy. Firstly the RSSF must weld a protesting student body into a massive revolutionary force. Education is here the key, through theoretical discussion, critical evaluation of student action and action itself. Secondly, the RSSF must foster the formation of a dialectical relationship between students and workers, and so foster the development of a vanguard of revolutionary socialist working class intellectuals. Initially the first task will be the most important, but it will, as the movement develops, give way to the second.

Tactically this strategy thus involves a double mobilisation:

1. By confronting the contradictions within each particular institution, other students must be mobilised, politicised and educated, so developing the ideological challenge by revolutionary students.
2. When RSSF develops a national organisation of some strength it can confront the contradictions revealed by the place of the educational system in society as a whole, so uniting students and working class youth (those included and excluded by the class mechanism of education) in a total challenge.

The emphasis on the educational system is not the emphasis of the challenge but the point at which the challenge begins.

[3] TACTICS

There are a number of crucial questions relating to the tactics to be followed in the devolution of this strategy.

The first and most fundamental question is the nature of the contradictions which we seek to expose. Following from this is the question of the tactics to be followed in exposing these contradictions.

(i) The contradictions

Fundamentally the contradictions which are found in the educational sector are those which lie at the roots of capitalist society. However it is not very useful to work at such a general level when formulating tactics at the present stage. These contradictions should be progressively revealed as our lower level demands are not met. The lowest level at which the fundamental contradiction is revealed is in the contradiction between the reality of the educational system and its rationalisation in liberal bourgeois ideology. This reflects the contradiction between the requirements of an independent critical attitude and the simultaneous requirement of very rigid boundaries on the exercise of such independence, which in turn follows from the contradiction between the means of production and the relations of production at its most advanced level - the same level as in the automated industries. The formulation of demands at the lowest level serves two functions. Firstly, it focusses attention at the ideological level. Secondly, it provides the closest contact with the mass of students, by providing demands which are "reasonable" even in liberal terms, while providing the opportunity for the development of the issues to the higher levels.

The low level contradictions appear basically in three ways. Firstly as a contradiction between the reality of a class-based institution, in terms of what is taught and researched in both content and means of expression, and the liberal ideological rationalisation which stressed the independence and objectivity of research and teaching. Secondly, as a contradiction between a hierarchical authoritarian structure and an ideology which sees a community of equals bound together by a freely contracted social contract and in which all disputes are settled by rational discussion. Thirdly, in terms of the class-based nature of selection.

Within the university or college our task is initially to reveal this low-level contradiction and to use this to reveal the contradictions at increasingly higher, more general levels. This involves on the one hand confronting the authorities to behave as the rational and democratic humans, in full control of their faculties, that they claim to be, inviting them to join with us in open debate and democratic control. Subtlety rather than drama should be the key. And on the other hand revealing the class-based nature of the education and research. It is important that the issues exploited in this context should be accepted by the mass of students so that the legitimacy of any action by the authorities is challenged by all the students. This means that issues should not be manufactured by the militants, but must be drawn out of the mass of the students and developed. The avant-garde must at all times remain in close contact with the mass, to avoid the very real danger of being outflanked. It should not need a Clausewitz to tell us that you don't fight if you are bound to lose.

(ii) The confrontation

A second tactical imperative is that issues must always be very firmly placed in the general context. Issues must be developed and generalised continuously. A permanent tension should exist within the organisation. Thus confrontation must be a tactic used flexibly and extremely carefully. The authorities can defuse the situation by either refusing to engage in confrontation or by giving way on particular issues, thus preventing the development of the situation in either case. The sit-in and the confrontation are advances on the traditional demonstration, because they are ongoing and capable of development. However they still present fairly narrow limits to development. It is necessary to progress, at some stage, beyond the sit-in to the maintenance of permanent tension which allows for almost boundless development of the issues and the situation. Thus our tactical aim should be the development of a situation of dual power, and our transitional demands formulated on that basis. Thus we must raise a large number of issues simultaneously, the issues being bound together by a general position, and not focussing permanently on any one issue, but shifting the specific focus all the time. In terms of action it involves a large number of different types of action, each suited to a particular issue, undertaken simultaneously, none of which could be decisive and none of which involve sustained confrontation. Of course the sit-in still has great value in the initial stages of a mobilisation and will still be the correct tactic in institutions which have not yet seen much student activity, but it must be recognised as no more than a

stage in the tactical development of the struggle. With the focus on dual power there will also be a large number of activities which will involve no reference to the established authority, because the students will simply take certain powers to themselves.

(iii) Ideological struggle

The class basis of the bourgeois ideology must be attacked by attacking the class basis of the teaching and the research. Thus a continual critical challenge to the content of lecture courses must be maintained. This can involve the organisation of seminars challenging the content of particular courses, direct challenges during lectures and so on. Secondly, the research of the staff must be subjected to constant scrutiny. Every book or paper should be scrutinised and if necessary criticised and the author called to defend it (or engage in self-criticism). This may be criticism merely of the subject matter or of the frame of reference or it may be a detailed analysis of the content. Likewise the links of all academic and administrative staff with outside organisations must be revealed.

Thus at the level of the institution the students present an ideological challenge by demystifying the bourgeois ideology, revealing the shallowness of bourgeois intellectuals and the class nature of their work and of the educational and ultimately the social system. Thus will found in the militants and the mass the basis of a revolutionary ideology to guide their actions.

(iv) Working Class youth

What has to be done is to attract the potential working class cadres and then to educate them. This process must involve intensive personal contact between revolutionary students and potential cadres, contact with the working class will be at a very individual and local level and must be the task of local groups. Secondly, organisation amongst the mass of the workers can only be done by the workers, since the aim is the development of a revolutionary organisation of, and not for, the working class. Thus initially contact with the mass of the workers will be limited and will involve two specific forms of activity. Firstly inviting local workers, apprentices etc. to meetings to explain the student struggle once it has begun and secondly, broadening the student struggle to involve issues beyond the particular institution, centred around the contradictions revealed by the position of the educational system in society. Direct agitation may seed a few workers with revolutionary consciousness, but only an exemplary struggle by the students against the state will arouse the workers to struggle for their own liberation.

The class basis of the educational system must be challenged. The whole system of education is geared to bourgeois culture and values. The language in which it is conducted is a bourgeois language. The values to which it aspires are bourgeois values. The culture which it teaches is bourgeois culture. The subjects with which it deals are those which are of value to the bourgeoisie. The challenge to the system must challenge the class based culture. It must challenge the content, values and style of the educational system, and selection in terms of these bourgeois qualities. Its demands must carry within them the germs of a socialist educational system.

(v) Demands

This immediately leads to a number of demands; the demand for an education for all as a right and so the abolition of all examinations and selection in education, the amalgamation of universities, technical colleges, art colleges, etc. (a demand combatting the fragmentation of culture in a capitalist society), the complete comprehensivisation of secondary education, the total abolition of streaming, the reform of the content of the education, the active participation of students at all levels of education, the provision of grants for all non-compulsory education as a right. On the basis of these demands, under the general heading of "an education for all", the students can stretch out to men and women in the working class and to youth. Initially this could be done by holding open seminars, lectures, meetings for these groups and by insisting that university lectures, libraries and recreational facilities should be open to all. Other specific tactics which get the students in touch with the workers and others can be developed. The German SDS has even set up nursery schools for the workers' children in order to make contact with the workers.

Workers must organise independently, while retaining links with the students, and the issues can be widened, students and workers helping each other in their respective struggles. At every stage in the development of the struggle, the methods of organisation, the tactics followed and the issues raised must correspond with the objective situation.

(vi) National Action

So far no mention has been made of national action at all. This is because it is proposed that there should, in the first stages, be no physical action beyond the local level.

It is not possible to engage in a confrontation which may reveal any contradictions at this national level. This is quite simply because a confrontation reveals the contradictions only through the actions of the opponents in response to the confrontation. Thus until our opponents are prepared to engage directly with us at a national level, national action can have no tactical importance. Furthermore we are not nearly in a position to engage in any on-going national action, and we shall have no chance of engaging the authorities in a meaningful way until we can do this. The use of police against "militant" demonstrations reveals nothing at the present stage, since the dominant ideology justifies the protection of property. The police only use violence in response to violence, not because they are lovely people, but because it is a tactically correct thing for them to do. Thus any attempt to use national physical action as a significant tactic will stultify the development of a revolutionary movement, as it has stultified VSC, not only by wasting energy up blind alleys, but also by switching attention from the vital grass roots.

There are other arguments for national action. One is that it is a show of strength. However at the moment our strength is very small in terms of numbers. Our strength, such as it is, lies in our ability to mobilise large numbers of students in their educational institutions, and it is this which the bourgeoisie fears and which impresses the mass of people. To mobilise our members in a national demonstration will alleviate this fear and weaken this impression, because it reduces a mysterious force of unknown strength to a few thousand bedraggled individuals being carried off to police vans.

It is also argued that national mobilisations are educative and that they attract new support. However, given the failure to engage they must be stultifying rather than educative. Nor are they likely to mobilise new support on a significant scale. The RSSF has been doing its job of contacting students in unorganised institutions and if there have been a reasonable number of local actions.

The last argument in favour of national action is its effect on morale and commitment. This is an argument in the short run, but the examples of CND, the Committee of 100 and now RSSF all show that in the long run the failure of the struggle to develop shatters both morale and commitment. These are better developed by local action within institutions and by conferences. These arguments do not apply so forcefully to mobilisations on more specific issues such as Vietnam, which should be supported provided only that they are well and imaginatively organised, which they have not been in the past.

Some key demands

Arising out of this analysis are three key demands which need to be argued over by socialists:

1. An education for all. The abolition of all selection in education and of all exams and qualifications. The provision of education at all levels for all who want it, including a vastly extended programme of day release.

There are two basic questions here (a) the class nature of the educational system, and (b) the function of the educational system. This is a demand for a socialist educational system whose function is to educate and not to select, and a socialist view of education as being a central part of a full life.

There is no more reason why the educational system should be responsible for turning out qualified doctors than qualified bricklayers.

2. Student Power. This is both a very important and a very dangerous demand, because it can easily be distorted and used against us. It is not a transitional demand, since essentially it is concerned with an educational system in which students are no longer an elite. It is essential that this demand should always be accompanied by the demand for an education for all. It should also be used as an umbrella demand, rather than a specific demand. Lastly it would be useful in always linking it with the demand for worker power. Because of its generality and its non-transitional nature, it should not be overemphasised.

3. Class content. All class content is mediated by individuals, however much they may protest. Responsibility of the intellectual for his work and all its implications must be pointed out. Within the institution this will concern the responsibility of academics. "Alienation is no excuse." This is important with regard to scientists. Further "passivity is a crime" - doctors have responsibility for the Health service, lawyers for the law etc. These demands also serve to reveal the class position of the intellectuals.

Organisation

Despite the fact that all physical activity is seen as taking place at the local level, the national organisation of the RSSF is of crucial importance.

Since the student challenge must be predominantly ideological, and particularly since the intellectual level of the Left is still so low, relative to that necessary for an effective challenge, the intellectual activities of the RSSF are of paramount importance and must be at a consistently high level.

Left in the isolation of our individual colleges and universities, there is no doubt that we shall fail in our task. It is therefore imperative that an efficient and RELIABLE communications system should be established. This would deal with the transmission of urgent information as well as the more mundane business of distributing documents.

The RSSF should establish a journal at the first opportunity, and this should be of such a quality that it can serve as the focus for debate in the movement. The national organisation should also assist local groups in their organisation of political education.

The RSSF should hold termly conferences, which would be concerned largely with the exchange of experiences and with theoretical discussion. These conferences would also be the supreme authority of the RSSF.

It is vital that the RSSF should be a mass membership organisation. It is a movement, not a federation of a few political groups, and it is vital to its success that the greatest possible degree of personal involvement within the RSSF is achieved. A mass membership organisation not only combats sectarianism, it also ensures that every member knows what is going on all the time, and personally receives all documentation.

For the same reason it is essential that the termly conferences should be membership conferences, and not, as has been suggested by the sectarians, a delegate conference.

The day to day running of the RSSF should be in the hands of a committee which should be made up of one member from each institution. This again is to maintain the involvement of all groups, and so individuals, in the day to day affairs of the RSSF.

We shall also almost certainly want to establish a few task groups to run the office, journal, political education, communications and so on.

Self constituted regional groupings could establish offices. These offices would not mean the establishment of regional groupings standing between the local groups and the national organisation. Universities are national institutions, regionalism as such means nothing for higher education, as the wide spread of institutions in all areas shows. Though a regional type of organisation must be avoided, there is every reason for linking with neighbouring institutions in a liaison organisation, where the individual groups feel such a need.

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