

Students Into Class Struggle



publication of the

COMMUNIST PARTY OF BRITAIN (MARXIST-LENINIST)

3 p

INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet represents the collective experience of comrades of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) engaged in struggle on the student front. It is an application of the line of the Party embodied in its Programme "The British Working Class and Its Party".

The only purpose of this pamphlet, being a theoretical one in its true sense i. e. derived from our practice, is as a guide to action; to develop the struggle of students by deepening it and broadening it in a political way.

It is not intended to be, indeed it cannot be, a blueprint or list of formulae for would-be Marxist "mechanics" to go through the motions of acting out.

Much thought has gone into its production and even more thought must be given to its creative application. This being the case we are confident that we as students with the leadership of the Party can play our part in the struggle of our class to smash capitalism and build Socialism.

STUDENTS INTO CLASS STRUGGLE

The past few years has seen the appearance of a new phenomenon, that of student struggle becoming a regular occurrence. Once an extremely small and quiescent part of the population easily controlled, this transient section of society can no longer be generalised as such. Significant numbers of students have now been forced into conflict and ferment as they find themselves in growing contradiction with the system itself and the educational system in particular. A qualitative change has, and is, taking place among students; not so easy to control, they have begun to conduct struggle. And the system of capitalism is weaker for it.

No longer can students be used as a force to scab on workers' struggles, - no longer can the ruling class expect and rely on students to operate as a reactionary shock force in times of social conflict and crisis, as they did as volunteers in the 1926 General Strike - though the bourgeoisie will try to develop such action. In this respect times have changed. Of course, the level and frequency of struggle, as well as the numbers of students involved, has varied from college to college and between the different types of educational institutions - the Polytechnics, the Colleges of Education, the Universities, the Technical Colleges, and so on. In some places, maybe little or no struggle has yet occurred. However, the change is basic, and continuing and growing struggle is the trend.

But a qualification is that they are relatively new to struggle, inexperienced in it, and further that they enter into struggle with many disadvantages and weaknesses - which of course has never been an argument not to struggle, only to give more consideration and thought to it. In composition they are transient and continually changing each year. In power and bargaining strength they appear seemingly weak; their organisations are young, embryonic and just getting off the ground, if they are yet in existence; battles by students are sporadic, generally local, un-coordinated and with little concerted effort, and it could be said that they are engaged in without enough understanding of themselves actually as a force in serious battle, with not enough involvement indeed of the student mass and without enough consideration being given to good tactics and the strategy.

To help develop further the qualitative change taking place, we must have a clear understanding of the position of students in Britain, examine their contradiction as a force with the ruling class and capitalism, solve correctly how our Party involves itself in this student struggle and how it is to develop it so that

students see their struggle as a component part of the fight of the entire working class, the force that alone can destroy capitalism.

THE POSITION OF STUDENTS

Before coming in detail to the struggle of students and the role of our Party in it, we must dispense with notions that have wreaked much confusion, the notions that students are petty-bourgeois and middle-class. The supporting argument to these notions is that students are privileged because they are getting education and also because of the opportunities it opens up in the way of employment and jobs. But this argument holds water only if it is left stated and unanalysed, and if reality is left out of the picture somehow - which of course is impossible.

What is the actual position of students in this the oldest and most proletarianised of capitalist countries, Britain. Britain has only two classes - those who sell their labour power and those who exploit the labour of others. All those intermediate classes that were left over from feudalism have been absorbed into the proletariat, as has the peasantry. Students do not own the means of production and are not going to exploit the labour of others. While still students they are in an educational apprenticeship, acquiring and being taught skills for future employment and jobs. Many (such as student teachers) have to give many days and weeks of unpaid labour as part of this apprenticeship.

After finishing their education they are going to be wage slaves of capitalism, generally in the white-collar and professional areas where recently a growing trade union development has occurred, among draughtsmen, technicians, scientific workers, teachers to name but a few. Many students are already seeing that they will be wage earners pure and simple, and often badly paid at that. That is if they are lucky; for with the application of rationalisation and productivity workings by management to the white-collar and professional areas, students are rapidly becoming a new unemployed that capitalism has created. Qualifications are no passport to success and a way out of the class struggle any longer, if they ever were.

Indeed the whole idea that education was a privilege granted by capitalism was superficial and mistook what was happening. In fact a brief reflection on the fact that students are paid according to the absolute minimum thought necessary to exist, and moreover are forced into a dependent relationship with their parents into the bargain, should be enough to squash such notions forever. Capitalism did not erect the educational system because it liked the idea of people getting cultured for the sake of it, out of

altruism or philanthropy; rather because capitalism had need of it, it needed skilled workers, scientific and research workers, and people to be cogs in the evergrowing bureaucracy and administration and for the professional ranks.

It is not a privilege bestowed upon us by capitalism for in its stage of monopoly its economy has need of education and has proletarianised it. The ruling class alone would like to see this notion of "privilege" have a continued existence, for it has been their strategy towards the developing struggle always to malign students as living off the taxpayers money. They want if they can to have students in isolation.

However, the fact is that education is a right, not a privilege, and with regard to the finance of it the capitalist class gives us nothing. They are merely using some of the money looted from the working class to purchase more trained wage slaves. Furthermore, if the iniquitous suggestions for giving us loans instead of grants become reality we will be reduced to the position of serfs! At a time when more students are quite quickly realising the truth of their position as future wage earners in educational training, our job is not to lag or obstruct such a development but to lead and develop it further.

This is important because other people and groups are spending their time giving students an incorrect perspective, and doing positively harmful work by telling them they are middle-class and ending up reinforcing the wrong subjective ideas some students still like to retain about themselves. With this argument struggles can be held back and peoples' political growth stunted, for students come to see themselves as uninvolved, being middle class, being detached from the struggle going on in industry. Thus the growing contradiction of students with the ruling class is ignored. Ultimately, it becomes a handy rationale for inactivity, a useful excuse for not getting involved in political work with students - "they're petty-bourgeois and privileged, they won't struggle" - as well as being a stock superficial analysis when things fail and go wrong.

The "privileged student" idea must be got rid of as the hindrance to struggle that it is. For doing work with students is not a luxury we can somehow afford. It is necessary and essential; for monopoly capitalism in extremity is forced to suppress working class struggle more and more, and is forced to find elements to do this. And although so far the bourgeoisie has found that change and ferment have touched students, things could change. For it is true that students do have desires and expectations - instilled in them by capitalism - which are being dashed into the ground by the monopoly development of capitalism itself, both while in college and out in working life. The disappointed among them could veer

to fascism unless we do our work in this area. Our job is to develop the change and ferment that has touched students, till the memory of their 1926 General Strike role is but an unrepeatable memory of their infant beginnings. Students should welcome that they are becoming part of the working class, the force for revolution, which in Britain has had a long experience of struggle. Not to accept it would be an evil.

APPRENTICESHIP IN STRUGGLE

Taken together, much struggle has happened among students in which there is a wealth of experience to consider. However, as unfortunately often happens, those involved in these struggles have allowed them to pass by without analysis, without learning the lessons, being too caught up with them. But this experience must be reviewed; not with the intention of presenting a blueprint for revolution, some universal panacea or formula that is going to solve everything (for none exists, there is no easy route that cuts out the drudge of work and thinking) but to draw together from the practical experience we have acquired so far the general lessons absorbed and learnt; a collective theory of struggle so far. There will be more to say as we gain more experience. One desire we must shun is that of searching for a book where it's all set out and the problems and answers are all explained. No such do-it-yourself revolutionary kit exists. We have to be adult enough to know we have to do some thinking.

It wouldn't be unfair to say that students as a whole, and the Marxist-Leninists in the field, are still at the stage of learning how to conduct the struggle. Most of our early efforts were generally immature politically, abounding with lots of youthful errors. Their most positive aspect was that they were well intentioned and most of the people genuine, so it proved possible to examine the efforts and try and go on to do better.

There was a very basic tendency to misunderstand what politics actually were, to pervert the whole living nature of Marxism-Leninism. This led to the idea that students were the vanguard revolutionary force because they were involved in 'politics' whereas the workers were only involved in 'economic' battles. The truth is, of course, students are only now beginning to fight on the basis of the reality of their position, something that other workers have been doing since the beginning of capitalism, with the skilled industrial workers as the true vanguard. The vulgarisation of this false idea meant that the more unrelated, unintelligible and packed with jargon an issue was the better, because it was harder to approach the mass, thus more exclusive, and therefore a revolutionary stand.

Most often, as well, the things acted on were solely external to students, and appeared as such. For a long time anti-imperialist issues alone preoccupied the time, there being a fear all else would be unpolitical and reformist as well as the fact that foreign struggles were easier to tackle than the more difficult British and student ones. A romanticism about all things foreign existed, every world struggle bar our own in Britain was talked about - which reflected that we were still fairly blind to the struggles of our working class, the revolutionary force in Britain.

When struggles did come - or when they were fought - they were entered into with little forethought, with little consideration and the balance of forces that existed in the particular institution and in general. This resulted in confrontations and a whole stock of casualties and disciplinings, from fines to expulsions. Thus, the slogan of communist students putting politics in command came in practice to mean us acting in isolation and in disregard of the student body, inviting the victimisations and casualties from the authorities. And the central question of the ideological development of students was misconstrued as being an ideological war within the classroom, lectures and tutorials against your teacher to little purpose, instead of that political development of students that comes through practice and struggle.

So when substantial numbers of students decided not to move in struggle, either because of the issues chosen and the way in which they were handled, or because they were not prepared to or yet convinced they had to, the "advanced" students retreated into their national "revolutionary socialist" student organisations that only served the purpose of encouraging remoteness from the rest of the students, talking to each other with a great deal of ineffective rhetoric away from the mass. Much time and energy was wasted in propping up these paper organisations before they collapsed and disappeared.

A notion very commonly held during these immature beginnings was that as education is bourgeois, nothing can be done here, the influence is corrupting, so the task of political students is to 'go into the factories'. Not only was this wrong, it has led to the demoralisation and temporary loss of many to the movement. Arising from a misunderstanding of the Chinese Cultural Revolution where students went to the factories under socialist conditions, it shows no humility - smacking of the 'theory' that students are inherently more political than the workers and will lead the struggle. Students must relate to the proletariat where they are

and with the skills that they possess. It's a question of real concrete identification, avoiding superficial gimmicks, by working where we are in a communist way, in political action.

Going to the factories has harmed the development of many students - for though intermittent involvement in manual labour may be easy, it is hard when it is a permanent thing and you have to go to that prison of a factory to be exploited for the rest of your life and you don't want to do it. A factory worker has no choice if he wants to eat and live. But the student will always be aware that he could possibly be working somewhere else other than the factory floor. Besides, going to the factories is often nothing more than a theoretical excuse to avoid the hard graft - academic and political - in the colleges; but life isn't easy anywhere. All students choose to come and study, and we can't idealistically reject it by saying its bourgeois education. Of course it is, how could it be otherwise under capitalism? It's a most unproletarian attitude to take to say "I wish I hadn't come" and give up, or spend most of the time politicking and doing no study - we must finish our education and do our apprenticeship.

LEARNING HOW TO CONDUCT THE STRUGGLE

In our work we are beginning to go beyond the errors of that infantile stage. We have learnt the hard way that our task is not one of cramming people with Marxist-Leninist tracts nor one of preaching or of quoting things we have learnt by rote as panaceas and formulas, all of which are mechanical and dogmatic and have nothing to do with real Marxism. We are learning that genuine politics and ideological development comes through practice and struggle, and most important of all, the once widely held suspicion of getting involved in the bread-and-butter issues of students for fear of their being economist and reformist is being overcome. In reference to this, it must be emphasised that local student unions are the organisation of a particular student body and we must strive to develop them into true weapons of struggle. In this respect the demand that they be truly autonomous bodies and not appendages of the state machine is a national priority.

In the future, struggle will affect more students precisely because it will centre around bread-and-butter concerns that affect all; the problems of getting accommodation, of the graduate unemployed and the right to work, of living on grants - when they are available - in times of rapid inflation, of the inadequacies of the education received, the bad working conditions and the lack of facilities especially in the Technical Colleges and the Polytechs, the failure rates and the human and financial wastage,

to mention but a few notable concerns. In fact it is a condemnation that many militants can know all the ins-and-outs of anti-imperialist struggle or of the workers' fight against the Industrial Relations Bill, and yet often know relatively little about the situation of students, of the trends and prospects of education and the Education Acts.

We must be in all the struggles, not stay on the outside of them. Marxist-Leninists cannot decide the issues or struggles that occur, nor define what students shall do. We must take students as they are - not as we would wish them - and to develop them or stand on the sidelines forever. In this manner, we must relate to where we are. Otherwise, we will only end up phrasemongering or like "revolutionary monks", able to talk endlessly about the principles of communism but abstaining from real life and struggle to maintain political purity and to prevent getting corrupted.

We must know our area and be conversant with what is happening in education in general but also with what's occurring in particular institutions. Only through a deep knowledge of the general and particular situation we find ourselves in - for the different types of college have their own problems and no two institutions are ever alike and identical - shall we be adequately prepared for the increasing struggles coming, be able to devise correct tactics for the situation at hand and relate our Marxist-Leninist politics to the mass of students. There will be much to learn in how to conduct these growing "economic" struggles properly, and it will only be found out in doing it, though error to begin with there will be. As well as providing good tactics, our central task will be to relate these fights back to the fundamental issue of class power and who holds it, and make them a component part of the class struggle for revolution.

To be properly involved our Party has to be represented in the struggle by actual students, studying. There cannot be a situation where people not rooted imagine they can, like 'professional revolutionaries', rove from one place to another, from one trouble spot to the next. Only by having as much to lose or gain as anybody else can our Party be truly involved. Therefore in the battles ahead, those genuine and thinking students who emerge in the forefront must be recruited to our Party.

In the burgeoning struggles to come it is not just a question of us, but a question of the force, of the students as a body, and it is to them that we must go with our Marxist-Leninist line. This is the only way to survive, develop, and grow. Our dialogue and exchange must be with the students - for we are not a sect

or an exclusive group - and not with the mish-mash of "left" groups who we need not concern ourselves with. Past political work has been superficial precisely because it had little or no root in the student mass, to whom no more than lipservice was often given as being the force. Consequently, what can then develop is a form of revolutionary posturing where small bodies of students indulge on their own in "action" because they have failed, not done their basic political work, and want a short cut to revolution by extrovert acts. Work among students is particularly hard and slow, in fact, and calls for great stamina. Posturing and empty calls for acts of desperation need to be guarded against as they have already resulted in many needless victimisations and casualties.

What is needed to correct this anxiety for short-cuts is persistent grass-roots political work among students which entails a lot of personal work and unglamorous drudgery which is nonetheless essential. For the person ranks above the printed word in convincing others of the correctness of the line we advocate in our propaganda; we will be judged by what we do, by how we behave in practice, and not by what we may write. We must be a genuine development, springing out of the students with their needs, for they have had their fair share in a short time of establishment careerists, dilettantes, and egotrippers, all poncing on their struggles and organisations. An unpretentious breed would be welcome.

A GUERILLA STRUGGLE

Though a visible change among students has occurred and they are not so easily controlled, in terms of struggles so far the bourgeoisie has tended to have the upper hand, in terms of casualties in struggle and in terms of who holds the initiative. Though they have shown that they are no soft-option, student struggle is still a weak growth, and great care and consideration must be taken in the future struggles to correctly foster the growth of this force, for the ruling class has closely watched its development and is out to derail it. Our Party's involvement is going to be very necessary in the years ahead, when students under attack and relatively new to struggle will have to show not only can they fight, but they can fight well.

How can students with little economic strength in the sense of labour power to withdraw, in many ways raw and unorganised with the odds against them, change their position in the balance of forces with the ruling class? First their fight must be seen as a protracted one, as the position cannot be changed all that quickly, overnight as it were. And this must not just be clear

to us but to students as a whole as they enter struggle and start to think about it. For "guerilla" should not be misconstrued as a few in a roving band; it applies to all.

Secondly, within this long protracted offensive, it should be our intention in all the struggles that come up to be arguing for tactics that preserve the force, keeping it intact for the battle. Rash acts and senseless, ill-planned confrontations must be avoided. We are not after punch-ups for the sake of them. And here there is much experience to be evaluated by those who have been in them, of long static and martyrdom occupations and take-overs of buildings with sit-ins. Did they focus on purposeless residence in which we forgot the real aims of the struggle? Did they tend to separate the few that had been involved thus far from the rest? Certainly a bad feature of many incidents has been their longevity.

Though overall the student position appears inferior and weak and the revolutionary forces are small when looked at in isolation, we are still at the outset. The situation can be changed in struggle by providing good tactics and strategy and keeping forces intact and prepared for the next battle within the context of a war of attrition waged not in a final do-or-die fashion but over a protracted period where the object in each particular battle that comes along (whether it is about accommodation, files, union autonomy), is to develop in all these struggles students ideologically; this is the primary purpose.

The knowledge that it is a continuous struggle has to be conveyed as the growing contradictions impel students into yet more battles - a continuous struggle going on still on leaving education, only ending with the end of capitalism. Whereas they undertook conflicts and fights irregularly in the past, believing their sporadic, unconnected engagements to be the exception rather than the rule, struggle will grow in the future and it needs a reasoned and guerilla development to survive government attacks. Bit by bit, local superiorities will have to be fought for, till as they extend together with the whole revolutionary movement, students will change from weak to strong in the balance of forces.

One fact of great significance must be borne in mind. Those struggles that have developed any real character have done so because they were led by Marxist-Leninists with class strategy guiding their actions. This is true, and our Party is all the stronger for it both in terms of numbers and experience, despite the fact that errors through immaturity were made.

Particular care must be given to securing continuity in colleges. Students go to college, spend only three years there on average, find it largely unorganised at the beginning, help develop something, then they have to leave. Because of this

continual transiency time must be given yearly to ensure traditions and customs of struggle do not die out because of the departure of some in the forefront.

The fruits of political work among students does not stop within the colleges; it is carried into the many areas of the working class that students pass into. Correct political work in the colleges can help prepare many for a continuation of the class struggle and be a valuable contribution to building our revolutionary Party. We are not playing at a game and being revolutionaries for three years. Students will learn if they haven't grasped already that education is not a privilege, but that they are in training for employment as wage-slaves. Our task is to develop this particular force ideologically and so contribute to the revolutionary awakening of the working class as a whole.

THE PROGRAMME OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF BRITAIN (MARXIST-LENINIST)

"All political organisations in Britain and all institutions have it in common that they are for the preservation of capitalism in some form or other. From the Rightest reactionaries to the Leftist reformists the common aim is to live with the system and make it work. The only exception is the one Party whose aim is the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist class power and its replacement by the dictatorship of the proletariat for the building of socialism. That is us, the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)."

Preface by Reg Birch, Chairman. Sections on Class Struggle in Britain, Trade Unions and Class Struggle, The Party and Class Struggle, and the Party of the Working Class.

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