

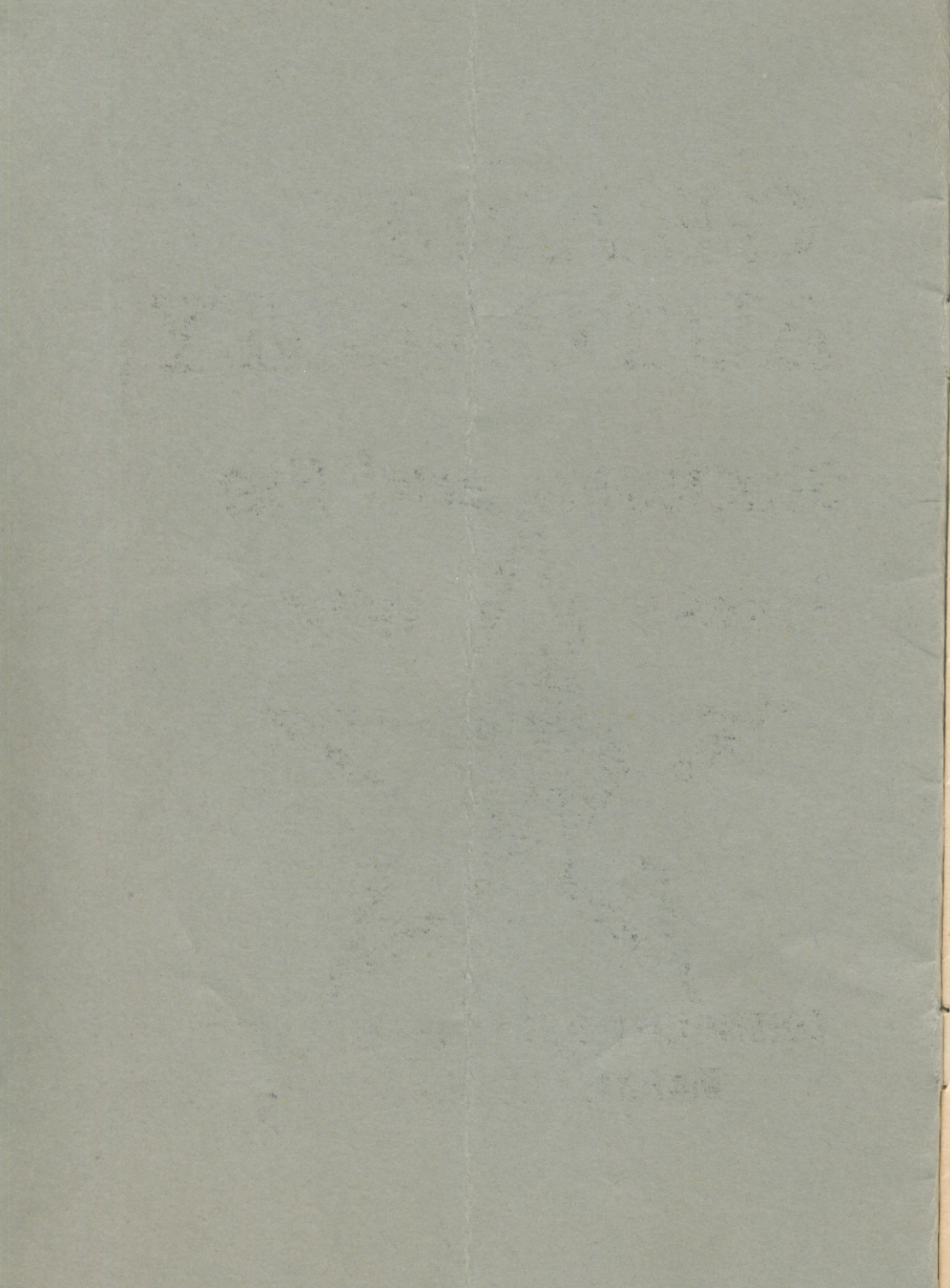
GRANTS — AUTONOMY

students and the
class war



COMMUNIST PARTY of BRITAIN
MARXIST-LENINIST

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GRANTS, AUTONOMY — STUDENTS AND THE CLASS WAR

If we, as students, are to continue to extend and develop the fight over the issues of student union autonomy and the inadequacy of grants, on one thing first we must be absolutely clear. All money paid to students whether directly in the form of "grants" or indirectly to students' unions belongs to the students alone, and must be entirely at their disposal.

STUDENT UNION MONEY

The money for student unions is merely money deducted from our grants paid directly to the college or university who pay it in turn to the Union. (In fact in some colleges part or all of the student union money is paid directly by the students out of their grant : no matter to the college authorities who still demand control).

The true logic of the state's position is thus revealed. If they demand to control Student Union funds because it is public money (and their new-found concern for the public is most strange), then logically they must also demand control of the way students spend the money they actually receive as grants, as this comes from the same source. Further, of the way teachers (and university administrators!) spend their money, and similarly with every other state employee for all

receive "public funds" (i. e. "Taxpayers' Money"). Such a position is clearly ludicrous. Just as they don't try and tell us what to do with our grants (though they would probably like to) nor should we allow them to tell us what to do with our student union money.

In fact of course, the State does not care where the money comes from. It is trying to control and emasculate ultimately all Unions. The story of public money is merely an excuse to hit Student Unions in much the same way as "holding the country to ransom", etc., is used against Trade Unions.

GRANTS — PAYMENT FOR OUR WORK

But, some will say, students don't do any work. They are getting an education, which is a privilege (after all, only x% receive a higher education). They are getting something for nothing - living off taxpayers' money - and therefore ought to accept at least some controls, and be grateful for what they get. This is the line also used by those calling for loans instead of grants. This argument should be smashed at the root. Students do work and their grant is payment for this work. Just as apprentices in industry are paid during their period of training, so too are students. Capitalists make use of their weaknesses to pay both ridiculously little. Marx made no differentiation between manual and mental labour - both are work, and since when have proletarians not expected to be paid for their work ?

REMOVE THE MYTH OF PRIVILEGE

As to 'privilege' this is hoary old bourgeois propoganda which they themselves are now feeling it necessary to change. Having previously

convinced many students that they were privileged, an elite, 'middle class' etc., and that when they finished college they would walk straight into well-paid 'superior' jobs, the present high level of graduate unemployment has caused this to explode in their faces. They are now desperately trying to re-educate students into the fact that they shouldn't expect 'superior' better paid jobs. Hence the CBI statement that "if an increased graduate output is to be absorbed, this will mean an inevitable broadening of the range of employment for many graduates, and an increased acceptance of jobs below the traditional level."

As always, capitalism helps dig its own grave. It is helping our task of convincing students of their real class position - that is, part of the working class. Students on leaving college will have to sell their labour power on the labour market, and increasingly will not be given the opportunity of doing even that. Students and graduates are NOT privileged in any sense, whether by money or by social class. As for being privileged by having "received an education", education is an investment for the ruling class, no more, no less. They make money out of having educationally skilled wageslaves in exactly the same way as having technically skilled engineers, printers, etc. This is the only reason a section of the working class is given these skills. The fact is that capitalism only needs a certain small number with high educational or technical skills, which is why only a small proportion receive it, and, no less important, the vast majority do not. The only privileged section under capitalism is the capitalist class itself.

AUTONOMOUS UNIONS FOR STRUGGLE

Student Unions, despite their origin as social and debating clubs, set up by college and university authorities, are more and more being used in their role as organs of struggle. This is why it is so important to ensure that Student Unions are under the control of their memb-

ership, and all external controls and attempts to impose such controls are rejected. We have already demonstrated that union funds belong to the students themselves and they alone should control them. It follows that the union constitutions must also be free from ratification or imposition by college authorities, especially as these controls would be in the hands of the very people we will have to fight against - on issues like canteen prices, hall fees, standards of education, etc.

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

We do not seek financial autonomy to give all our funds away. Those who insist at every opportunity to give money to other workers in struggle or anti-imperialist causes are in reality saying that students cannot usefully use this money for their own struggle. Whilst on occasions it is correct to make such payments, the position of our Unions is the same as every other Union : most of our money must be used for our own struggle.

CONSTITUTIONAL INDEPENDENCE

It has always been recognised as absolutely vital by any trade unionist that unions should be independent and under the total and democratic control of its membership. The history of trade unionism is studded with attempts by the state to remove or control this freedom, from the Combination Acts onwards. Recently both Labour and Conservative Parties have tried to introduce state controls, but history and present-day experience shows that the working class will not relinquish its independence of organisation lightly. Nor will it stop struggling against the capitalist class. The capitalists want to

hit working class organisations because organisation furthers struggle and lack of it hinders it. This is why Student Unions too have come under state attacks.

Despite the attempts by some to redefine autonomy to mean the status quo, autonomy means the total independence from all external controls on student unions. It is clear that this can only be achieved with mass support. But the point has been made that organisation furthers struggle, and autonomy must be seen as the freedom to organise in struggle. Most important of all, autonomy cannot be seen as an end in itself, as some principle to be pursued for the sake of it. It is the means to an end - to develop student unions which are strong, well-organised and engaged in class struggle. Autonomy reflects the level of political consciousness and organisation of a Union, which are necessary to carry out struggle on day-to-day issues. The winning of autonomy implies the determination to fight harder on other fronts, while the struggle on these other issues shows up the importance of autonomy. Each affects the other and an advance in one is also an advance in the other.

THE EROSION OF STUDENT LIVING STANDARDS

At one time students considered themselves well-off and secure for the future. But there is no security under capitalism, especially when it is seeking to cut expenditure on all but the most immediately vital sections of the economy. Education, being a long-term investment, is under attack.

The student grant has been worth less and less every year, as shown in the table on Page 14

At the same time, the student cost of living has increased at a far higher rate than the retail price index which includes the slower-rising goods such as motor cars, television and furniture.

The last decade has also seen the accomodation situation become critical. Overcrowding and underfeeding are becoming more and more prevalent among students.

Students, far from being an elite, are well behind the level of the organised industrial workers, and are now being classed with Old Age Pensioners as those living on a fixed income. But unlike OAPs even the right to our present meagre income is being threatened.

FURTHER ATTACKS ON STUDENTS

Ever since Higher Education ceased to be a preserve of the rich, and graduates were produced for the requirements of capitalism, the ruling class has been getting its education on the cheap. In fact over the last few years with student numbers outpacing facilities and staff numbers, and the fall in values of grants an educational expenditure generally, education for the employers has been getting cheaper and cheaper.

But this Capitalism in crisis, cutting back on anything which will not promise immediate returns, would like to make education even cheaper - by making the students pay for it!

Loans to replace grants is a current threat. What would this mean? It means that throughout our period of study and training we will have worked for absolutely nothing. This puts us in a worse position than a slave who at least gets his food and shelter in return for his work. Furthermore, education is a profitable investment (otherwise the capitalist class wouldn't have it), i. e. they make more out of the product of their investment, that is the profit from the extra skills given to the worker, than it cost in the first place.

Ever looking for a way of dividing the working class, and each section of it, the state may well decide to try loans for postgraduates first. This would clearly be the breaching point, for the actual

"saving" here would be only £10 million.

On another front, we are also being attacked. Now no longer should students expect the "privilege" of leaving home to study. They should go to their nearest college, thus dispensing with the need for student accommodation, and requiring 25% less grant. The difficulty from the point of view of our struggle is that this attack is presented not to the mass of students in the colleges (as loans would be) but to each individual applicant in the terms of "either stay at home or don't go to university at all". We need to find how to fight this in the colleges with mass action, over issues such as the shortage of student accommodation, etc.

Again, in a direct attack on the standards of living and the value of the grant, subsidies to accommodation and catering are supposed to stop. This has meant many Halls of Residence fees have gone up to £280 or £300 for 30 weeks - £40 to £60 over the amount allocated in the grant for board and lodging. And many canteens have had exorbitantly high price rises over recent months.

To fight such attacks on students, it is vital that there is clarity among students in rejecting all capitalist arguments of privilege, charity and good fortune. One recent tactic has been their argument that nursery education is a higher priority than higher education. From this the line goes that "giving" students grants is "robbing" young children of nursery education. They might as well ask all teachers to go without pay to subsidise nursery education!

NO GRANTS AND LOW GRANTS

Education under capitalism means that they use every possible excuse such as parental earnings, marital status, and various courses studied, to pay us as little as possible.

Many local authorities refuse or reduce grants to those studying

courses which do not have entry qualifications of 2 A-levels. Among these are HND, Accountancy, Law Society, and various art, drama, and paramedical courses. These full-time students, although in a minority, often find themselves in conditions which make it impossible to continue their study. Similarly many students who need to repeat a year or change courses find themselves with no source of income. This is an intolerable situation, for it forces many to take part-time jobs to work their way through college, and ruins their study. Clearly, as it is the case that grants are paid for the work we do, the state should no longer be allowed to escape paying thousands of students because of their choice of courses or unfortunate circumstances. Full grants for all who study full time is thus an important demand in our struggle. One particularly vicious regulation is that restricting married womens' grants (except when married to another student) to £275 p. a. , which affects around 8,000 at present.

The practice which affects many more students, and some just as seriously, is that of the means test. This deducts from the grant a notional figure termed the "parental contribution" for all students whose parents' combined income is over £1100 after allowances for dependents, etc.

This deduction is supposed to be made up by the parents. But this contribution unlike the deduction, is not compulsory but "recommended" In one survey at a University it was found that 40% did not receive the full "parental contribution", and a further 7% was subject to stipulations in return for this amount. NUS currently estimates that 37% of students do not receive the full parental contribution from their parents.

Again we see capitalism getting education on the cheap. Any excuse to reduce expenditure is used, regardless of the ridiculous position of dependency this thrusts on many students (even married students), and the frequent hardship due to parents who can't or won't

make up the grant to its 'recommended' level.

In any struggle over grants all sections of students must be mobilised and these problems cannot be ignored. The very fact that they still exist shows how capitalism's arguments that education is a charity subsidised by the taxpayers' money have not up to now been seriously challenged.

It is up to the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party to smash these ideas. We work for our living and we must fight for proper payment for that work - and engaging in that struggle is the best way to eliminate all notions of charity and privilege.

STRUGGLE IS THE ONLY WAY FORWARD

It is clear to any who study our history and experience of class struggle, that statistics and "cast-iron" cases do not produce any results. Only struggle does that and it is entirely due to the lack of struggle in the past that we are in our present position.

This is well shown by the grant "increases" over the past few years. In 1968, the Labour Government set up an 'independent' body to recommend new grant rates. They suggested 12% rises. The Labour Government (whose Patrick Gordon Walker had been the first to accuse students of "wasting taxpayers' money") cut this by half, a decision which was eventually accepted by NUS.

The next capitalist government, the Conservative Party, set up a similar body in 1971, which recommended rates for September that year, which the Government decided would only be met in full in 1973. Once again logical arguments and conciliatory politics had produced nothing for the student body, for while "giving" with one hand, the state took much more away with the ending of catering and accommodation subsidies, and the go-ahead for general increases in these charges in colleges all over the country (University Grants Committee circular, 5.8.71.).

Since then disputes and struggles have become more and more

frequent over the cost of accomodation and catering, but up to now they have not been linked with the national question of student grants, and up to now there has been no strategy for a struggle over student grants. These local battles are part of the national struggle, but national action is also needed.

THE GUERRILLA STRATEGY OVER GRANTS

First of all we have to put forward the correct demands, which unite our forces without at the same time being a shopping-list in which the main demands are lost. At this time these demands must be:

- (1) Full Grants For All Students;
- and (2) Immediate increase in the Grant.

All sorts of arguments are brought forward against such struggle. Some reflect the genuine doubts of students - lack of confidence due to the absence of a long tradition of struggle. But many others are excuses to avoid struggle. These include : That the discretionary awards must be scrapped before students should start fighting over the level of grants; further, that we should not even fight for grants but for a wage-system for students (the implementation of this policy has recently been shelved — we hope for good! .

These will all arise in the course of the battle and we must give clear answers. We must build up confidence by our victories in local guerrilla encounters. We can point out that the past NUS policy of putting first priority on ending discretionary awards has only left, that minority to fight by themselves, and left NUS miles behind its membership who are fighting over the grant level anyway. This policy had been accepted by NUS as the "good principle" of giving priority to those worst off. But for most colleges, with students receiving proper grants, it was simply a means of avoiding struggle. We must present a strategy to mobilise every student in common battle, and this has only been done by our Party.

To bring up the question of wages is the absolute antithesis of good guerrilla tactics - such a demand would result in the membership fighting NUS and its advocates, not fighting the State and its Government! The demand for a student wage is in essence false for it is trying artificially to turn students into what they already are - part of the working class. Such eclectic games have nothing to do with either. Should we spend our time trying to convince students that they should be paid by wages or that they should fight for decent grants? At the local level, like discretionary awards, this question will often not be raised, but the NUS have a ridiculous preoccupation for it.

In fact the fight for higher grants has already started, with Hall Rent strikes and canteen boycotts growing in frequency all over the country. The November 1972 NUS Conference agreed to support all such action but of course we must rely on our own strength at grass roots (half-a-million of us) not on a 16-man Executive. This is the green light for action and this decision can be used to strengthen our actions locally. Even last year these had enough effect to make the University Vice-Chancellors appeal to the Government to increase grants.

These issues are ones on which immediate action within the colleges can be fought with proper guerrilla tactics. Wherever possible we must take on these local struggles, build up the strength and confidence of students on the local successes and divide the present unity of college authorities and the State.

From this the battle must be made national. Guerrilla actions (i. e. not once-and-for-all confrontations, but persistent protracted struggle) must be conducted until the Government concedes.

THE SITUATION IN BRITAIN TODAY

There is no doubt that by struggle gains can and will be made against the college authorities and the capitalist state. This is so for students just as much for any other section. These victories, for example, the lowering or holding of canteen prices or an increase in the grant, are worth it in themselves insomuch as, if living under capitalism, it is better to live on £12 than £10 (assuming the same real value of the Pound). To deny this is to be divorced from the mass and from reality. However the real value of money today is far from fixed and is in fact steadily falling. Like the Red Queen in "Alice in Wonderland", the working class is having to run faster and faster to stay in the same position. No victory under capitalism is permanent; if we have won something one day, the capitalists will try and take it away the next, and we will have to fight the same battle again. Furthermore the question must present itself: do we need to continue under capitalism? The answer of course is no. CAPITALISTS NEED WORKERS BUT WORKERS DON'T NEED CAPITALISTS.

It is the understanding of this that is the real permanent gain from such victories. The understanding that capitalists, their agents and their state itself can be taken on and defeated. That capitalists, far from being necessary, are leeches on the backs of our class; and finally that revolution is the only solution to the daily hardships, trials and tribulations of life under capitalism.

To economically struggle our class into a comfortable existence under capitalism is impossible. Capitalism by its very nature cannot provide all with work. It needs unemployment (as Marx demonstrated in Capital). To say that Britain has ever had "full" employment - i. e. no unemployment - is a lie. It may be greater or smaller but it is

always there. The idiocy of a system that seeks to make the maximum profit out of workers yet to do so needs to have a large number of them unexploited is apparent. Capitalism has never been, and never will be, able to provide all with a decent standard of living, or enable workers to develop their skills to the full and use them for the benefit of mankind as opposed to profit.

If only the smallest iota of the effort, the heroism and the class conscious organisation that the working class has employed merely managing to exist under capitalism had been directed towards revolution, we would have had our revolution a thousand times. It is bitter irony that the easy way out, i. e. avoiding revolution, has in fact proved to be the opposite.

The Development Towards Fascism

In Britain today the ruling class can no longer continue to rule in the old way. The level of struggle of the working class under Britain's liberal bourgeois democracy and the national and international crises of capitalism have meant that the ruling class is being forced to ditch bourgeois democracy: to remove the smokescreen and impose their naked rule. Britain is now developing towards fascism — the Corporate State. The Industrial Relations Act, the Immigration Acts, the "Wage Freeze" and the number of civil liberties that are going out of the window are all evidence of this development towards fascism. The choice is clear - fascism or revolution. There is no longer a middle course of class struggle conducted within the safe limits prescribed by social-democracy. It is all-out class war. War to the death between the two great camps, workers and capitalists. The death-knell of capital is tolling. Revolution is truly the main trend, and students are daily showing that they will play a vital part in the British Revolution.

TABLE: THE EROSION OF STUDENT LIVING STANDARDS.

YEAR	MAIN GRANT RATE (£) *	GRANT INDEX (Sep'62=100)	RETAIL PRICE INDEX (Sep'62=100)	% RISE IN GRANT
1962	320	100	100	-
1963	320	100	103.7	0
1964	320	100	106.2	0
1965	340	106.3	111.3	6.3
1966	340	106.3	115.4	0
1967	340	106.3	117.0	0
1968	360	112.5	123.9	5.9
1969	360	112.5	130.2	0
1970	380	118.8	139.4	5.6
1971	430	134.4	153.2	13.1
1972	445	139.0		3.5
1973	465	145.3		4.5

*Main Grant Rate: Grant to students outside London and Oxbridge whose students receive a differential at present of £35.



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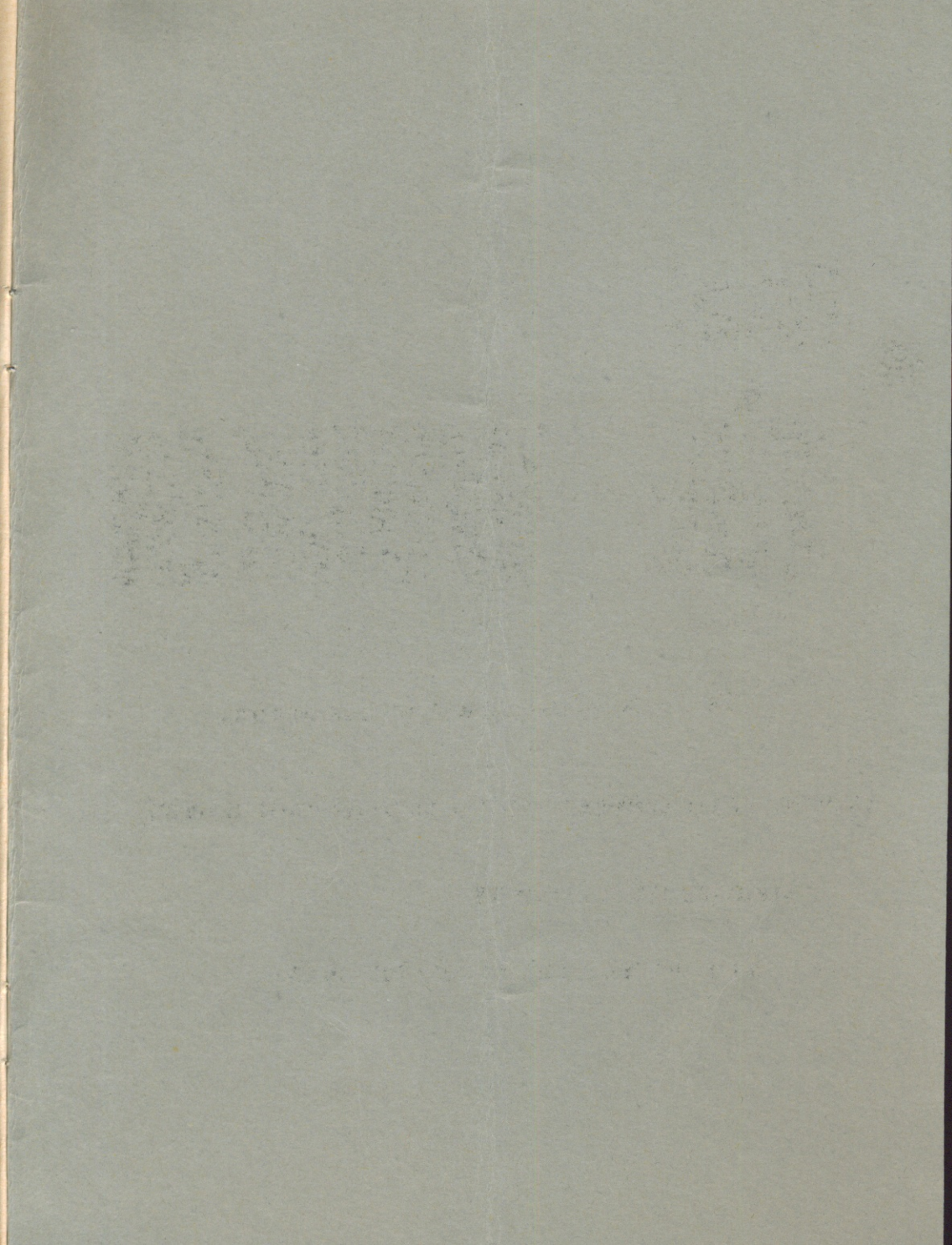
"After finishing their education they are going to be the wage slaves of capitalism, generally in the white-collar and professional fields, where recently a growing trade union development has occurred, among draughtsmen, technicians, scientific workers, teachers to name but a few. Many students are 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 deals by management to the white-collar and professional fields, 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."

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