

Be Worthy of Wages

access to some money, or a wage, for that work.

In high school, the struggle against schoolwork takes many forms. A recent Toronto board of education report shows that 24 percent of Toronto high school students dropped out in the 1973-74 school year. This represents a sharp increase over previous years.

Although the report designated six different categories of drop-outs, the common thread running through all of them is that school, with all its rules and regulations, was too much of a hassle, too much work, on the other hand, all categories expressed the need to have a wage of their own.

Vandalism in the schools, like sabotage in factories, also expresses students' struggle against schoolwork. In the U.S., officials estimate that schools spend as much on vandalism costs as on textbooks.



In Toronto, despite the installation of electronic surveillance devices in "vandalism-prone" schools, incidents of vandalism continue to increase. Officials reported last fall that among the thousands of dollars in case and equipment stolen the previous year, only one book was taken. What better indication of the refusal of schoolwork?

Dropping-out and vandalism are only two of the most visible forms of students' struggle against schoolwork and for access to a wage (or the goods a wage enables us to acquire). For students who remain enrolled in school, truancy or absenteeism has been on the rise, despite the liberalization of discipline in vocational schools and the new credit program in all high schools.

Students are also increasingly refusing the daily discipline of schoolwork. A Toronto teacher was asked recently by a student teacher I know who determines how much homework is assigned each day. He replied that the students themselves decide—students have simply refused to do homework, so teachers like himself have just stopped assigning it. Other teachers describe the increasing refusal to accept authority and a generalized rebelliousness among students.

When all these forms of struggle against schoolwork are seen as isolated or individual actions, it seems a bit much to describe them as a "struggle". But when the majority of students engage in some of these activities all the time, and when employers are complaining loudly about the poor quality of the product of schools, we are forced to recognize the daily actions of students as a struggle against their work of producing themselves as the future labour force.

STRUGGLE AGAINST SCHOOLWORK AT UNIVERSITY

Our struggle against schoolwork at university also takes on a variety of forms. It involves skipping classes, using the same essay for several courses, helping fellow students with assignments.

The avoidance of schoolwork can also be a pleasant love affair, long conversations in pubs with friends, reading the wrong book at the right time and the right book at the wrong time. Those of us who have enough money frequently buy term papers from essay companies.

One of the most tangible results of students' struggle over the past 10 years has been the steady erosion of the grading system. Schools, employers, and the state use the grading system to check the "quality" of the products of the school system. As long as it functions, grading forces students to work harder and compete with each other for jobs or places in graduate school.

Increasing criticism by students of authoritarian learning and the refusal to do a lot of schoolwork has significantly reduced the use of the bell curve, and grade levels have risen steadily.

Now the universities complain that most first year students lack basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills, despite adequate grades in high school. Also, grades have lost much of their usefulness to employers in assessing job applicants.

School authorities describe this phenomenon as "grade inflation". From our viewpoint, when we struggle for higher grades for less work, we are making a similar struggle as that of waged workers, whose struggle for more money and less work is called "wage inflation" by the state.

We students have not only been struggling against schoolwork; we have also been fighting for money in various forms.

In the late 60's, federal and provincial authorities were faced with a widespread refusal of university students to pay back their student loans. By 1970, more than 50 percent of outstanding loans were not being repaid. In this way, students were refusing the discipline and the pressures that a huge debt creates to quickly find a job after graduation.

Since then, student loan regulations have been tightened up to prevent students from simply taking money for schoolwork by refusing to repay loans.

Students also get access to goods which a wage usually permits through shoplifting books, food, clothes, etc. A few years ago, there was a city-wide campaign against shoplifting in Kitchener-Waterloo, which suggests that not only students, but also workers in stores and warehouses, have supplemented their income in this way.

In the last few years, university students have been organizing around how much money they get from the state for schoolwork. In 1976 already there have been large demonstrations of students at Queen's Park, at the New Brunswick legislature, and at the University of Calgary over grants and loans.

In a three-week Quebec-wide strike by community college students last year, students demanded that their parents' income should have no bearing on student grants, and that all students should get a *guaranteed annual wage* equivalent to welfare for a single person. The fact that even getting welfare would be a big gain shows how little our work is valued at present.

In effect, the Quebec students were demanding wages for schoolwork, without being quite so coherent. It should be noted that community college students in Quebec pay no tuition, so they already had a significant amount of leverage or power to reduce the level of indebtedness that wagelessness usually means for Ontario students.

Similarly, the opposition of Ontario students to decreases in grants and proposed tuition increases shows clearly that we think we should get more money, not less, for going to school.

The Ontario Federation of Students is demanding free tuition and a "living stipend" for university students. This is a positive move, but unless we make clear that going to school is work, and we want to get paid for it, will be difficult to avoid the traditional blackmail that we are a "privileged" group living off the backs of the taxpayers.

These recent actions by Canadian university students demonstrate that we already receive a form of wages for schoolwork through the grant system. The Ontario Student Aid Program is just that. It's interesting to see how the government calculates the cost of food, books, housing, transportation, etc. to determine what it costs for a student to stay alive. From the state's and employer's viewpoint, that's what a wage is—what is necessary for us to maintain ourselves so we can continue to work for them.

Other categories of students also receive a form of wages for schoolwork. Thousands take Canada Manpower Training Programs, and receive a subsistence wage while at school. High school students who leave home can get welfare if they stay at school. Also, the Canadian Armed Forces pay university students to go to school if they enroll in officer training programs.

The difference between all these forms of wages for schoolwork and an explicit wage for schoolwork is that they all assume that schooling is a privilege rather than work, so we should be glad to receive less than welfare and accumulate large debts. When we demand wages for schoolwork, we make clear that schoolwork is a job like any other job, and that we want a lot more money than mere subsistence.

WAGES FOR SCHOOLWORK

Although we and other students have been struggling against schoolwork in all kinds of ways, as well as getting some money, our

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