

to give their own 'responsibility' as  
 termination to avoid 'undue provocation'  
 horitis constantly made manifest, and  
 id of good insurgent energies are wasted  
 illied maintenance to the Department of  
 ss: th manoeuvres represent only the  
 goes nancing along with his friends.  
 ese pulses are manifestations of the  
 ng at the hastily convened action  
 the necessity, both in practical and  
 ' even'ing from lectures to telephones,  
 n forve militants, in this atmosphere, to  
 ! for week, or a month, does not equal  
 . But does not mean, once the enemy  
 uses, or that the confrontation of the  
 studis has been a vain thing.  
 and traditional revolutionaries are  
 gen contains and what it will react to.  
 onf one hand, too speedily wishes to  
 asst on the capitalist system. He  
 stnle, as it develops, seems to be  
 pathf orthodox left politics.  
 othhand, perhaps fresh to any kind of  
 cionf any declamations which seem to  
 'om'pation with the whole weight of  
 tpin' system. Thys his own pugnacity  
 th ion. Is he really battling against  
 'e-dicellor: are the two synonymous?  
 ask to plunge into an 'idiom which may  
 'emvely, if he is based in a tradition of  
 his low students to strike out into this

acquired a truly revolutionary character where students have rejected the notion that higher education is a world of its own.

The student movements in France, West Germany, Japan and elsewhere have all soon discovered the necessity of breaking the isolation which bourgeois society imposes on students in the form of privilege. These movements have reached out to all the potentially revolutionary forces in society as a whole and in the world as a whole - in particular they have sought real forms of solidarity with the anti-imperialist struggles of the under-developed world and to make real connexions with the anti-capitalist struggles of the working class of their own countries. The former type of solidarity has often provided the initial stimulus for student actions while the latter has usually become an overriding preoccupation after the student revolutionaries have already achieved some success within their own milieu.

In the context of advanced capitalism there is a certain common theme in the struggles of workers and those of students. The great majority of workers' struggles (especially unofficial ones) reflect an urge to wrench control over the factory process from the chosen representatives of capital. Some three-quarters of all strikes do not directly concern demands for wage increases: they are attempts to limit the power of management over such questions as the pace of work, hiring and firing policy, changes in production methods and so on.\* Both students and workers are often trying to achieve power from below. There are of course great differences in the implications their actions have in a capitalist society. In the long run modern capitalism may need the skills taught to students, but on an everyday basis it is immediately and massively dependent on the exploitation of the working class. However subjectively subversive students may be they cannot by themselves bring the whole social process to a halt, as can the actions of the working class.

Of course there remains a great gap between even the most complete general strike and an actual revolution. Indeed few western revolutionaries have been willing to consider the manifold and cumulative power any revolutionary movement would have to possess if it were really to overthrow an advanced capitalist order. Even in the pre-revolutionary period it will surely be necessary, as Gramsci always maintained, to build a hegemonic movement capable of tapping the energies of all the potentially revolutionary forces in society. The implication of recent student actions is that from them the beginnings of an answer to this problem are emerging. Once the student movement is committed to an alliance with the working class it can begin to explore the specific contribution it can itself make to the general revolutionary cause.

Too many traditional schemas on the Left allot students a purely external role in revolutionary politics - namely that of supplying solidarity to the really revolutionary force. For some the only worth-while confrontation is that between imperialism and the national liberation forces of the Third World. For others the sole revolutionary force is the proletariat of the advanced capitalist countries. As very few students can participate directly in these conflicts, they are usually asked to cheer on the combatants from the touch-lines. The assumption of such analysis is that capitalism is riven by one, simple master contradiction which determines all else, and the revolution is a question of unlocking its progressive potential.\*

Now if the history of this century shows anything it is that revolutions do not arrive by any such direct route to their ultimate consummation. The international capitalist order first broke at its 'weakest link' not in a country where the opposition between capital and labour was at its barest. Moreover in Russia itself the revolution was the product of a series of different contradictions involving peasants, intellectuals and divisions within the ruling order, as well as the historic actions of the Russian proletariat. After the experience of the Chinese, Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions this point should not need labouring. Just as the liberation movements of the Third World have long ago decided not to wait for the liberation of their countries as a consequence of the socialist revolution in the imperial metropolis, so students today refuse to wait for some external deliverance from their condition as victims of the bourgeois education system and participants in the misery and boredom of the late capitalist spectacle. Solidarity movements may help a new force to develop its strength and they will certainly be vital in cementing a revolutionary alliance but they cannot be its sole form of action.

The student movement must first be itself before it can be a useful ally to anyone. Fortunately the French confrontation of May 1968 at least made it clear that students acting as an independent revolutionary force can ignite a much more general conflagration - thus also disposing of the myth that the modern working class is irredeemably integrated into contemporary capitalist society.

#### Revolutionary Culture and the Red Bases

In their own right colleges and universities are clearly important bastions of power for the bourgeois social order. The older universities have always been and remain fortresses of wealth and privilege. Other higher education institutions have the function of providing the secondary elite discussed above.

Both largely exclude the sons and daughters of the working class, so that where class discrimination and sex discrimination combine a working-class girl in Britain has a six hundred to one chance against receiving higher education. A significant function of many colleges and universities is to generate the themes of ideology within the social system as a whole. Finally bourgeois power relations are inscribed in the structure of these institutions themselves with their hierarchies, bureaucracies and boards of governors.

Power in a modern capitalist country is not uniquely concentrated in one institution (army or parliament). It is rather embedded in the fabric of all social relations so that every factory, office, church, college, housing estate, hospital, prison, school, trade union or party both partakes of and contributes to the power of the dominant class. Indeed many organizations which were created to advance interests opposed to those of the dominant class have been confiscated from their original function by a social system which specializes in such reversals. The emergent student revolutionaries aim to turn the tables on the system, by using its universities and colleges as base areas from which to undermine other key institutions of the social order. No advanced capitalist state can afford to maintain a permanent police occupation of all colleges or universities, nor can it act like a Latin American military thug and simply close down the universities - which after all are necessary, in the long run, to the productive process. So long as the universities and colleges provide some sort of space which cannot be permanently policed they can become 'red bases' of revolutionary agitation and preparation. The new revolutionaries propose that bourgeois power must be confronted directly - and confronted in all the diverse forms it assumes in the ramified institutional apparatus with which late capitalism protects itself against the perils of popular spontaneity. Actions are engaged which expose the repressive and mystifying structure of the institution in question - expose it above all to the inmates themselves, the alienated and the administered, the exploited and the oppressed. This strategy presupposes a sustained and continuing work of political and theoretical self-formation by the revolutionary militant. If the militant cannot himself produce the concepts and analytic framework with which to interpret his experience then he will succumb to the 'common sense' of our society which is inescapably pressed in the mould of bourgeois ideology.

This is especially true in Britain with its relative weakness of native revolutionary traditions. In fact all the great revolutions have been preceded by cultural renovation with far-reaching revolutionary implications. The French Enlightenment, the Chinese Renaissance of the May 4 Movement and the explosion of Russian revolutionary culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were all indispensable preparations for the momentous historic events which were to follow. It is worth while noting the richness and sweep of the cultural premonitions of socialist revolution in Russia as the question of revolution in the advanced capitalist democracies is scarcely likely to be less demanding. In their various ways Belinsky and Herzen, Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov, Gogol and Saltikov-Schedrin, Bakunin and Kropotkin, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, Chekhov and Gorky, Tugan-Baranovsky and Plekhanov, Lunacharsky and Riazanov, together with a host of others too numerous to mention, all contributed to the cultural background of the Russian revolution. In China, the astonishing works of Mao Tse Tung - philosopher and general, poet and statesman - bear witness to the flowering of the May 4 Movement which preceded it, and which has justly been called the Chinese Renaissance. Among Western Marxists, Gramsci always insisted that the revolutionary movement must acquire 'civil hegemony' before the seizure of power: he emphasized that revolutionary practice must be wedded to a thorough critique of established ideologies.\*

The first wave of the student movement was marked by a tendency to reject not just ruling ideology but the need for revolutionary theory as such. The perils of such self-denial are that student revolutionaries risk being absorbed on its own terms by the spectacle, as just one more pseudo-conflict. Students inescapably play some part in the social production and reproduction of ideology: for student revolutionaries to be unarmed theoretically can ultimately only mean political defeat. There are now definite signs that the student movements do wish to create a revolutionary theory and culture adequate to the prodigious task they have set themselves.

by Alexander Cockburn

This article appeared as the introduction to a book called "Student Power" edited by Alexander Cockburn and Robin Blackburn.



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