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## Balance Sheet of the Student Movement

*In our July 14 issue (page 723) we published a resolution entitled “Worldwide Youth Radicalization and the Tasks of the Fourth International.” This document opened a discussion on the subject in the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution, founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. The document below is a second contribution to the discussion. It is a condensation of Cahiers rouges, No. 12, “Problèmes du mouvement étudiant,” written by Daniel Bensaïd and Camille Scalabrino. The condensation appeared in Quatrième Internationale, No 38 (September 1969). The translation is by Intercontinental Press.*

### - I -

**1.** The student movement in the 1960s was everywhere in the vanguard of the reviving revolutionary struggles. The particular political mobility of the student milieu arises from the accumulating superstructural contradictions of which it is the focus: the crisis of bourgeois ideology which affects the youth as a whole; the problems of employment, training, and professional careers which concern the intellectual workers; and the institutional crisis of the university.

**2.** A component part of the youth in general, the students were the first to be affected by the crisis of bourgeois ideology, which they are called upon to glorify and perpetuate. The bourgeoisie of the period of imperialist

decadence is not the creative bourgeoisie that rose to power to accomplish its historical tasks. The values, morals, and history of this bourgeoisie can inspire no enthusiasm. The cause of the crisis seems clear – the youth cannot identify its hopes with those of the bourgeoisie, or tie its fate to this moribund class. This is all the more true because the values so much preached by the schools, the academies, and the authorities are denied daily by the crimes imperialism commits in its death throes. Losing its morality and ideals, the bourgeoisie has replaced them with advertising slogans. It no longer seeks to inspire defense of the ideals of the rising bourgeoisie (“liberty” and “equality”) but conformity to the robot image of the average consumer, the mediocre bourgeois of the period of decadence. No young generation can identify with this ideology. And more than any other young people – since they are the heir apparent and the appointed continuers of this tradition – the students experience the crisis of bourgeois ideology very intensely.

**3.** As future “professionals”, the students are haunted by the problems of employment. In those branches where the professional perspectives are precisely defined, to be a future specialist is frequently synonymous with future unemployment as a consequence of the imperatives of continual economic reorganization. In the liberal professions, long years of study often culminate in beginning a slow climb in the restricted hierarchies.

### - II -

**1.** More specifically, the students find themselves in the center of a contradiction which they may strive to surmount but which they

can never resolve because it involves the fundamental contradiction in the capitalist mode of production – the contradiction between developing the productive forces and maintaining the relations of production. This same contradiction bears on the universities which are compelled to respond simultaneously to two contradictory demands – (1) advancing the productive forces through a general increase in the level of skills at the price of an increase in the social costs of training; and (2) retaining the productive relationships through fragmentation of knowledge, discriminatory recruitment, and respecting the private profits of the capitalists as individuals. The bourgeoisie everywhere tries to deal with this contradiction by measures and reforms which themselves are hybrid and contradictory and which perpetuate the institutional crisis and instability of the university.

**2.** The increasing needs for skilled manpower are bringing about a diversification of university recruitment and its extension to the middle strata. These strata, attracted by the prospects of assimilation into the upper classes, do not bring rebellion into the universities with them. But everywhere they are an element of instability. Caught between an insecure family background and an uncertain professional future, the children of the petty bourgeoisie on occasion are ready to make the authorities pay for the insecurity and anguish which is their lot.

**3.** The student population, rooted in the contradiction of the university, lacks both social and political homogeneity. Even if the time spent in school has been extended, even if the concentration of university complexes

has reached immense proportions, even if the diversification of university recruitment and the professional careers open to students create stronger ties than ever between them and the rest of their generation in the high schools and factories, for all that the contradictions in the university system does not constitute an objective foundation for bringing the students as such over to the side of the proletariat and does not make the students natural allies of the workers. There are no homogeneous student interests to defend.

**4.** The student milieu has given birth to movements and political currents whose poles are outside the university, in the class confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the working class on the national and international scale. A part of the students have aligned themselves with the established order, whose benefits they are destined to share; another part have gone over to the proletariat. But there is nothing natural and spontaneous about this lineup, especially when the workers – deprived of revolutionary leadership – fumble and mark time.

**5.** This is why in the advanced capitalist countries the politicalization of the students has generally taken the path of anti-imperialist struggle. The students have not found the least perspective in the Social Democratic or Stalinist workers organizations in their own country, which have submitted to the status quo. As a result, the Vietnamese revolution provided a symbol and an example of the international struggle of the proletariat in which a part of the student population recognized what it was waiting for and which restored its hope.

**6.** Moreover, mobile, unstable, and continually renewed, the student milieu provides few openings for the working-class bureaucracies, above all at a time when the crisis of Stalinism and its ideology echoes that of the bourgeoisie. Thus the student movement represents the weakest link in the chain of political integration forged and maintained by the bourgeoisie and the Social Democratic and Stalinist leaders to preserve the international status quo.

### - III -

**1.** Shaken by the interplay of contradictions all of which come to a focus on the campus, the university population produced a powerful student movement. Impelled by the crisis of bourgeois ideology and of the educational structures, and inspired by the example of the colonial revolution, this student movement escaped the control of the working-class bureaucracies. The extreme contradiction in the universities has given the student movement an energy which has enabled it, alone and in spite of its isolation, to wage vanguard struggles distinguished by a revival of violent forms of combat, of direct action, in defiance of the political rules of the game accepted by the working-class leaderships.

**2.** However, the student movement by itself cannot deal with the contradiction of the university, which rests on the very foundations of capitalism. It is incapable of political and programmatic independence from the working class.

**3.** As a result, the student movement is torn between its revolutionary vocation and the objective limits of the university community,

between its mass character and its role as a substitute vanguard, at a time when, as the weakest link in the political system, it finds itself thrown into the vanguard of the struggle.

**4.** This is why the student movement cannot be analyzed as a distinct entity; one could only describe its fluctuations, often irrational and unpredictable. In order to understand it and give it political direction, it must be analyzed in connection with the variations of the coordinates that condition its existence and its development, for in itself the student movement has not history or memory. These coordinates are on the one hand the workers movement (the extent of its mobilization, the political forces which compose it) and on the other the development of the revolutionary vanguard, which is still in too embryonic form to really play a leadership role.

### - IV -

**1.** The evolution of the French student movement illustrates the relationship between the student movement and the workers movement in a very complete way. After the Algerian war, in a period of relative quiescence in working-class struggles, the student movement became the guilty conscience of the workers movement. Against the spurious rationality of the bourgeoisie, it counterposed its own programmatic rationality – it relied on the power of reason and the word to unmask the contradictions of capitalism and demonstrate the validity of the socialist view without having to take into account a relationship of social forces caused by lack of mobilization of class.

**2.** In the period of reviving workers struggles, the student movement, inspired by revolutionary groups that had broken from the Social Democracy or the Stalinist movement, rediscovered the reality of the workers movement and the possibility of linking up with it. In this period, the student movement constituted itself either as pressure groups acting on the workers movement or as supporters of the workers movement. As a pressure group, the student movement acted through liaisons with the unions on common problems (training, employment); as a supporting force through populist movements inspired by Maoist groups. During this period, the developing student movement slipped into the preexisting structures of academic vocational associations where it found an ideological forum and a vaguely unionist rubric that legitimized its attempt at hybrid unionism.

**3.** The student movement could not remain forever on this tight leash, drawn behind a workers movement under Stalinist or Social Democratic domination. It had to either submit and return to the bosom of the “democratic” forces or rely on the resources of the student population and alone, or at the risk of isolating itself, take the initiative and try to upset the status quo in the class struggle. The student movement was driven to this choice. Economic struggles that were halted or diverted as they ran up against a stat speaking in the name of the “national interest” seemed increasingly futile. Thus, the mobilizing structures taken over from the vocational interest group associations seem too constrictive. The example of the March 22 Movement at its birth was typical. Along with this movement, the vanguard

groups took the initiative of combining the fragmented political activities of the student movement into an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-bureaucratic movement. After this turn, the student movement ceased to follow its natural channels; it was organized by the vanguard groups which defined its role and its objectives, no longer in accordance with campus criteria but in accordance with the general relation of forces, an overall evaluation of the class struggle. In this altered form, the student movement acquired the means to play the role of a temporary substitute vanguard, of accelerator or detonator of the class struggle, more by its exemplary forms of struggle than by its programmatic content.

**4.** Once the workers movement began to struggle, the student movement could not continue to play its role of substitute vanguard by giving an example of determination and courage. The workers cannot limit themselves to moving through the tactical breaches opened up by the students. They need strategic perspectives and slogans which the student movement, incapable by itself of going beyond a certain level of political comprehension – that of petty-bourgeois radicalism – cannot provide. In the face of this problem, the student movement yields to the revolutionary vanguard.

- V -

**1.** The temporary vanguard role played by the student movement is not a novelty requiring any revision of Marxism. Already Engels, Trotsky, Mao Tse-Tung hailed the vanguard role played by the students in Austria in 1850, in China in 1919. This role

merely testified to the fact that the bourgeoisie was no longer vigorous enough to make its revolution and the proletariat was not yet mature enough to lead its own. Today, the vanguard role of the student movement is no longer a sign of the insufficient objective maturity of the proletariat but of the bankruptcy of its Social Democratic or Stalinist leaderships.

**2.** It is no less true that the student movement can only play this role with the perspective of a linkup very shortly with the workers movement. Without this perspective, the student movement is condemned to maintain an impossible balance between its revolutionary function and its mass character, continually pulled by reformism on the one side and ultra leftism on the other. This contradiction can be resolved only by constructing and developing a revolutionary organization capable of transcending the student “point of view” and offering a strategic design, an organization capable of playing a vanguard role in the workers movement as well as in the student movement.

**3.** Building such an organization demands qualities of doggedness, of perseverance, of firmness, which are far from inherent in the fickle, unstable, and unremembering student population. This is why we see the flowering in the student movement of a gamut of ideologies that are just so many escape routes from the fundamental task of building the revolutionary organization.

**4.** An early variant of these ideological evasions consisted in the dynamics of a group, a phase of introspection in which the

student movement searched for the reasons for its political impotence in its own lack of consciousness. A sub variant was populism by which the movement endeavored to efface itself by doing penance in the service of the masses – all under the theoretical aegis of Mao's thought. Introspection and populism are the infantile deliriums of the student movement.

**5.** Anarchism and spontanéism are its adolescent deliriums. Incapable of surmounting the contradiction in the student movement (between its revolutionary role and its mass character), the anarchists prefer to deny this movement outright. For them the student population is sociologically petty bourgeois; consequently there can be no revolutionary student movement, only anarchist militants intervening in the student milieu by direct action and propaganda of the deed. The objective is, by means of the question of violence, to radicalize this student petty bourgeoisie still tainted with a squeamish humanism. The objective is to draw the student masses into the wake of an activist minority. But since the "solidarity" of the mass of students is associated more with sentiment than political consciousness, it would be futile to try to give it an organizational form.

**6.** As incapable of resolving the contradiction as their anarchist cousins, the spontanéists dissolve the student movement in the cultural revolution. For them the students are a natural ally of the proletariat. The only obstacle in the way of revolution is the lingering fascination of decaying bourgeois ideology, the cop everyone carries in his head. Through a spiritual conversion, termed

cultural revolution for the occasion, everyone must drive the cop out of his head. In this way he comes directly to the revolutionary movement (without class distinctions) and not to the student movement. In a word, between the student under the spell of bourgeois ideology and learning and the revolutionary militant there is no longer any place for an overly encumbering student movement. The problem is thus removed but not solved.

**7.** The common denominator of these student ideologies is an antiauthoritarianism which combines the student movement's awareness of the hoax of the strong state and its resentment of a hated father figure. The student movement blames the bourgeois society which has nourished it and educated it for betraying its own teachings and its own precepts and covering up this betrayal by an omnipresent and arbitrary state authority. To this betrayal the student movement reacts by seeking a new antiauthoritarian humanism into which it dissolves the class struggle. And since it does not have the means of carrying out a proletarian revolution by itself, it contents itself with a "cultural revolution." It attacks culture by preference because it began by sustaining itself from it. Mao-spontanéism is the most all-inclusive cocktail of student ideologies in which populism, spontanéism, and antiauthoritarianism blend. All these ideologies converge on one point and that is to reject the revolutionary organization which threatens them as their own negation.

## - VI -

**1.** In the period when the new vanguards are emerging from the youth radicalization, these

vanguards find a favorable environment for growth in the student milieu. Since they are too weak to confront the bourgeois regime directly or to compete with the recognized working-class leaderships, the student movement offers these organizations shelter and protection. By its mass mobilization, the student movement compensates for the vanguard groups' weakness. During this period these new vanguards are primarily student groups regarding themselves as parricidal offspring of Stalinism or the Social Democracy. It is only through transforming themselves that they can link up with the Fourth International which is the bearer of the strategic acquisitions that constitute the alternative to Stalinism.

**2.** This transformation enables the incipient revolutionary organization to raise itself to the level of an overall strategic understanding, and to finish off the student group outlook that perpetuates the social and political characteristics of the student movement. The revolutionary organization must be virtually torn out of the student movement.

**3.** The student movement as such has neither memory nor history, it is absorbed in ephemeral actions, in acts of bearing witness, in spectacular demonstrations. In contrast, the intervention of the vanguard is not spectacular. By organizing and training militants it weaves the fabric of the political memory of the student movement. It is the mast that bears the sails of the student mobilization. It is vertical with respect to the horizontal dispersions of student agitation (anarcho-Maoist agitational focuses). Through the improvisations of the student movement

it traces the coherence of its own revolutionary design. The balancing of the student movement between reformism and ultra leftism cannot be broken except by the hammering intervention of the revolutionary organization.

## - VII -

**1.** The development and reinforcement of the revolutionary organization does not mean the end of the student movement but a change in its function. In the early period, the student movement, because of specific conditions in the universities, was in the lead of the youth radicalization.

The development of a revolutionary organization makes it possible to reconstitute the student movement, which is foundering in repetitious actions dictated by its contradiction, into a movement of the youth in general. This broadening is a precondition for increasing the mass movement's capacity for struggle. It has been made possible by modifications in the relationship of forces between the vanguard and the state, between the vanguard and the bureaucratic working class leaderships.

**2.** The basis for such a youth movement lies in the struggle against the regimentation of youth. This regimentation begins with vocational training in all its forms (high schools, universities, apprenticeship, technical education).

It includes the housing, transportation, and working conditions imposed on youth; the organization of amusements, culture, competitive sports, all the repressive recreational structures offered to the youth (scouting, camps, athletic clubs); and sexual oppres-

sion. Finally this regimentation culminates in the army, the last stage of integration into bourgeois society.

**3.** The youth, not having gone throughout the great defeats of the working class, does not bear the burden of this dead past. It is a profoundly powerful element of political renewal and is shaking the bureaucratic yokes.

**4.** The mass youth movement we have to strive to develop must be distinguished, however, from the youth affiliate of a revolutionary organization. Such a youth affiliate assumes the existence of an already strong revolutionary organization.

## - VIII -

**1.** The attempts to define a strategy for the student movement as such have generally ended in failure. The strategists of the Critical and the Negative Universities, as these terms indicate, reduce the student struggle to an essentially ideological struggle against the bourgeois university. As soon as the student movement moves on "from the criticism of society," it is faced with problems of revolutionary strategy that only a vanguard can resolve.

**2.** In a parallel way, revolutionary trade unionism in the student milieu leads into reformism. You cannot restrict yourself to applying in limited areas an all-encompassing design which you have the means to carry through only in the universities. This way you end up with the slogans of student control, even student management, in the universities and high schools, which, in

isolation from the overall situation in the class struggle, are thoroughly reformist.

**3.** Any attempt at a student strategy is thus liable to a double trap. On the one hand, there is the danger of reformism, of patching up the system under the pretext of a partial transitional strategy applied to the university. On the other hand, there is confrontationist which is only a policy in bits and pieces.

**4.** The Red University is not a slogan. Like workers control, it is a general theme of struggle which should be filled out by concrete slogans in specific situations. The Red University is not an institution that can be counterposed to the bourgeois university; it is a movement of struggle by which the vanguard seeks to direct the student movement as a permanent striking force against the system. The Red University is not a line for the universities but the tactic of the vanguard in the universities, a subordinate part of its overall strategy.

**5.** The University slogans of the organization may attack the problems of professional training by demanding flexible training and a guarantee of employment at the level of skill acquired. But the implementation of these slogans requires the mobilization of the workers movement, in which the embryonic vanguard does not hold the initiative. That is why the slogans centering around the theme of workers control of education retain a propagandistic character.

**6.** Incapable of an overall strategic program, the student movement can meet the bour-

geoisie's university policy only by organizational resistance (maintaining the independence of the movement and opposing participation in collaborationist structures) and tactical political initiatives laid out by the vanguard in accordance with its evaluation of the political conjuncture as a whole.

These initiatives revolve around three major axes – support of workers struggles, support of anti-imperialist struggles, and the struggle against regimentation. It is under this last heading that struggles for freedom of expression, political organization, and against the bourgeois educational policy fall.

#### - IX -

**1.** A student trade union as a means of struggle is a scheme that could have reality only in a consciously defined framework of student self-management. The reformist workers organizations, anxious to humor their allies, have maintained this myth of the autonomy of student demands. The student trade-union structures fly into bits as soon as political struggles revive. Moreover, united mass political organizations of the student movement, such as the FUA and the March 22 Movement were in France, can have only a temporary existence. Based on specific tactical agreements, they must disappear or fossilize once strategic problems come to the fore. Caught between the slow attrition of the student-interest organizations and a nostalgia for united political organizations, the student movement runs the risk of fragmentation into fiefs (Italy) or atomization.

**2.** The most favorable organizational outlet for the student movement presupposes already

quite powerful revolutionary organizations. In this case, a process of caramelization develops. The breakup of Zengakuren provided an example of this which will not prove an exception. The revolutionary organizations, which alone are capable of resolving certain strategic and practical problems (like demonstrations which at a certain threshold of confrontation require a degree of discipline and organization that does not come naturally to the student movement), will reorganize the mass movement around their own political initiatives.

#### - X -

**1.** The student movement and the youth radicalization cannot be considered simply as a windfall for the vanguard, which can win the youth involved over to its program and recruit new elements among them. This youth radicalization, in which the student movement occupies a prime position, enables the vanguard to alter the relationship of forces between it and the bourgeois state and the working-class bureaucracies. The specific role of the student movement offers the still weak vanguard a margin for maneuver, an opening to get a foothold in the political arena, to carry out its initial experiments without being under the double fire of the bourgeois and bureaucratic repression. In this sense, the student movement is playing a precise and specific historical role.

**2.** But this opportunity for the vanguard is also a test. It cannot be satisfied to profit from the student movement. In order to play its role, the vanguard must grapple with the student movement, organize it en masse, engage in a continual polemic against its

spontaneously generate ideologies. Ceaselessly threatened by opportunism of the left and right, the vanguard must have enough theoretical firmness to resist the ideological pressure of the movement and enough political understanding of the conditions of struggle left but he breakup of Stalinism to get in step with the movement without dissolving itself in it. The road is difficult; no verbal schematism can make it any easier. But it is by this route that the resurrection of the revolutionary vanguard will come.

**3.** If this phenomenon holds true primarily for the advanced capitalist countries, it is often true also for the colonial countries and for the forces destined to carry out the political revolution in the bureaucratically degenerated or deformed workers states. In the colonial countries, the student movement often combines the characteristics of the Western student movement and the classic features of a liberal intelligentsia struggling against imperialism. In the degenerated workers states, the rise of the student movement is often based on the defense of freedoms rather than anti-imperialism, but the political characteristics of this movement also offer striking similarities, both in its role and its limitations, to the student movement in the advanced capitalist countries.

Understanding the role and the limitations of the youth radicalization is one of the keys to advancing the sections of the Fourth International and developing the world movement itself from a propagandistic International to an International rooted in the masses and capable of responding to the new tasks of the period.

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