

# International Internal Discussion Bulletin

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# The Red University Strategy vs. the 'Irreversible Turn'

## A Five-Year Balance Sheet of the Worldwide Youth Radicalization

By Andy Rose

[The general line of this contribution to the international discussion was adopted by the National Committee of the Young Socialist Alliance, June 8, 1973.]

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### Introduction

Before the Third World Congress Since Reunification, held in April 1969, the United Secretariat unanimously adopted for presentation to the congress the resolution *The Worldwide Youth Radicalization and the Tasks of the Fourth International*.

Some comrades at the world congress raised disagreements with the resolution, although these disagreements had been neither written down nor discussed during the pre-congress period. For this reason, the resolution was not voted on, but was submitted as the initial contribution opening a discussion in the International.

The congress did unanimously adopt a motion on youth work that read in part as follows:

"(1) The Ninth World Congress reaffirms that work among both the proletarian and student youth is the central task the International must confront in the immediate period ahead.

"(2) It calls on all its sections to mobilize their best forces to promote this work.

"(3) The militants of the Fourth International must integrate themselves in the mass student and youth movements to become their best agitators, propagandists, and organizers." (*Intercontinental Press*, July 14, 1969, p. 733)

After the world congress two articles were contributed by leaders of the French Communist League presenting their disagreements with the line of the resolution. (*Balance Sheet of the Student Movement*, by Daniel Bensaid and C. Scalabrino; *A Contribution to the Discussion on the Worldwide Radicalization of the Youth*, Resolution passed by the Political Bureau of the Communist League.)

At its Ninth National Convention, held in Minneapolis in December 1969, the YSA voted to adopt the general line of the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document. The convention also adopted a report given by Caroline Lund that responded to the arguments of the French comrades against the document.

The resolution, the two articles from the Communist League, and the YSA's reply are all included in the International Internal Discussion Bulletin reprint compilation *Discussion on the International Youth Radicalization*, 1968-71.

Unfortunately, since 1969 there has not been a single contribution to the international discussion specifically dealing with the question of the youth radicalization or

answering the arguments the YSA raised over three years ago. It is not clear for example whether the leadership of the Communist League still holds the same views they did or whether their position has evolved. Nor is it clear how they and other supporters of the IEC Majority Tendency evaluate the continuing eruptions of student protest over the last four years. Yet since 1969 the Trotskyist youth organizations throughout Europe have been liquidated, and approval of this course of action has been incorporated into the general line of the IEC Majority draft resolution *The Building of Revolutionary Parties in Capitalist Europe*, (IIDB, Vol. IX, No. 5).

Moreover, the contributions that have referred to disagreements with the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document have failed to clarify the issues, because they have not addressed themselves to the line of the document but have directed most of the polemics against various positions it does *not* put forward.

In order to have a clear and fruitful discussion of the differences on the youth question we hope the comrades who reject the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document will write their balance sheet of the international student movement since 1969, explain where they think the line of the document has been proven wrong, present their alternative strategy for our youth and student work, and justify their opposition to building Trotskyist youth organizations.

This contribution will respond to the major criticisms of the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document and show how the balance sheet of the youth radicalization since the document was written confirms its line and enhances its value.

### I. Line of the Worldwide Youth Radicalization document

The 1969 United Secretariat resolution points to the development during the 1960s of a new radicalization of youth the world over. This radicalization, touching millions of young people, primarily students, has become an important *political* factor internationally, a significant added weight on the side of the working class and its allies in the new rise of the world revolutionary process.

The first section of the resolution explains the roots and common features of the international youth revolt. It says the fundamental objective causes of the youth radicalization are, in the first place, the crisis of imperialism, especially the upsurges in the colonial revolution but also the upheavals and social convulsions in the advanced capitalist countries, and, in the second place, the crisis of Stalinism and Social-Democracy. Their corruption

and conservatism have discredited them in the eyes of many radicalizing young people.

Student youth have been the most affected by the radicalization. College students have left behind strict control by their parents and are not yet tied down to the conservatizing responsibilities of a job and supporting a family. Students have more leisure time to read and discuss ideas. These factors are not new; in the past they have often meant that students have radicalized earlier than other sectors of the population and have articulated discontent brewing in society at large.

But today the expansion of higher education, brought about by modern capitalism's need for a more highly educated workforce, means that the social power of a student revolt is greater than ever before. There are millions of university students, concentrated in huge educational complexes, being trained in skills that are essential for the operation of the capitalist economy.

In addition, the increased number of students, the growing percentage of students coming from working-class families, and the future facing more and more students as skilled wage workers, all tend to link students more closely to the working class, especially the young workers. The document calls attention to the fact that as the radicalization deepens and spreads, high school students will also be drawn into action on a massive scale.

The resolution states that the university is an institution of class rule that reflects the contradictions of capitalist society. Students consequently rebel against many aspects of the functioning of the educational system itself.

The youth radicalization is not a passing phenomenon — despite conjunctural ups and downs and differences from one country to another. For the foreseeable future it will remain an important factor in domestic and international politics, one of the prime arenas for revolutionary activity by sections of the Fourth International, and a significant source of recruitment to the revolutionary party.

The second part of the document looks at the ideology and politics of the student radicals. It notes certain political weaknesses that flow from the social nature of the student movement and the absence of mass revolutionary parties from which it could learn.

These shortcomings, it is also pointed out, are counterbalanced by the major political strengths of the student radicalization: its origins in and responsiveness to the big issues of the national and international class struggle; its internationalism; its anti-authoritarianism; and the openness of many student radicals to the ideas of revolutionary Marxism.

The third section of the resolution proposes a strategy for revolutionary Marxists in the student movement. This "red university" strategy stands counterposed to both the reformist approach that limits the movement to narrowly-defined "student issues" in isolation from broader questions, and the ultraleft sectarian approach that denies any importance to campus issues or the student movement itself.

The red university strategy *connects* student demands to the broad economic, political and social demands of the class struggle as a whole. It orients students to linking up their struggles with those of the working class. One side of this link-up is based on understanding the role of the university in capitalist society, and advancing demands that point toward the role it should play to serve

the interests of the working class and oppressed nationalities rather than the interests of the ruling class.

"The concept of the Red University means that the university ought to be transformed from a factory producing robots into an organizing center for anticapitalist activities, a powerhouse for revolutionary education, an arena for mobilizing youth in a struggle for the complete transformation of society." (p. 193; references to the document are taken from the edition published in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, Pathfinder Press, 1973)

The "red university" is a goal that cannot be completely achieved under capitalism. Rather, it is a strategy for maximizing the effectiveness of student struggles by mobilizing the full power of students and directing that power toward reaching out to and building an alliance with the working class.

It is a strategy for mobilizing the support of masses of students behind the major battles of the class struggle nationally and internationally; and it aims to show the student movement how it can fight to swing the organized might of the working class behind battles initiated by students which are in the interests of the working class and its allies. It is a strategy for educating the student rebels through struggle about the need for a proletarian revolution, a socialist revolution.

This strategy also has special application to the struggles of oppressed nationalities for self-determination.

The fourth part of the resolution presents a program of immediate, democratic and transitional demands as a guide to our intervention in the student movement.

Finally, the resolution specifies three tasks of the Fourth International among youth: 1) to participate in the struggles of youth and strive to become the leadership both in action and in political ideology; 2) to build strong Trotskyist youth organizations; and 3) to build (or rebuild) the sections of the Fourth International by recruiting and educating the best of the new generation as revolutionary Marxist cadres.

## II. Two approaches to the student revolt

The resolution, summarized above, emphasized the objective roots and increased social weight of the student revolt. It stated: "Given the various social and political factors outlined above and the explosive character of our epoch, the current student radicalization is not just a conjunctural phenomenon, but a permanent one that will be of continual concern to the revolutionary movement from now on." (p. 187)

In contrast, the general approach of the comrades who reject the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document is to downplay the importance, power, and independence of the student struggles.

The *Balance Sheet of the Student Movement* by Comrades Bensaid and Scalabrino described the rebelliousness of students this way: "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." (p. 16)

Later on, the student movement is described as: "absorbed in ephemeral actions, in acts of bearing witness, in spectacular demonstrations" (p. 18); "foundering in repetitious

actions dictated by its contradiction" (p. 19); and suffering from "political impotence" (p. 18). Students are "fickle, unstable, and unremembering." (p. 18)

### 'Crisis of Ideology'

In their haste to downgrade the significance of the student struggles, these comrades tend to disregard or at least blur over the fundamental contradictions of capitalism that generated them. For example, the *Balance Sheet* ascribes the development of the student radicalization to the following three factors: "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." (p. 16)

What is the "crisis of bourgeois ideology"? Bensaïd and Scalabrino explain: "The bourgeoisie of the period of imperialist decadence is not the creative bourgeoisie that rose to power to accomplish its historical tasks. . . . 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. . . . 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." (p. 16)

But the "creative bourgeoisie that rose to power to accomplish its historical tasks" hasn't been around for over 100 years. The "period of imperialist decadence" set in quite some time ago. When in the last century has the above paragraph *not* held true? What pertinence does it have to the student revolt of the 1960s? What is explained or clarified by identifying the "crisis of bourgeois ideology" as a reason for the radicalization? Since "crisis of ideology" can only mean in the last analysis that people are radicalizing, the "explanation" boils down to saying that people are radicalizing . . . because they are radicalizing!

The other two factors cited are more relevant to the actual development of the youth radicalization, but they tell only part of the story. Left out are such factors as the rise of the colonial revolution, especially in Algeria, Cuba, and above all Vietnam; the rise of the Black liberation struggle in the U.S.; and the crisis of Stalinism since the Khrushchev revelations and the suppression of the Hungarian revolt.

Do these comrades agree with the assertion of the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document that: "The efforts of the imperialists to maintain their exploitation and oppression and crush revolutionary movements have been the prime factor in radicalizing the youth in both the advanced countries and the colonial countries"? (p. 183) It is impossible to tell.

The phrase "institutional crisis of the university" is defined just as superficially and inadequately as the "crisis of bourgeois ideology" was defined:

The universities "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." (p. 16)

Do the comrades agree with the resolution's explanation of how the expansion and transformation of higher education have both increased the social weight of students and exacerbated the contradictions between the university's role as an institution of capitalist rule and the interests of the masses of students? Their analysis remains on such a rarefied level of abstraction that it is impossible to tell.

### *Homogeneous student interests?*

The comrades of the Communist League leadership seem less concerned with evaluating the actual power of the student movement—and devising a strategy for maximizing that power—than with simply reaffirming the elementary proposition that students alone cannot make the socialist revolution. Based on their polemic against the notion of "homogeneous student interests," they don't seem to think that the clash of interests between the capitalist university and the students amounts to very much.

Bensaïd and Scalabrino's *Balance Sheet* insists that "the contradiction 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." (p. 16)

In their next paragraph, the comrades even seem to view the appearance of a radicalized student movement as some chance occurrence with little objective foundation: "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. . . ." (p. 16)

The International Marxist Group, the British section of the Fourth International, in its 1972 *Perspectives Document*, goes a step further: "there is no direct bloc interest which students have which is not completely reformist or even reactionary" (*SWP Internal Information Bulletin*, No. 3 in 1972, p. 8)

Leaving aside the question of how a Marxist could characterize a "direct bloc interest" as "completely reformist," these polemics seem to be directed against the view that students form a socially homogeneous bloc that by virtue of its class position is automatically impelled to revolutionary struggle. Such a polemic is misplaced, however, because that is not what the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document says. It says:

"The student population is not homogeneous. Students come from varying class backgrounds with widely differing interests and they are on many different levels politically. Their only homogeneity consists of their common position as students in a capitalist society and university—or a bureaucratically deformed workers state." (p. 192)

The objective reality the resolution addresses itself to, though, is that students *have* taken to the streets in extremely large numbers in protests that *are* in the interests of the working class and the oppressed. It says: "The fundamental significance of this unprecedented radicaliza-

tion of the youth is the emergence of new forces, ready, willing and able to enter the arena of class struggle on the side of the colonial peoples and the working class and to give battle to world imperialism and its accomplices. . . ." (p. 182)

Even though their reasons for doing so are not a direct function of their relationship to the means of production, but "merely" a function of their relationship to one of the major institutions of capitalist or bureaucratic rule, that should not stop us from participating wholeheartedly in the student revolt, or from putting forward a strategy for it.

The comrades who put the emphasis on "no homogeneous student interests" grossly underestimate the degree to which the interests of most students do clash with the capitalist system. They seem to overlook the fact that the university is an institution of class society. As such, it is controlled by the ruling capitalist class and it functions to serve their interests, not the interests of workers, oppressed nationalities, women, or any non-capitalist sector of the population, including the overwhelming majority of students.

The clash of interests is reflected in many ways: University research is intimately tied to the needs of big business, not the pressing needs of masses of people. In contradiction to its supposed ideals of truth and intellectual freedom, the university as an institution of capitalist rule *must* systematically falsify history and suppress the truth, so as to perpetuate bourgeois ideology, including racism, sexism, and anti-working class ideas. The university itself is regimented, authoritarian, and alienating.

It is wrong to draw so strict a dividing line, as the critics of the resolution seem to do, between struggles around university-related issues and student struggles around general political problems. These are in reality closely interrelated through the role played by the university as an institution of class society.

The same confusion is reflected in the formalistic way the comrades who reject the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document define what they mean by "student movement." For example, in the *Preparatory Text for the 1971 Conference of the Leaderships of the European Sections*, Comrades Vergeat and Delphin explain that "While the student *struggles* continue to develop among the youth under certain conditions, the student *movement* appears less and less as an active political force." (IIDB, Vol. IX, No. 5, p. 6, emphasis in original.) The European document refers to "the student movement proper" as "the movement around the social and material problems specific to this milieu." (p. 19) This narrow definition is not very useful because it eliminates the main rallying points of the student revolt. These are not only or even primarily the "social and material problems specific to this milieu," but the major issues of the class struggle on a national and international scale—issues like imperialist war, inflation, workers struggles, national oppression, racism, and democratic rights—which are *reflected in and closely interrelated with* the specific problems of students.

More than a semantic difference is involved. The restricted view of what constitute "legitimate" concerns of the student movement obscures the deep objective roots of the student revolt, oversimplifies the wide range of issues involved, and thereby facilitates deriding and brushing aside these issues as relatively unimportant.

### *Charting the coordinates*

The analysis by Bensaid and Scalabrino exemplifies such oversimplification. They assert that "the student movement cannot be analyzed as a distinct entity . . . 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 no 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." (p. 17)

The "coordinates" cited are important, of course. But so is the "coordinate" of the international political situation—the state of the colonial revolution and imperialism's efforts to contain it; the interimperialist conflicts; the relations between the workers states and imperialism and the relations among the workers states themselves; the acts and level of the student movement in other countries. And isn't the contradiction between the university's function under capitalism and the interests of the masses of students also one of the "coordinates" that shapes the student movement?

The analysis of the student movement in the two articles by the leadership of the Communist League is undoubtedly intended to be more profound than that of the resolution. But in fact their analysis is rendered superficial and misleading because it obscures the objective reasons for the rise of student struggles and focuses on the subjective attributes of the movement, which of course vary greatly from country to country (even from campus to campus) and are liable to change rapidly.

Their articles attempted to chart the "coordinates" of the subjective evolution of the French student movement and then deduce from that the prospective course of the international student movement. This analysis led them to project a decline in the importance of student struggles as the attention of radicalized students turned toward the struggles of workers on the job.

In the *Preparatory Text* Comrades Vergeat and Delphin wrote:

"It appears that after having demonstrated all its power, the student movement is now revealing weaknesses inherent in its social character." (p. 6)

"Without a real linkup with the working class, the student movement could at one time play a role of detonator and example for the workers, but it seems that this first stage is over on a European scale, even if all the countries have not gone through it." (p. 6)

The IMG's 1972 *Perspectives Document* explains it this way:

"The events of May 1968, while at one level the highest expression of the potentiality of the student struggles, at another level dealt a death blow to the student *movement*. The appearance on the revolutionary scene of the working class knocked away the previous base of the autonomy of the student actions." (p. 8)

". . . the political consciousness of radicalised *students*, became dominated by the political issue of the struggles of the working class." (p. 27)

The point is reformulated in the IMG *Document on Student Work*:

"The continuing radicalisation of the working class has

removed the last vestiges of autonomy from the student movement. . . . The very highest point of the student movement, the night of the barricades in Paris, in its very success had undermined the conditions of existence of this movement." (1972 IMG Pre-Conference Discussion Bulletin No. 6, p. 6)

These obituaries on the student movement have turned out to be premature. Even a cursory and incomplete survey of student struggles in recent years demonstrates the incorrectness of the major contentions of those who reject the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document: their division of the international student movement into "stages" and relegation of anti-imperialist struggles to the "previous stage;" their assertion that struggles around student issues can only be reformist in the "new" stage; their counterposition of student struggles to the broad political questions of the class struggle; and their denial of the need for revolutionary-socialist youth organizations.

The facts show that the youth radicalization and the student struggles have continued to flare up all over the world, although there are ups and downs in any particular country, and that the dynamic of their development confirms the prognoses of the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document.

### III. What the balance sheet shows

In the five years since the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* resolution was drafted, student protests have been a feature of political life in all three sectors of the world revolution: the workers states, the colonial and semi-colonial countries, and the advanced capitalist countries, including in Britain and France. As the resolution explained, these student struggles arise out of the major issues of the class struggle, intertwined with questions of concern specifically to students.

#### A. Imperialist war and militarism

Contrary to the view expressed in the *Preparatory Text* and the IEC Majority Tendency's European resolution that the "anti-imperialist stage" of the youth radicalization ended in 1968, opposition to imperialist war, above all the Vietnam war, continued to be a key aspect of the student movements around the world. The battle between the Vietnamese revolution and U. S. imperialism, more than any other single question, radicalized and shaped the political consciousness of millions of young people the world over.

The largest, most powerful, and most consistent actions against the war took place in the U. S., not only because U. S. troops were fighting in Vietnam, but also because the Trotskyist movement in the U. S. gave the highest priority to organizing and leading such actions, and fought for a political orientation aimed at involving *masses* of people in the antiwar struggle.

The U. S. antiwar movement, in which students were the key activists and leaders, became a significant factor in world politics, limiting the options open to the imperialists in their efforts to crush the Vietnamese revolution. The entire history of direct U. S. military aggression in Vietnam and the U. S. antiwar movement, from 1965 to 1973, illustrates the role a student movement can play in bringing more powerful social forces into action around

a question of central importance in the class struggle. The example of the May 1970 antiwar upsurge is particularly important.

#### May 1970

The *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document did not hinge primarily on the experience of the student movement in the U. S. but on the major student revolts around the world—France, Pakistan, Japan, Mexico, Yugoslavia, and others. But just one year later, in May, 1970, it was dramatically confirmed when students in the United States carried out the biggest student strike in history, protesting the invasion of Cambodia and the murders of students at Kent State University and Jackson State.

In the context of the antiwar struggle students put into practice one of the central concepts of the red university strategy on a wider scale than ever before—the concept of students and faculty taking control of the university to transform it from an agency of the capitalist ruling class into an organizing center in the interest of the working class.

A crucial turning point was reached on many campuses within the first few days of the strike. Having achieved nearly 100% effectiveness in a strike to "shut it down," students went on to "open it up" under their control as an "antiwar university."

Where the upsurge went the furthest the following key features of the antiwar universities were created:

- 1) Control rested with the mass democratic decision-making meetings of students, faculty and staff. These meetings also established strike councils with representatives from dormitories, academic departments, and political tendencies.

- 2) Most normal functions of the university were halted. A special target was any form of university complicity with the war like military research projects or ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps).

- 3) The students took over the facilities of the university—buildings, printing presses, telephones, radio and TV stations—to reach out to the rest of the population by organizing mass educational and agitational campaigns, marches, rallies, teach-ins, etc. Special efforts were made to reach working people, trade unions, the Black community, and GIs.

Unlike the French students' actions in May 1968, the May events in the U. S. did not trigger a general strike of the working class. But they did lead to the first major break of AFL-CIO unions from Meany's pro-war line, including the first union-called antiwar demonstration, which drew 20,000 people in New York. Hundreds of GIs also participated in demonstrations.

The student upsurge provoked a deep split in the ruling class, posed a national political crisis, and altered the course of the war.

One could hardly draw up a balance sheet on the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document without taking into account the May 1970 events and what they showed about the power of the student movement and the value of the red university strategy.

The comrades of the IEC Majority Tendency should tell us whether they think the May 1970 events in the U. S. confirmed the red university strategy, and if not, what their evaluation of these events is.

The question of 1) eliminating university complicity with the war, and 2) winning a measure of student control in order to better build the antiwar movement, were posed by students not only during the May events but throughout the antiwar movement. The degree of student control naturally varied at different times and on different campuses, depending mainly on the degree of student mobilization. During the April-May, 1972, antiwar upsurge features of the antiwar university were again won on some campuses, although not as widely as in 1970.

Actions around such questions, which were linked to the antiwar movement as a whole and its central demand for immediate U. S. withdrawal, showed how *students as students* could concretely and immediately organize themselves to aid the struggle of the Vietnamese. Was this reformist? To even pose the question is absurd. The YSA, guided by the strategy of the red university as applied to the specific conditions of the antiwar movement, saw the importance of such actions and was in the forefront of organizing them.

Should the YSA have refrained from demanding student control over university facilities and resources because students "have no homogeneous interests"? Should the YSA have abstained from the struggles against ROTC and military research because students alone do not have the power to effect a permanent and complete transformation of the university? Should the YSA have condemned the formation of antiwar universities as "thoroughly reformist"? What alternative course would the comrades of the IEC Majority Tendency have proposed?

Without going into a detailed history of the international antiwar movement, it should be noted that large demonstrations have taken place around the world on numerous occasions since 1969, especially in response to major U. S. escalations. In almost every case these were spearheaded by student activists.

### *Yugoslavia*

A student upsurge in Yugoslavia in 1970 showed the interconnection between Vietnam solidarity actions and the struggle for socialist democracy in the deformed workers states. During the invasion of Cambodia a Yugoslav student leader circulated leaflets protesting the U. S. aggression and the Yugoslav government's welcoming of U. S. capital investments. He was later arrested for this act and for circulating an unauthorized newspaper. In October, 1970, when he was sentenced to 20 months in prison, thousands of students at the University of Belgrade went on strike for 10 days in protest.

### *Southeast Asia*

Even in the repressive conditions under the puppet dictatorships in Southeast Asia students have demonstrated against these governments and against U. S. aggression in Indochina. Many such actions have been reported in South Vietnamese cities. In Cambodia, thousands of high school and college students demonstrated in April, 1972, after cops shot several students. In March of this year Cambodian students joined demonstrations by striking teachers in Pnompenh.

A significant student movement has developed this spring in Thailand, and one of the students' demands is

for the closing down of the U. S. bases there, from which much of the continued bombing of Cambodia is conducted.

### *African liberation*

Students have led protests against other imperialist wars, as well. Portuguese students have demonstrated against Portugal's colonial wars in Africa. Demonstrations have also been held in other parts of Europe against Portuguese colonialism, some of which raised demands against their own government's complicity, including withdrawal from NATO. In the U. S., Black students were the main organizers of the large African Liberation Day demonstrations held in 1972 and 1973.

### *Europe*

The recent resurgence of student struggles across Europe—in Spain, Greece, Britain, Germany, Belgium, and France—shows that the advanced capitalist countries have not achieved any sort of immunity against the student revolt. These struggles *in Europe* point up the complete absurdity of the hypothesis of the "irreversible turn" advanced by the draft European perspectives document. The largest of these, in France, focused on the issue of the draft and the militarization of society.

A struggle around very similar issues developed in Belgium at the end of 1972 when a government plan that included abolishing student draft deferments was announced. That touched off mass mobilizations of high school students that involved over 175,000 students in actions in January 1973, including one march of 15,000 in Brussels.

The next month the French student movement began to explode in a series of mobilizations that, on the level of student actions, went beyond the May, 1968, events. The movement began among the high school students, demanding the repeal of the Debré law, the restoration of deferments, and their extension to all youth.

On March 22, the day of the first national action against the law, even the Ministry of Education had to admit that 70 to 80 percent of the high school students were on strike. A demonstration that day in Paris, even though it was banned by the police, drew over 100,000, and several marches in the provincial cities were over 10,000.

In March the university students joined in, linking to the draft issue the abolition of another government reform, the Fontanet decrees, that would drastically cut down the number of students who could get a regular university degree.

Next the movement was extended to the technical high schools, for the first time in France. On the next national day of mobilizations, over 300,000 high school, university, and technical school students took to the streets.

The power of the movement was so great that the French CP, which at first ignored the movement and later tried to split it by counterposing its student front group to the mass strike committees, was forced to recognize the students' democratically elected leaders and the autonomy of the students' strike organizations. This led to the massive April 9 united front demonstration of the students and both major trade union federations, the first such action since May, 1968. The march included contingents of immigrant workers from the Renault plant who were on



strike against the racist, discriminatory conditions they face.

One can imagine how the bureaucrats like Seguy—the head of the CGT and a member of the Political Bureau of the French CP—must have felt sitting down to negotiate a united action with student leaders the majority of whom were members of the Communist League!

One of the key features of this movement was its democratic organizational forms. Mass meetings in every high school, technical school, and university made the decisions about when to strike, when to march, etc., and elected representatives to city, regional and national coordinating bodies. Our comrades of the Communist League played the leading role in the upsurge right from the beginning and on every level. Indeed, in this struggle, the League's intervention was at variance with—and was far superior to—the position its leaders formally adopted in the debate on the youth resolution.

The French upsurge developed along the lines of the red university strategy. Democratic strike councils of students took control. They used the campus and high schools as bases to build support for their struggle. They reached out—very successfully—for support from other schools, the striking immigrant workers, and the trade unions. Their struggle, which began around specifically student issues, demonstrated a potential for truly massive mobilizations that linked up with other aspects of the class struggle.

How does the IEC Majority Tendency fit the 1973 French student struggles into the schema of the "irreversible turn"? Do they agree that this student upsurge confirmed the validity of the red university strategy? If not, what do they think it showed?

### *B. National oppression*

Since the youth radicalization document was drafted students have continued to be in the forefront of struggles against national oppression, which have emerged as an important aspect of the class struggle not only in the colonial world but in the advanced capitalist countries and of the anti-bureaucratic struggles in the workers states.

Opposition to national oppression is a central aspect of practically every student movement in the colonial world, and students have been a leading force in practically all national liberation struggles. The greatest explosion of such a movement since the 1969 World Congress (outside of Southeast Asia) was the national liberation upsurge in Bangladesh in the spring of 1971, during which the universities were centers of the nationalist struggle. The Pakistani government's recognition of the leading role of the students was shown by the fact that the schools were among the first places surrounded and shelled by Pakistani tanks at the outbreak of the civil war.

Another powerful movement that showed the importance of *students as students* in the struggle of the oppressed nations was the upsurge in the spring of 1972 in the Malagasy Republic. The Malagasy Republic won formal independence from France in 1960, but French social and economic domination continues. The universities are naturally central to the neo-colonial regime's plans to Gallicize the country. The students raised nationalist de-

mands to stop this process and instead to *Malagasyize* the educational system, that is, teach the true history, culture, and language of Malagasy.

These student actions won the support of major trade unions. Then on May 13 the army opened fire on a demonstration, killing at least 30 people. This triggered an 8-day general strike and massive popular uprising that toppled the government. The workers brought their own economic demands into the struggle, along with demands for democratic rights and freeing all political prisoners.

These and many other student protests that have taken place in the colonial world over the last few years have combined demands for national and social liberation with demands for democratic rights, university autonomy, and other issues. Some of the major ones have been in South Africa, Ethiopia, Iran, Morocco, Tunisia, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Trinidad, Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina. The especially important example of Egypt will be discussed later.

### *Advanced capitalist countries*

Students have been among the most active elements in the struggles of the oppressed nationalities within the advanced capitalist countries, as well. The *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document mentions the concept of the Black university as a specific application of the red university strategy to the Black struggle in the U. S.

The concept of the Black university was not first raised by the YSA; it arose out of the experiences of the Black student movement as a method for linking up the demands and actions of Black students with the needs of the entire Black community. This development further attests to the validity of the red university strategy. Moreover, this approach initiated by Black students has also been adopted by Chicano and Puerto Rican students in the U. S. in the course of mass nationalist struggles.

In Quebec, struggles against attempts to anglicize the schools have been among the largest nationalist mobilizations. The Québécois student movement has taken the lead in actions like the 1968-69 upsurge for a unilingual French school system and subsequent actions in defense of the French language, as well as opposition to the repressive War Measures Act in 1970 and solidarity with the massive workers' struggles over the past two years.

Time and again over the last five years student struggles among the oppressed nationalities in every part of the world have confirmed the value of the red university strategy. What position does the IEC Majority Tendency hold on the struggles of students of oppressed nationalities for control over educational facilities and for transforming these facilities into instruments to advance such nationalist struggles?

### *C. Democratic rights*

The struggle for political freedom and democratic rights, an important aspect of the class struggle, takes on burning urgency under repressive conditions in many colonial countries, more advanced capitalist countries like Spain and Greece, and in the anti-bureaucratic struggle in the workers states. Here, too, the student movement has often

been the first significant force to go into action initiating struggles to gain or restore democratic rights.

The universities were strongholds of resistance to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and despite the repression continue to be centers of opposition to the bureaucratic regime.

Black and white students in South Africa have helped raise the first massive challenge to the racist settler-colonialist regime there since the Sharpsville massacre in 1960. Student unrest dates back to at least May 1970, when it was reported that 300 students were arrested at a demonstration of about 2,000 protesting the jailing without trial of two Africans.

Then in May 1972, 20 Black students were expelled from the University of the North in Transvaal because of their antiracist activities. Other Black students went on strike in support of those expelled. White students from the University of Capetown held a support rally that was brutally attacked by the cops. In response to this repressive action, student protests exploded all across South Africa, including a demonstration of 10,000 in Capetown.

The government took a hard line against the students, arresting hundreds of them, but it was obviously shaken by the scope of the actions and the sympathy shown for them by other elements of the population. The student protests undoubtedly helped encourage the Black workers who were beginning to engage in illegal strikes demanding higher wages.

#### *Greece*

The powerful student demonstrations in Greece, in which our comrades have played an important role, have been the first mass actions against the dictatorship of the colonels.

The students raised the elementary democratic demand that they be allowed to elect their own student union leaders instead of having them appointed by the military.

The first small march on April 21, 1972, the fifth anniversary of the coup, was broken up by the cops, but more demonstrations broke out in open defiance of martial law. University students in Athens and Salonika went out on strike. They were joined by the technical high school students, who brought in their own demands. The movement began around a basic students' rights demand, but from the beginning it also had a broader political character.

At the beginning of 1973 an even bigger series of student actions erupted, again beginning around demands for university autonomy and more student control. The students also raised slogans like "Long Live Democracy," "Down with fascism" and "We want to be free."

#### *D. Right to an education*

The *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* resolution emphasizes the question of making higher education free and accessible to the masses of youth as an important focus of struggle by the student movement. The struggle to win free higher education for the working class and other oppressed and exploited layers of the population is not an insignificant aspect of the class struggle. Over the last five years this question has increasingly come to the fore

in struggles all over the world against technocratic so-called "reforms" of education, tuition increases, and various other measures that would limit access to a university education.

The Communist League Political Bureau's *Contribution to the Discussion* dismisses the slogan "university autonomy should be achieved or maintained inviolate" as "more than questionable." (p. 22) They write: "If it has a real meaning in the colonial countries, still it is hard to see what the content of this demand could be in the advanced capitalist countries: either a reformist content (that which the Faure reform gives to this slogan in France: autonomy permitting the adaptation to regional conditions, to local industries, etc.); or a conservative content: that of defense of the liberal bourgeois university (to maintain the autonomy 'inviolate')." (p. 22)

Does the Greek student struggle make it easier to see what the content of this demand could be? Or if not Greece, which one might argue is "exceptional" because of the military dictatorship, what about Britain? In March 1970, student struggles spread to one-third of the universities in Britain over the question of secret political files kept on students by school administrations. In spring 1972, there was a struggle over the attempt by the Tory government to take control of student union funds away from the students. Were these struggles around questions of autonomy and student control, around the political rights of students, "reformist" or "conservative"?

The capitalists in every country are compelled to "rationalize" higher education by increasing tuition costs, imposing greater restrictions on students, tying the university more closely to big business, and trying to direct more students into vocational or technical training that will simply prepare them to join the workforce, while denying them a rounded educational program. This trend flows from the worldwide capitalist economic problems, stiffening interimperialist competition, and the need of every national capitalist class to increase its rate of exploitation and cut down its social expenditures. It also fits in with the bourgeoisie's desire to regiment higher education more and forestall its tendency to produce radicalism.

#### *Belgium*

Last fall in Belgium a campaign initiated by our comrades against a discriminatory university "reform" program (the Claes-Hurez measures) involved university students in a series of national demonstrations, including a march of over 10,000 in Brussels. The Claes-Hurez measures would have tripled tuition costs, imposed a new series of entrance examinations, imposed new limitations on the number of times a student could repeat a course, and awarded far greater financial grants to the applied sciences than to the humanities. They would also have tied each university to an "industrial zone" for purposes of special research projects big businesses wanted.

Students in Ghent occupied a university building and used it as a center for mass meetings, production and distribution of leaflets, a press conference, and other measures to educate and mobilize people against the government measures.

This university student struggle helped inspire and was linked up with the high school student struggle against

the draft, and both provided models for the French student upsurge around very similar issues that developed a few months later.

#### *And around the world*

In Spain last year big mobilizations involving nearly 200,000 students developed against a new General Education Law that involved various changes in curriculum and examinations that were opposed by the students. In some cities these were the first mass antigovernment demonstrations since the 1930s.

Student protests broke out at 86 universities in Japan at the beginning of 1972 over tuition hikes. These reportedly included building occupations at six schools.

In the U. S. actions against tuition increases and cut-backs in aid to education have become an increasingly important part of the student movement.

In Canada and Quebec these issues have sparked major strikes, especially during the last school year.

In Britain a big fight has developed over the present system of student grants. Students are demanding an immediate increase in the level of all grants and the ending of various forms of discrimination in them. Actions have included rent strikes, cafeteria boycotts, rallies, demonstrations, and occupations. Thousands of students took part in a national day of mobilizations on February 21, 1973, and a national student strike on March 14, 1973.

Such issues are of concern not only to students in the advanced capitalist countries. After a massive student struggle in 1972 at the National University in Bogota, Colombia, the government felt it necessary to close down the campus for a semester. Students were protesting government measures that would cut down on the number of low-income students who could attend the university. University autonomy, student control, and an end to police repression on campus were also issues.

These events since the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document was written show that many key demands of the red university strategy—for free universal higher education; annual salary with an escalator clause for all students; control by students and faculty, as opposed to big business and the state, over curriculum, hiring and firing of faculty, etc.; expose and end the ties between big business and the university—take on added weight in many countries. Even if the comrades of the IEC Majority Tendency don't think students have an "interest" in fighting around these issues, hundreds of thousands of students all over the world have shown in action that they do.

## **IV. Dynamics of the student struggles**

In addition to locating the causes of the student revolt in the fundamental contradictions of capitalist society and showing that the issues raised by students are often central political questions of the class struggle, the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document makes a number of other generalizations about the dynamics of student struggles. These, too, have been confirmed by events.

### *A. The social weight of students has increased.*

The resolution cited statistics on the explosive expansion

of higher education and the number of students up to 1963-64. The latest UNESCO figures show this expansion has continued apace. From 1965 to 1969 the total number of students enrolled in higher education all over the world jumped from approximately 18 million to 24.4 million; the total in secondary education increased from 93.8 million to 110.2 million. (UNESCO figures do not include China, North Korea, or North Vietnam.)

From 1965 to 1969, enrollment in higher education increased at an annual rate of 6.2 percent in Europe; 8.3 percent in Africa (excluding the Arab states); 9.7 percent in North America; and 11.8 percent in Latin America.

### *B. The radicalization is being extended more and more from the universities into the high schools and technical schools.*

The unprecedented level of mobilization of high school and technical school students in Belgium and France this spring has already been pointed out. We should also recall the massive high school demonstrations around the Guiot affair in Paris in February 1971. These actions, held in defiance of a police ban, won the release of a high school student convicted for supposedly hitting a cop.

There were actions of tens of thousands of high school students in Quebec in 1969 and 1971 demanding a unilingual French Quebec.

In July 1971, mass high school demonstrations in Ethiopia protested a rise in bus fares and food prices, and 2,000 students were arrested. It's interesting to note that in the same month campuses in India were shut down after protests against bus fare hikes, and three months later, in October 1971, several thousand Black and Puerto Rican high school students demonstrated in New York City demanding the restoration of free bus-passes.

In May 1972, several thousand London high school students struck and demonstrated to protest compulsory wearing of uniforms, censorship of school magazines, beating of students, lack of student control, and the elimination of free school meals and milk.

In September 1972, over 5,000 high school students in cities across Australia demonstrated to demand an end to restrictive rules and corporal punishment, more money for education, more teachers, and equalization of educational opportunities.

In April 1971, police opened fire on Venezuelan high school students demonstrating for the reopening of the University of Caracas (which had been closed since October, 1970) and against the rising cost of living. The high school students battled the cops for several days, and over 800 people were reportedly arrested.

High school struggles have erupted over many of the same issues as college students' struggles, and the two have often been closely connected. In addition there have been actions around questions of specific concern to high school students. Everything you can say about the universities as an institution of class society leading to regimentation and alienation of the students goes double in the high schools. The tracking system—whatever form it may take in different countries—works to maintain class, national, and sexual social divisions and give students just enough education for their future job slot. Because of the high level of repression in the high schools, demands for elementary democratic freedoms often spark

major confrontations.

The struggles of high school students take on particular importance because of their close ties to the working-class communities and the high school students' future as workers, university students, or soldiers.

As the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document states: "At a certain point in the development of every revolutionary youth organization, its ability to organize, lead and win over decisive layers of high-school youth becomes a key test. Revolutionary-socialist youth organizations must take the lead in organizing the secondary-school youth, fighting with them for their rights and seeking to coordinate their activities with other sections of the anti-capitalist struggle." (p. 200)

*C. Student struggles have the power to affect major political developments, to trigger mass action by the working class, and to transmit revolutionary political ideas to other layers of the population.*

Vergeat and Delphin to the contrary, that is hardly a "stage" of the radicalization that is now over in Europe or anywhere else. Whatever specific issue may initially incite students to action, they quickly find themselves in a head-on confrontation with the ruling class or bureaucratic caste. Not a year has gone by since the 1969 world congress without impressive confirmation of this.

In fact, just one month after the world congress, student demonstrations broke out across Argentina. Police repression of these demonstrations was a key factor leading to the Cordobazo and Rosariazo, the first of the urban semi-insurrections that marked the resurgence of the mass movement and eventually led to the military dictatorship handing over power to the civilian Peronist regime. The issue over which the student protests began was an increase in prices in the university cafeterias.

Other student and youth struggles that have led to major political and social crises include the May 1970, U. S. antiwar upsurge; the Black Power revolt in Trinidad in 1970; and the mass struggle in response to government repression in Sri Lanka in 1971.

### *Egypt*

The actions of the Egyptian students in the past two years have been particularly significant, illustrating the connection between student questions and the broader class struggle, and the interrelations between democratic, anti-imperialist, and anticapitalist demands as aspects of one struggle.

The Egyptian students' mobilizations began in January 1972, shortly after Sadat's speech trying to explain why the "year of decision" (1971) had passed without any decisive action against Israel. They occupied Cairo University and held mass decision-making meetings in its Nasser amphitheater. Thousands of students, including representatives from other schools in the area, participated in these meetings.

The Egyptian students saw through the rhetoric Sadat used about "mobilizing the home front" to cover up his policies of repression and exploitation, and they were able to answer him by pointing to the measures that could really prepare for a struggle against the Zionist aggressors.

Their demands included: military training for students; nationalization of U. S. interests; rejection of the 1967 UN resolution and the Rogers plan; lift press censorship; free expression on campus; support for striking steelworkers; against the Jordanian and Iranian governments; free Palestinian political prisoners; support to the Palestinian resistance organizations and recognize the right of students to join them.

The students tried to reach out to other sectors of the population, especially the workers. Several union leaders declared their support. When the students held a march from the campus to the center of Cairo for a mass rally, the army attacked, dispersing the demonstration and arresting over 1,000 students. The students were militarily defeated for the time being, but they won the right to greater freedom of political activity on campus. They were able to hold meetings on campus, publish an "underground" press, and plaster up wallposters (an important means of expression because of the press censorship).

During 1972 unrest spread among other parts of the population. Towards the end of the year the regime decided to crack down. It violated the earlier agreement by beginning to arrest Palestinian and leftwing students. As the confrontation developed in January 1973, students again occupied the Nasser amphitheater, and three universities in Cairo were shut down by the student strike. Demonstrations were also reported in Alexandria and Helwan.

On January 3, 5,000 students began a march from campus into the city and were viciously attacked by police. The government shut down the universities for a month, and only reopened them under police guard, with many new restrictions on campus political activity.

Student resistance continued, though, with the publication of a daily newspaper, a hunger strike by some of the arrested students, and a demonstration of 1,500 at Cairo University on February 21, 1973.

## **V. The 'irreversible turn' of the 'new mass vanguard' vs. the method of the Transitional Program**

At an earlier point in the youth radicalization the "New Left" theories were prominent. They held that the workers in the advanced countries were hopelessly conservatized and could not be a force for progressive social change. The new rise of workers struggles heralded by May-June '68 in France discredited the New Left errors among a wide layer of radical youth.

In addition to providing new openings for revolutionary Marxists to intervene in the labor movement, the deepening workers struggles brought about an advance in political consciousness in the student movement and provided even better opportunities for Marxists there to explain the revolutionary potential of the working class and how students could maximize their effectiveness by having an orientation toward linking up their struggles with those of the working class.

### *'Irreversible turn'*

However, some student radicals reacted to the rise in working class action by simply turning their earlier po-

litical error on its head: they now denied that student struggles had much importance, and turned away from the burning political issues that initially radicalized them, like the Vietnam war. They adopted a workerist or economist outlook that counterposed workers' struggles around wage and job issues to broad political and social questions such as imperialist war, national oppression, or the oppression of women. For example, instead of attempting to bring masses of workers into struggle against the Vietnam war, they thought that organizing mass demonstrations against imperialist aggression in Indochina represented a "lower level" of political consciousness that they had now gone beyond.

The critics of the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document evidently mistook this contradictory development, part of which was a step backward into apolitical economism on the part of one layer of student radicals for an "irreversible turn . . . everywhere in the world." Even worse, instead of rejecting this error and providing a correct and balanced understanding of both the strengths and weaknesses of the student movement, these comrades have consistently echoed this argument.

Thus the IEC Majority European resolution makes this assertion about the radicalized students:

"After May 1968 and, more generally, after the revival of workers' struggles throughout Europe, an irreversible turn has taken place in this milieu everywhere in the world. These people are adopting positions today primarily in function of intervening in workers' struggles and by the perspectives of these struggles. In view of the continual renewal of the student population, and in view of the continuing explosion on campuses, it remains both possible and necessary to politicalize younger levies by means of anti-imperialist propaganda and action, above all in periods of ebb in workers' struggles. Demands peculiar to the university and high-school student milieu continue to provide a ferment of agitation and organization that can radicalize the less politicalized layers. . . ." (p. 19)

While the authors of the IEC Majority's European resolution cannot ignore that student struggles are still going on, they repeat the fundamental errors used to justify adaptation to workerist pressures: they mechanistically separate and counterpose workers' struggles, anti-imperialist struggles, and struggles around "demands peculiar to the university and high-school student milieu," and they relegate anti-imperialist struggles to the "younger levies" ("above all in periods of ebb in workers' struggles") and student issues to the "less politicalized layers."

But revolutionary Marxists, i.e., the "most politicized layer," must be in the forefront of struggles on such questions, recognizing them as important in their own right and seeing how they can advance the politicization and mobilization of the working class, not standing on the sidelines explaining how our consciousness has "gone beyond" such petty concerns.

Lenin put it this way, in *What Is To Be Done*: "The Social-Democrat's ideal should not be the trade-union secretary, but the *tribune of the people*, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalize all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able

to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth *before all* his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for *all* and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat. . . ." (*Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 423.)

"We must train our Social-Democratic practical workers to become political leaders, able to guide all the manifestations of this all-round struggle, able at the right time to 'dictate a positive program of action' for the aroused students, the discontented Zemstvo people, the incensed religious sects, the offended elementary school teachers, etc. etc." (p. 428)

### "New mass vanguard"

Underlying the European resolution's errors on the student movement is the concept of the "new mass vanguard." The resolution says our central task is to win hegemony within this "new mass vanguard," and proposes "organizing national political campaigns on carefully chosen issues that correspond to the concerns of the vanguard, do not run against the current of mass struggles, and offer a chance for demonstrating a capacity for effective initiative. . . ." (p. 24)

As Mary-Alice Waters explained in her criticism of the European resolution, this "new mass vanguard" is an abstraction that obscures rather than clarifies the situation we face and our tasks. Into the "new mass vanguard" have been dissolved the student movement, the former student radicals of the 1960s, the small but growing layer of radicalized young workers, and our ultraleft, sectarian, anarchist, Maoist, and some left-Social-Democratic opponents. Different problems and different tasks are posed in dealing with each of these different components of the "new mass vanguard."

Still more dangerous is the concept of orienting our work toward the "concerns of the vanguard." Our starting point is *not* the "concerns of the vanguard," but the objective interests of the working masses. In any particular struggle we formulate our demands and strategy to organize and mobilize the broadest possible forces on a principled basis, in order to win concrete demands in the interests of the masses, increase their confidence in their own power, and heighten their political consciousness through struggle. To orient toward the "concerns of the vanguard" first—avoiding only the positively retrograde motion of running "against the current of mass struggles" (!)—leads to adaptationism and disorientation.

Adaptation to ultraleft currents in the "new mass vanguard" after 1968 led the leadership of the European sections of the Fourth International to abstain almost completely from organizing mass actions against the Vietnam war from 1968 until 1972, when a partial correction was made.

Various political rationales were advanced to justify this abstention, ranging from acceptance of the imperialists' claim that the war was winding down (naturally under the left cover of saying the Vietnamese had already won) to Comrade Germain's explanation at the 1969 IEC that revolutionists outside the U. S. can contribute nothing to the immediate defense of the Vietnamese revolution short of making the socialist revolution in their own countries.

But underlying every rationale was the view that Euro-

pean revolutionists, at least, have outgrown the "anti-imperialist stage" of the radicalization and moved on to the "real thing," workers struggles, the latter seen as counterposed to the former.

When the so-called "vanguard" in Europe turned their backs on defense of the Vietnamese revolution, it would have been better if the leadership of the European sections, instead of tail-ending their abstention and providing a phony "Marxist" cover-up for it, had kept on proclaiming to the vanguard and the masses alike that Vietnam was the touchstone of world politics and trying to mobilize as many people as possible in real *mass action* to defend the Vietnamese.

### *Workers struggles and student struggles*

Their adaptation to workerist currents in the "vanguard" also led the comrades who reject the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document to completely misread the effect of a rise in workers' struggles on the student movement and predict a downturn in importance of actions other than those directly related to narrowly-defined "workers' issues."

An upsurge of the working class does not mean that other oppressed groups will step back in deference to its power. Quite the contrary. An upsurge of the working class inspires and spurs on others who have an interest in fighting capitalism. It stirs their feelings of revolt and hatred against their oppressors. It gives them renewed courage and a sense of power and breaks down their hesitations about fighting back.

In the advanced capitalist countries after World War II the prolonged period of capitalist expansion led to a temporary quiescence of the working class. Other sectors, such as the students, radicalized and moved into action before the workers.

There can be no doubt that, as the working class does radicalize, its actions will be decisive in orienting and heading its allies in other layers of the population. But there is no basis or reality for forecasting that, as big workers' struggles unfold, the radicalized students, women, oppressed nationalities, layers of the petty-bourgeoisie or other groups will lose interest in fighting for demands of specific concern to them.

The analyses of the student movement by the Communist League and IMG leaders note that the relative quiescence of the working class in the advanced countries was a factor in the political situation in which the student movement of the 1960s arose—one of the "coordinates." That is certainly true. But one of their key theoretical errors lies in seeing this quiescence of working class struggles as a *pre-condition* for the rise of student struggles, that is, as one of the factors that *caused* or at least *made possible* the development of the student movement.

The lack of mass working-class political action had an effect on the student movement, but it was just the opposite effect: it was a *brake* to the development of student struggles (because of the limitations on the social power of students acting alone) and it had a *negative* effect on the political consciousness of radicalized students. It made them more susceptible to all kinds of supposed shortcuts to winning social change, in particular to the anti-Marxist New Left errors of the 1960s.

The student movement arose, not because of the *downturn*

in the class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries, but because of the *upsurge* in the class struggle on a world scale, especially in the colonial countries. An upsurge in working class action in the advanced capitalist countries, far from destroying the student movement, laid the basis for new upswings in the student movement. Moreover, it increased the power of the students' actions by facilitating their integration and coordination with the workers' movement, and it increased the opportunities for revolutionary Marxists to win students to a correct political perspective. This has been confirmed by the scope of the student radicalization and the growth of the Fourth International since 1968—a growth that has come primarily from our ability to intervene in and lead the student movement.

But evidently the Communist League and the IMG, beginning from the correct observation that the quiescence of the working class led some students to *subjectively* overestimate their political power, reached the false conclusion that a working-class upsurge would undercut the *objective* basis for the existence of the student movement. In reality so long as the contradictions that produced the student movement in the first place have not been resolved, the objective basis for the student movement will exist.

The student movement is *both* dependent on and independent of the workers movement. Students have shown a capacity for independent struggle, not waiting for the working class to move. But of course the student movement is ultimately dependent on the workers movement because in the long run the only solution to the problems of students, women, and all oppressed and exploited layers of society is to struggle alongside the working class to bring about a socialist revolution.

Our conclusion is not that revolutionary Marxists should turn their backs on the student movement and other movements as too "low level" or too "peripheral" to the class struggle, but rather that revolutionaries must support and participate in the movements of all oppressed sectors, providing leadership and directing them towards the working class in order to *forge that connection in struggle*.

That is what the red university strategy is all about. It is an attempt to apply the method of the Transitional Program to answer the questions posed by the student revolt: What kind of leadership does it need? How can the problems of students be resolved? How can students be effective in the struggle for social change?

## **VI. Critiques of the red university strategy**

### *Transitional programs for sectors?*

One reason that has been given for rejecting the red university strategy is the specter of "transitional programs for sectors." The IMG *Perspectives Document* adopted in 1972 says that this is the original methodological sin of the youth radicalization document:

"There is however an even deeper level to which one can pursue the question of transitional programmes 'for' sectors. Quite clearly it is impossible for a sector e.g. women, students, etc. to overthrow capitalism. In short *if you hold that it is possible to have a transitional programme for 'sectors' then you are also forced to hold that it is possible to have a transitional programme which does not overthrow capitalism*. The tendency are of course

quite explicit about this in their theory of 'democratic and transitional demands.'" (p. 24, emphasis in original)

"What in fact happens with the methodology of the [United Secretariat document, (a) reformist programmes (b) talking to sectors only as the problem of sectors and in short a tendency to *adapt* to various petty-bourgeois movements." (p. 25) [The authors of the IMG resolution mistakenly refer to the youth radicalization document as "the SWP document."]

Although Comrade Germain may not agree with all the revisions of the Transitional Program in the 1972 IMG resolution, in his contribution *In Defence of Leninism* he felt compelled to raise this question by insinuation: "The whole idea of 'transitional programmes' for sectors of the masses must at least be submitted to a critical discussion, as the very nature of the Transitional Programme lies in its function to bring the masses through their own experience to a *single* conclusion: the need to struggle for power, to make a socialist revolution." (*International Internal Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. X, No. 4, p. 46)

This false line of argument does not help advance the real discussion.

First, does the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document advocate a separate transitional program for youth or students divorced from the Transitional Program as a whole? Does it advocate bringing youth to some conclusion other than the need for socialist revolution? The document says:

"The student struggles cannot be isolated from, or counterposed to, the political issues arising out of the world class struggle as a whole. Neither can the struggle for the red university be isolated from the task of building a "red" youth organization with links to a "red" Leninist party. Similarly, the program of democratic and transitional demands arising from student struggles is organically linked to the rest of the transitional program as outlined in the founding document and developed since then. The program of demands for the student movement represents a concrete application of the general approach outlined in *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*.

"The ultimate objective of the Fourth International is to link the student struggles with the struggles of the workers and national minorities at their present levels of development and to orient them toward a combined drive for state power, bringing into the struggle all the forces opposed to the capitalist or bureaucratic regimes." (p. 196)

So the resolution itself clearly explains that it is not separate from the Transitional Program. It is an addition to the Transitional Program, a supplement dealing with the problems of a distinct social layer, just as the program as drafted in 1938 contains sections that outline demands for various sectors. It is not a program for youth to take power, but an attempt to elaborate demands that will combine, or integrate, the struggles of students and youth into the struggle of the working class for power.

Second, is it incorrect—since only the working class can take state power away from the bourgeoisie—to work out a program of immediate, democratic and transitional demands to guide and advance the struggles of some other

sector of the oppressed?

In the Transitional Program itself Trotsky pointed out that the demands of all layers of the oppressed—not only of the working class—can only be solved through socialism. He notes that "even every serious demand of the petty bourgeoisie inevitably reaches beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and of the bourgeois state." (*The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, p. 75)

Later on Trotsky writes: "The sections of the Fourth International should work out with all possible concreteness a program of transitional demands concerning the peasants and the urban petty bourgeoisie and conformable to the conditions of each country. The advanced workers should learn to give clear and concrete answers to the questions put by their future allies." (p. 86)

That is exactly what the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document attempts to do for the new generation of rebelling youth and students. Not too long ago Comrade Mandel thought this a worthwhile project to undertake. In a major speech in September, 1968, he explained that "It is necessary to find some transitional slogans for university problems just as Marxists have tried to find transitional slogans for other social movements in whatever sector these come to life." (*The Revolutionary Student Movement: Theory and Practice*, Pathfinder Press, 1971, p. 8). And, of course, the United Secretariat *adopted* the document, early in 1969.

#### *Student powerism*

In many of their arguments, the comrades who reject the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document appear to be setting up a straw target of "student powerism" to polemicize against. We've seen deviations like that in the U.S., of course. At one time, in reaction to the rise of Black nationalist consciousness, some currents in SDS tried to figure out exactly what the "student interests" were, to make them a focus of a "student power" movement modeled after the Black power movement. They ended up counterposing non-existent student movements around dorm conditions, cafeteria prices, etc., to the antiwar movement, which was in reality the major issue before the student movement.

But the entire *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* resolution is a sustained polemic *against* just those narrow "student power" concepts. It argues *against* the reformist view that students should only be concerned with issues like grades, courses, quality of education, etc. This is what the document says:

"The revolutionary youth vanguard, to be effective, must put forward a program that transcends the campus in its goal, but at the same time includes it; that connects student demands with the broader demands of the class struggle on a national and international scale, that shows students how their own demands relate to these bigger struggles, are an integral part of them, and can help to advance them. The program put forward by the revolutionary youth must tie together the long-range perspectives and daily work of a revolutionist in the school arena. The program put forward by the revolutionary youth is one that mobilizes for struggle around the basic issues of the world class struggle *and* the needs of the student population itself." (p. 192)

## Propagandist

It is hard to understand how the charge of "student powerism" could be raised against the red university strategy by anyone who has read the resolution. The same could be said of the charge that the resolution advocates a "propagandist" orientation of standing on the sidelines of the class struggle.

For example, the *Contribution to the Discussion* by the Communist League Political Bureau cites the following sentence from the resolution: "The sections of the Fourth International are as yet too small to lead the masses in their own name and under their own banner in a decisive struggle for power. Their work has a preparatory and predominantly propagandistic character involving limited actions." (p. 202) The Communist League Political Bureau goes on to say, "We think that precisely this preparatory and 'mainly propagandistic' work becomes insufficient in relation to the size of the tasks in the coming period; that it is necessary and possible, even with limited forces, to take the initiative in action and in revolutionary mass agitation, at least in areas concerning the youth." (p. 21)

Later the French comrades write that the "main objection" to the red university strategy "is that it perpetuates the relationship of the vanguard to the mass movement as an exterior force." (p. 21)

In the first place, the resolution's assertion that the sections of the Fourth International are not yet strong enough to lead the masses in a decisive struggle for power, and that their work has a preparatory and predominantly propagandistic character, was true in 1969 and is true today. To think otherwise would be to delude ourselves dangerously. But does that imply that we should not be involved in struggles and that we are "exterior" to the mass movement? Are propaganda and action counterposed to each other, mutually exclusive? Not at all.

The entire resolution is a program for *active intervention and participation* in the struggles of youth around whatever questions may arise. It states: "No tendency can hope to root itself in and gain political leadership of the radical youth that does not fully and audaciously participate in the front lines of its ongoing struggles, whatever shortcomings they may have. . . . The Trotskyist youth must set the example in practice, as well as in theoretical concepts and political pronouncements." (p. 202)

It is precisely the fact that our opportunities to lead in action are so great among the students and youth—greater, in most countries today, than our opportunities to lead mass workers struggles—that a correct orientation to youth work is so important for the Fourth International.

## Reformist

The comrades who reject the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document imply that it puts forward a reformist program. Bensaïd and Scalabrino state: "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." (p. 19)

Since, as pointed out, the red university strategy is not a strategy for "student power" "in isolation from the overall situation in the class struggle," this polemic is not directed against the line of the resolution.

The Communist League Political Bureau's *Contribution to the Discussion* says: "In fact, as a catalog of demands, the program proposed by the document only juxtaposes bourgeois-democratic demands (on civil liberties) with university demands whose formulation is obscure when it is not openly reformist. . . .

"Indeed, this juxtaposition of democratic themes and university demands doesn't have much that is transitional about it."

They miss the transitional essence of the red university document, which is not a "catalog" but a *strategy* of propaganda, agitation and action: *against* the role of the university as an instrument of capitalist class rule; *towards* the university that serves the interests of the working class and the oppressed, a university that can only be established through a socialist revolution; a strategy that incorporates *full support* to struggles for those democratic demands which in this epoch challenge any of the prerogatives of capitalist rule, and includes a series of immediate student demands; a strategy that *links together* student struggles with the broader economic, political and social struggles of the working masses by fighting to alter the role of the university in capitalist society and transform it into an ally of the oppressed nationalities and toiling masses.

Many individual demands in the worldwide youth radicalization document clearly have a transitional character. For example, the demand for "An annual salary for all students adequate to their needs and safeguarded against inflation by automatic compensating increases," is linked to the demand "A university education for everyone who wants one, the full expense to be underwritten by the government." (p. 197) These demands, or other specific formulations of them adapted to a particular situation, speak to the immediate interests of students and the working class. They have been the focus of mass struggles in several countries. But the thrust of these demands is *against* the capitalist organization of education as a privilege for which the student and the student's family must pay, *towards* the socialist organization of education as a right made freely available to the entire working class.

The contributions by the French comrades imply that it is reformist to struggle for specifically student demands. Such an assertion is utterly false and "doesn't have much that is transitional about it."

Is it necessary to remind the comrades of the Communist League that what they call bourgeois-democratic demands are neither reformist nor revolutionary in and of themselves? It depends on how they are fought for and under what circumstances.

What distinguishes the revolutionist from the reformist in the student movement is not that the one struggles for democratic demands while the other explains the need for socialism. The campus reformists *stand in the way* of any effective struggle even for democratic and immediate demands because they oppose use of proletarian methods of struggle—strikes, demonstrations, mobilizing the masses—and they oppose connecting the campus ques-



tions with the broader class struggle in ways that go beyond their outlook of reforming capitalism. Consistent struggle for demands like wage increases, extension of free education, an end to discriminatory legislation—is a characteristic of revolutionists, not reformists. We aspire to lead *all* the progressive struggles of students, including those aimed at winning reforms that will alleviate their immediate needs, and show that the best way to win these is by mobilizing masses of students, raising clearly formulated demands against the (capitalist) university administration and the (capitalist) government, and linking the student struggles with the struggles of the working class and oppressed nationalities, as part of our overall strategy for revolutions.

As the resolution points out: "many of today's student struggles begin over the most elementary issues such as the right of free speech. However, they tend to develop beyond this level quite rapidly, going beyond the campus, beyond the framework of democratic freedoms . . . reaching into the economic area and bringing up problems that can actually be solved only under a socialist system." (p. 196)

Participation in actions for the immediate concerns of students is essential for revolutionaries to win the leadership of the masses of students *away from* the reformists. To abstain from actions for immediate demands, no matter what left-sounding justification may be offered, is to leave the field open to the reformists to *pretend* to be leading a consistent fight for students' immediate interests. With that approach you can never break the stranglehold of reformism.

Unless revolutionaries are right in the center of the day-to-day struggles of students, *leading them in action* towards a link-up with the working class, they are upholding not the Marxist program but a sectarian caricature of it.

### *One alternative to the red university*

Just such a sectarian caricature is provided by the IMG's 1972 *Document on Student Work*. Its central thesis seems to be that since students alone do not have the power to make a socialist revolution, students as students are not in a position to do much of anything.

In addressing itself to the question of what revolutionaries can do in the student field, the document puts forward three types of activity. First is organizing support for workers' struggles. Second is that "students can be mobilised to create the initial base for a campaign aimed at the working class. . . . This is not to be seen primarily in terms of exemplary actions but in the sheer amounts of labour necessary for leaflets, public meetings and so on." (p. 7)

Third comes the question of student struggles themselves. The IMG says: "the contradictions in the colleges find their genesis and resolution outside of the educational context. There cannot be socialism in one college. Thus there are only two ways of resolving the contradiction. Either an acquiescence to the technocratic reorientation or to smash the capitalist relations of production. This latter cannot be accomplished without the power of the working class. Thus a strategy *based* on some student power becomes either reformist in practice . . . or utopian and confrontationist . . . or it may just be a demand for the destruction of the college." (pp. 7-8)

The sectarian blindness that sees the only alternatives

as "acquiescence" or "to smash the capitalist relations of production" makes it impossible ever to mobilize the masses, the only force capable of smashing the capitalist relations of production in reality and not just on paper.

The IMG's approach views students simply as an amorphous mass of human beings who for some unknown reason happen to be radicalizing and who may be of some use running off leaflets, but who *as students* are powerless.

Here again the comrades have forgotten that the university is an institution of class rule. This means that students as students *do* have a role to play, by fighting to wrest control over the university away from the ruling class and use it instead to further the interests of the oppressed. It is in that context that the demand for student-faculty control is raised as part of the red university strategy.

### *Lenin on student struggles and reformism*

In Russia in 1908, in the period of reaction following the defeat of the 1905 revolution, one of the first signs of renewed resistance to the autocracy was the development of opposition movements among the students. Students in Russia at that time were almost wholly bourgeois or petty-bourgeois in social composition.

In September 1908, students in St. Petersburg called a strike around the question of university "autonomy." Surely Lenin must have condemned such a movement of petty-bourgeois students around a democratic demand—a student demand, at that—as a reformist diversion! In fact that was not Lenin's attitude. Writing on "The Student Movement and the Present Political Situation" in October 1908, Lenin said:

". . . will it not be a debasement of the aims of Social-Democracy if it decides that it is necessary to support the academic struggle in some way or other?

"Here and there, apparently, Social-Democratic students are putting this question. At any rate, our editorial board has received a letter from a group of Social-Democratic students which says, among other things:

"On September 13 a meeting of the students of St. Petersburg University resolved to call upon students for an all-Russian student strike, the reason given for this appeal being the aggressive tactics pursued by Schwartz. The platform of the strike is an academic one, and the meeting even welcomes the "first steps" of the Moscow and St. Petersburg Professorial Councils in the struggle for autonomy. We are puzzled by the academic platform put forward at the St. Petersburg meeting, and consider it objectionable in present conditions, because it cannot unite the students for an active struggle on a broad front. We envisage student action only as one co-ordinated with general political action, and in no case apart from it. The elements capable of uniting the students are lacking. In view of this we are against academic action."

Lenin responded: "The mistake which the authors of the letter are making is of much greater political importance than may appear at first sight, because their argument, strictly speaking, touches upon a theme which is incomparably more broad and important than the question of taking part in this particular strike.

"We envisage student action only as one co-ordinated

with general political action. In view of this we are against academic action.'

"Such an argument is radically wrong. The revolutionary slogan—to work towards co-ordinated political action of the students and the proletariat, etc.—here ceases to be a live guidance for many-sided militant agitation on a broadening basis and becomes a lifeless dogma, mechanically applied to different stages of different forms of the movement. It is not sufficient merely to proclaim political co-ordinated action, repeating the 'last word' in lessons of the revolution. One must *be able* to agitate for political action, *making use* of all possibilities, all conditions and, first and foremost, all mass conflicts between advanced elements, whatever they are, and the auto-cracy. It is not of course a question of us dividing every student movement beforehand into compulsory 'stages,' and making sure that each stage is properly gone through, out of fear of switching over to 'untimely' political actions, etc. Such a view would be the most harmful pedantry, and would lead only to an opportunist policy. But just as harmful is the opposite mistake, when people refuse to reckon with the actual situation that has arisen and the actual conditions of the particular mass movement, because of a slogan misinterpreted as unchangeable. Such an application of a slogan inevitably degenerates into revolutionary phrase-mongering." (*Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 214-215)

More than 50 years later, when student struggles are exploding all over the world around fundamental political questions and when in many countries the student population is increasingly working class in composition, we are solemnly warned that struggles for student control are "thoroughly reformist." Is this anything other than the "revolutionary phrase-mongering" Lenin condemned?

## VII. Revolutionary-socialist youth organizations

The resolution on European perspectives adopted by the IEC Majority Tendency rejects the perspective of building Trotskyist youth organizations. This is one of the most important practical divergences between the line of the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document and the work of the European sections of the Fourth International today. The degree to which some of the European sections participate in and provide leadership for the struggles arising out of the youth radicalization is far greater than the European document reflects, but the lack of youth organizations means these sections are proceeding empirically and are not making the maximum possible gains out of this work.

The grounds that have been offered at one time or another for not building youth organizations are a confused and contradictory patchwork of rationalizations.

For example, the IMG 1972 *Perspectives Document*, in explaining why it was necessary to get rid of the Spartacus League, says: "a cadre youth organization only made sense in terms of a rapidly expanding political *movement* in which rapid growth of the organization would occur. . . . The S. L. type organisation therefore was premised on a major possibility of expansion in the universities from which a cadre could be gained to intervene amongst young workers. The possibility of such a dynamic as

we have analysed many times did not exist by 1970 because of the upsurge in the workers movement." (p. 10)

I don't know whether in light of the recent upsurges in the student movement the comrades of the IMG now feel that youth organizations are timely and appropriate. But the perspective of youth organizations outlined in the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document is not based on the conjunctural ups and downs of the level of student struggles. The logic of that would be to form and dissolve youth organizations every couple of years or even every few months, given the volatility of the student movement. The document explains that the need for revolutionary youth organizations is based on the social and political analysis of the student movement and the world situation in which it is developing. It flows from the character of the international youth radicalization as a significant feature of world politics for the foreseeable future.

In fact, the ups and downs of the student movement, and the rapid turnover of the student population, make it all the more important to have a revolutionary youth organization. The revolutionary youth organization is the historical memory of the student movement. It draws the lessons of past struggles and represents the highest political consciousness of the movement.

### *The critical threshold*

The view presented in the *Preparatory Text* and the IEC Majority's European resolution is that revolutionary youth organizations like the JCR in France and the JGS in Belgium were just a temporary phase in the reconstruction of sections of the Fourth International. Now, however, our task is to win hegemony in the "new mass vanguard" and begin to establish a base in the working class, so we can't spare the forces to build youth organizations until we have passed the "critical threshold."

It is ironic that the European resolution recognizes that youth organizations were the vehicle through which fresh forces were won to the Fourth International in Europe at a time when most sections were moribund, but goes on to claim that now that the sections are stronger—they are too weak to build youth organizations!

The comrades who oppose building youth organizations today seem to be saying that, while we did win some members on campus in the past, now that we are a more serious organization, we can relegate student work to the background and turn our attention to the working class.

The *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document does not see the importance of youth work simply in terms of recruiting some activists who can rapidly be pulled off campus and sent to the factories. It points to two reasons why a central task of revolutionary parties at this juncture is to participate in and win leadership of the struggles of the youth.

First, because of the objective role these struggles are playing in advancing the world revolution, that is, their objective importance in the class struggle.

Second, because of the extraordinary impact our relatively small forces can make in this arena. The youth and student struggles have developed outside the control of the Stalinist and Social-Democratic bureaucracies; the relationship of forces is more favorable to the revolu-

tionary Marxists. We can often win the leadership of significant student movements, helping to orient them in a revolutionary direction and linking them up with working class struggles. In this way our small forces can often play an objectively important role in real political struggles, recruit rapidly, and gain valuable experience in leading mass struggles. From the ranks of these youth will come many key leaders of future struggles of the working class. We also help establish ourselves as a serious political force that will be attractive to radicalizing workers.

The document in no way counterposes political intervention in the student milieu to other work by the revolutionary party. It does not say we should do student work instead of trade union work. Only the opponents of the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document set up that kind of dichotomy.

We agree with the arguments advanced by the comrades of the Communist League leadership that they are only able to recruit students because they are showing in practice that they are seriously trying to build a revolutionary party with a base in the working class. That is the basis on which serious radical students join the YSA, too. But such an assertion in no way settles questions of political line concerning *how* to orient the totality of our forces, *how* to conduct our trade union and factory work, or *how* to intervene in the student movement. We think the European perspectives document projects an incorrect political line for student work: an underestimation of the importance of student struggles, a rejection of the red university strategy for intervention in the student milieu, and opposition to building revolutionary Marxist youth organizations.

The working class is the only force capable of taking power and destroying capitalism, and only a mass Leninist party that is proletarian in program and composition can lead the socialist revolution. But pointing to these elementary Marxist principles is not a refutation of the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document, which is precisely a program for linking student struggles to the power of the working class. Nor is it justification for not building Trotskyist youth groups, which are vehicles for winning youth to the Leninist program and the Leninist party.

Youth and student work today provides one of the most favorable arenas where the Fourth International can lead in action and recruit new forces. Winning and assimilating the best of the rebel youth is the road to strengthening the sections of the Fourth International *now*, not a task that can be deferred until after we cross the "critical threshold."

*Where is the threat to the program?*

The IEC Majority Tendency's European resolution warns against the dangers that could be posed by a youth organization rapidly recruiting too many petty-bourgeois students. These students might transmit alien class pressures into the Fourth International, which could run the risk of being "caught up in a sectarian (or spontan  ist) tendency to underestimate and misjudge the organized workers movement." (p. 23) Certainly the student radicals are liable to many political weaknesses, including not only underestimation of the working class but also ultra-

left workerism, substitution of the actions of a small "vanguard" group for actions of the masses, extending even to terrorism, and susceptibility to reformism.

The *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document points to how we can deal with these problems: "Competing with, and systematic polemicizing against these various opponent currents is an essential part of winning the best elements to the banner of revolutionary Marxism." (p. 190)

It is ironic that the IEC Majority comrades are afraid of the pressures on our program that might result from recruiting too many students on the basis of a Trotskyist program into a Trotskyist youth organization where they could be educated and trained—but they were perfectly confident about accepting the Maoist-Castroist PRT (Combatiente) as the official section of the Fourth International in Argentina and then refraining for four years from discussing political differences with them!

As Comrade Waters pointed out in her criticism of the European resolution: "If we did not believe that many revolutionary-minded students could be won to the program of Marxism we would have to throw out 90 percent of all the recruitment the Fourth International has done in the last decade and start over again. The only guarantee of the political firmness and revolutionary character of the Fourth International lies in uncompromising programmatic clarity—not in refusing to build a youth organization so as to avoid the 'dangers' of student recruitment." (IIDB, Vol. X, No. 3, p. 18)

*Youth and party*

The IEC Majority European resolution warns us against building "hybrid revolutionary youth organizations which, in certain contexts and in view of the relationship of forces, would continue to function as substitutes for adult revolutionary organizations. . . ." (p. 23) No one in the Fourth International, to my knowledge, has ever advocated building "hybrid" youth organizations, whatever that means. Nor does anyone propose that youth organizations function as substitutes for revolutionary parties.

Indeed, the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document clearly states: "Work among the youth is not an end in itself. It reaches fruition in the impetus given to the construction or reinforcement of the revolutionary parties that will be capable of leading the working class to victory. The sections of the Fourth International are as yet too small to lead the masses in their own name and under their own banner in a decisive struggle for power. Their work has a preparatory and predominantly propagandistic character involving limited actions.

"Their task now is to win and educate decisive numbers of the radical youth in order to equip them for the great task of winning leadership of the revolutionary elements among the working masses. To fulfill that function adequately, the youth recruits must thoroughly assimilate the organizational concepts of Bolshevism and its methods of constructing politically homogeneous and democratically centralized parties. The construction of such parties in the struggles that are erupting is the only means of overcoming the crisis of leadership which is the central contradiction of our epoch." (pp. 202-203) (When placed in its full context, it becomes obvious that the sentence referring to "propagandistic" work means just the opposite

of the interpretation given to it by the Communist League leaders.)

We can only add that the admittedly difficult problems of allocating our limited forces among the many opportunities we face, determining the precise division of cadres and tasks between the youth group and the party, etc., can only be solved *politically*. Refusing to face these problems by the organizational expedient of not having a youth organization can only perpetuate our weakness and lead to missed opportunities.

The IEC Majority European resolution's use of the term "adult revolutionary organization" could also lead to confusion. The youth organization is not distinguished from the party simply on the basis that the former is for youth and the latter for "adults." Youth should be recruited to the party as soon as they have reached the required level of political understanding and commitment, and young people should play an important role in the party. One key aspect of the importance of the youth organization is that it provides a training ground for the development of party cadres. The role of the youth organization is spelled out in the *Worldwide Youth Radicalization* document:

"The independent youth organization can attract radicalizing young people who have not yet made up their minds about joining any political party of the left and who are not yet committed to the Bolshevik perspective of becoming lifetime revolutionists, but who are willing and ready to participate in a broad range of political actions together with the revolutionary party and its members. It can lead actions and take initiatives in the student movement in its own name. It can serve as a valuable training and testing ground for candidates for party cadre status, and make it easier for them to acquire the political and organizational experience and education required for serious revolutionary activity. Membership in the revolutionary-socialist youth organization enables young radicals to decide their own policies, organize their own actions, make their own mistakes, and learn their own lessons." (p. 201)

When one examines the role actually proposed for the youth organization, I think the danger of it "substituting for the party" recedes in importance.

The perspective of building revolutionary youth organizations is not a new one. The early Second, Third, and Fourth Internationals all had independent youth organizations, although the exact relationship of the parties to the youth organizations has varied under differing conditions.

The youth is the only sector of the population where we favor an independent Marxist organization. There is only one revolutionary program and it answers the needs of all sectors of the population, so there is the political basis for only one revolutionary party.

Youth, however, is not just a sector of the population, but a temporary condition characterized by a process of learning and maturing—and by rebelliousness. Among the youth it is to the advantage of the revolutionary movement to build an independent Marxist organization—not as a second revolutionary party, but as a training ground for the party.

Today the need and opportunities for revolutionary youth organizations are far greater than ever in the past, because of the scope of the current youth radicalization.

The IEC Majority European resolution says it is "by no means opposed in principle to building genuine youth organizations that would confine themselves to the specific tasks of youth work . . ." (p.23) It is not clear exactly what this means. What is a "genuine youth organization"? What are the "specific tasks of youth work"?

When we talk about building youth organizations, we mean organizations of youth that deal with the broad range of political questions over which youth are concerned. We don't artificially limit it to whatever could be seen as specifically "youth" issues, since that would exclude many of the most important struggles of youth, and would miss the whole point of the role youth can play in broader political campaigns.

It is interesting to note that the left wing in the pre-World War I Social Democracy fought against the right wing's attempts to limit the work of the youth organizations to educational and cultural activities, and asserted the youth organizations should lead youth in action in the class struggle. With the Stalinist degeneration of the Communist International, the Communist Youth Leagues were again pushed away from politics and relegated to educational and cultural tasks along with sports and recreation. The authors of the European resolution should spell out more precisely what they mean by "specific tasks of youth work."

#### *Sympathizer circles*

The sympathizer circles the IEC Majority European resolution hails are no substitute for youth organizations. Their manifold disadvantages flow from the fact that they are not independent organizations.

Party sympathizer circles cannot intervene in the struggles of high school, technical school, and university students in the same organized, disciplined, and coordinated way that a youth organization can.

They do not offer the same opportunities for recruitment. Youth in the circles have no say over the political line or activities of their "group." They are merely an appendage to the party, carrying out a line decided elsewhere. How can sympathizer circles have the same attractiveness to serious radicalizing youth as their own organization in which they lead and make the decisions?

Nor are sympathizer circles the best way to facilitate recruitment to the party, because the circles cannot provide the same training and education to develop youth for party membership as an independent youth organization. In fact, *not* having a youth organization in this period when we can make rapid recruitment gains in the student movement poses a dilemma for the party, which must either lower its norms of discipline and level of political understanding to the less demanding level of a youth organization, or else pass up hundreds of potential recruits.

Most important, sympathizer circles cannot train youth in the traditions, program, and methods of Bolshevism in the same way as an independent youth organization. In an independent organization the youth collaborate and work with the party, but they also have the responsibility for building their own organization, selecting their own leaders, making their own decisions, and leading their own actions. There is no better training school for party cadres. Thus the youth organization speeds the

process of leadership education and selection for the party.

The problems created by not having an independent youth organization were evident at the Communist League's high school Red Circles conference held in Paris immediately following the unprecedented student mobilizations in March-April of this year. Not only was the conference smaller than the similar gathering a year earlier, but nearly every leader of a workshop at that *high school students'* conference was either a Political Bureau or Central Committee member of the Communist League; only one was a high school student.

### *Independence of the youth*

In an article written in 1916 Lenin explained the importance of organizational independence of the Social Democratic youth leagues. He said: "The middle-aged and the aged often *do not know how* to approach the youth, for the youth must of necessity advance to socialism *in a different way, by other paths, in other forms, in other circumstances* than their fathers. Incidentally, this is why we must decidedly *favor organizational independence* of the Youth League. . . . For unless they have complete independence, the youth *will be unable* either to train good socialists from their midst or prepare themselves to lead socialism *forward*." (From "The Youth International," *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 164, all emphasis in original.)

If the criterion of the "critical threshold" had been followed in the U. S., the YSA would never have been formed. In the late 1950s, coming out of the McCarthy witch-hunt period, the Socialist Workers Party was weak and lacked a "significant base in the working class." But here, like in many other countries, the first openings came among radicalizing students. Some former CP youth, some left-Social-Democratic youth, and independent young socialists were regrouped around the *Young Socialist* newspaper, leading in 1960 to the formation of the YSA. Ever since then the YSA has been an indispensable component of the Trotskyist movement in the U. S., and the primary source of recruitment to the party, intervening in the different movements that have developed and recruiting the best of the radicalizing youth to Trotskyism.

The validity of building independent youth organizations is confirmed not only by the experience in building the YSA, and the earlier experiences of many of the European sections, but also by the work of other com-

rades around the world.

An illustrative example is the work of the Socialist Action League of New Zealand. Their forces are quite limited, but they are moving towards the formation of a national youth organization based on the gains made from their Young Socialists for Labor campaign in 1972.

Or look at the experience in Australia, where the initial cadres that were won to the Fourth International were youth who launched the Socialist Youth Alliance. The leaders of that group came to an understanding of the need for a revolutionary party, and in 1972 founded the Socialist Workers League. The comrades did not, however, think it was advisable, once the party was formed, to fold up the SYA and wait on building a youth group until the Socialist Workers League had passed the "critical threshold."

There are Trotskyist youth organizations in Canada, Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela and Japan. I'm sure those comrades will have something to say in the debate over perspectives for youth work. An important part of this discussion will be to get the information on the experiences of all these different groups and their evaluations and contributions.

Finally, in order to move forward with a fruitful political discussion on this question, which is of such importance to the Fourth International, in order to have a discussion about real and not phony issues, we appeal to the comrades of the IEC Majority Tendency to spell out clearly and unambiguously their line:

What balance sheet do you draw of the student movement since the last World Congress? Do you agree or disagree with the analysis of the university as an institution of class society? Do you agree or disagree with the analysis of the increased social weight of students? Do you agree or disagree that the student actions have arisen out of the broad issues of the class struggle? Do you think it is reformist to struggle around student demands? Do you think it is reformist for students to fight to turn the function of the university from the perpetuation of capitalist oppression into an organizing center for anti-capitalist activities?

Don't just lecture us about how students can't make the socialist revolution. Speak to the live issues: What is your analysis of the continuing student struggles? What do you disagree with about the red university strategy? What alternative strategy do you propose?

July 30, 1973

# The European Document and the RSF's Strategic Orientation

By Torben Hansen

(The comrades who support the European document are requested—for the sake of the internal life of the RSF [Revolutionära Socialister Forbund, sympathizing group of the Fourth International in Denmark], among other reasons—not to reject criticism of the document from the outset, but to go through it very carefully. They are also requested to conceive of the present discussion as the very first stage in a very long process that can only end satisfactorily if everyone avoids a factional way of thinking and does not lose sight of the fact that in the continuing discussion the lessons of practical political experience are an absolutely essential component.)

## Is There a West European Specificity?

It is possible and relevant to point out specifically West European features common to the area. In the case of the bourgeoisie, one could cite postwar efforts at economic integration. In the case of the working class, one can point to the tradition of mass political organizations.

The question, however, is whether the uneven and combined development of the twentieth century has given rise to a West European specificity, in the sense that the same sort of homogeneity can be seen in this part of the world, as, say, in the United States. In other words, is it possible in the context of a general balance sheet of development in the advanced capitalist countries to lay out guidelines that apply *in their entirety* to the West European countries and *only* these?

The European document indicates that the answer to this question is negative, that many of its ambiguities are owing to the difficulty of including in the same analysis countries with widely varying characteristics. The expansion and consolidation of the EEC [European Economic Community], along with certain similarities in workers struggles during the last few years, do not mean that the West European sections can operate with a common frame of reference in political work that does not at the same time apply for Trotskyists in other highly developed countries. Does the document wish to posit the existence of such an insurmountable barrier between what applies to the workers movement in the United States and what applies to the workers movement in Western Europe that the experiences of the SWP can be disregarded by the West European sections? And, with regard to the mobilizing of women, students, the national minorities, etc., are there similar basic differences that would make it impossible to deal with West European movements in the same way as with the North American movements?

In implicitly advancing a West European specificity vis-a-vis the other highly developed capitalist countries, the European document is not convincing. It pays no attention to the decisive differences among countries in Western Europe itself. (All you need to do is try likening Scandinavia to the countries of southern Europe to discover that such a comparison is impossible. In Scandinavia, the institutions of bourgeois democracy have reached a high point of stability. In the countries of southern Europe the ruling classes have been hit during recent years by a profound political crisis linked to the fact that the bourgeois revolution has been carried through only partially there, if at all.)

## The General Social Crisis

An analysis of the total social reality must unquestionably be taken as the starting point for the work of building revolutionary parties. The sections of the Fourth International must, moreover, avoid imitating the various sectarian left groups (like, for example, the "Leninist" KF) by distinguishing between party-building work on the one hand, and, on the other, raising demands around which to intervene in mass actions. The Fourth International must not only intervene in factories but be involved in serious ongoing work aimed at organizing and leading protest movements that have begun to develop among nonproletarian masses. These masses must unquestionably be linked up to the struggle of the working class, whose aim is a socialist revolution. But this is not the perspective laid out in the European document. The document does not stress that only the Fourth International can achieve this linkup and that this sort of task cannot be accomplished as long as comrades mistakenly believe that the nonproletarian masses can be won to socialism by the type of propaganda or slogans applicable in trade-union work! Coming after a rather lengthy period during which there has been a strong tendency in the RSF to regard our task in the student movement or the women's movement as simply to advance slogans about workers control—and not in a concrete way at that—the document must be characterized as insufficient, to put it mildly! It does not criticize this form of sectarianism. If anything, it helps to promote such a sectarian approach, for it in fact neglects the task of intervening on the innumerable "issues capable of sparking conflicts" that arise "in every sphere of public life" (as Lenin said in *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*).

Although the European document does mention the general social crisis in Western Europe two or three times, it deals almost exclusively with the workers mobilizing in the plants and the ways the bourgeois state, the bureaucracies of the workers movement, the various left-wing groups, and the Fourth International might respond to this. The general social crisis is without significance for the document.

Meanwhile, the various protest movements are intensifying and broadening, and this is occurring outside the factories. This is especially true for Denmark (consumers' protests, teachers strikes, renewed mobilizations of college and high-school students). In the case of the RSF, this must be analyzed much more profoundly than has hitherto been the case. This is demonstrated by some incorrect projections we have made. (For example, at its last convention, the RSF "resolved" that the student movement was "dead"—yet a half year later, 6,000 Copenhagen students demonstrated in opposition to the government!)

A quite amazing omission in the European document is the absence of a balance sheet on, for example, the work of the Ligue Communiste among university and high-school students. It could also be asked, why, for example, the discussion of the English comrades on work in the women's movement is not dealt with in proposing a line for the European sections. The reason for this lack no doubt has something to do with the document's basic attitude toward nonproletarian or nonindustrial protest movements—an attitude that obviously fits in with the political parasitism of the RSF's approach to the universities thus far: The sections are to "bring these strata" (i.e., students) to "a general understanding of the revolutionary program and to the revolutionary party" (p. 19 in the English text) in order to "recruit them" (i.e., the "most advanced elements" in "radicalized sectors") to the "revolutionary Marxist organization" [p. 22].

This is pure sectarianism! Not only does the document not assign the slightest priority to intervening in these layers or movements. But the aim of any intervention is *not* to organize and lead them by putting forward demands that relate to their actual needs (for example, the demands of students to participate in the leading bodies of the universities and for a change in the examination system, or the demand of women for better child care—Is taking up such things looked down on?). Yet it must be remembered that if the sections refuse to intervene systematically in these movements, others—the Stalinists, especially—will be in a better position to derail and demoralize them. The consequences of this, both in the short and long run, should be obvious.

The explicit and implicit economism and sectarianism that marks the European document has the effect of codifying the RSF's self-inflicted political impotence, which we share with the rest of the Danish left-wing groups, since the entire left is stamped with, and is, in part, the organizational expression of the workerism and coffee-house Marxism of the university milieu. (The following parallel illustrates the lack of principle that distinguishes this milieu and the extent to which the RSF is also affected by it: For some time workerist students at Aarhus University in scores have been joining the KF, which is marked by a complete lack of programmatic clarity. At

the same time, RSF comrades are rushing headlong to join the tendency that supports the line of the European document, yet despite being in existence for several months, this tendency has not bothered to explain its own formation in the Internal Bulletin. Its members disagree on the question of Latin America, and some have even reportedly joined the tendency in order to gain "influence" or "information". No campaign for workers control can cure this political immaturity—an immaturity that, moreover, has also been expressed in the Copenhagen branch refusing to arrange a meeting with Peter Camejo, while at the same time calling a meeting with Vergeat with lightning speed!)

## Balance Sheet of Entryism

On page 18 of the English edition of the European document, it is stated, parenthetically, that the entry tactic "was by and large valid during the preceding phase." If the tactic failed to promote left-wing tendencies in the Social Democratic, Stalinist, and Centrist parties breaking away and organizing around the Fourth International, the document says that this was owing to our small "numerical strength." Many interesting observations could be made about the validity of this explanation in the case of a whole series of West European countries. If we draw up a balance sheet of entryism as it was practiced by the old Danish section, Revolutionaere Socialister, there is no doubt that the European document makes a completely incorrect assessment!

RS's weakness was not numerical but political. This is obvious from the role that the leader of the section at that time, Vagn Rasmussen, played in the VS [Venstersocialisterne—Left Socialists, a split-off from a middle-sized left Social Democratic party]. He and the other Trotskyists in VS had no perspective for working in this party (Vagn Rasmussen's explanation that we wanted to function as an active and loyal faction in VS is of course no perspective—cf. *Socialistisk Information*, no. 5, 1968, p. 6).

How many members of the RSF would agree that a long period of confusion and opportunism among the Danish Trotskyists in first the SF [Socialistisk Folkeparti—Socialist People's Party, the left Social Democratic party of Titoist origins from which the VS split] and then VS can be blamed on numerical weakness?

## The Vanguard

The European document is very unclear in its use of the term "vanguard." On page 13 of the English edition, it is obviously combined with the social vanguard of the working class—the advanced workers. But on page 14 the document begins to introduce new terms; it talks about "the revolutionary left," which must win "hegemony." What does this mean? And why is "vanguard" superseded by the expression "the new far-left vanguard" on page 21? Is it referring to the social vanguard of militant workers, who are militant insofar as they try to carry on class struggle? Or is it referring to a kind of "political" vanguard consisting of the various left groups (including the Fourth International)? The document's amalgams and ambiguities on this point come close to outright obscurantism!

Unclear and ambiguous arguments lead naturally to unclear ambiguous conclusions. On page 25, it says that

the Fourth International must organize campaigns "that correspond to the concerns of the vanguard and do not run against the current of the mass struggle." Should this formulation be understood as a justification of the Ligue Communiste's attitude to the "symbolic" incendiarism at the Argentine Embassy in Paris (cf. *Rouge*, No. 169, September 2, 1972, p. 9)? Why doesn't the document take a position on this type of action, which doubtless meets with sympathy from various French Maoist groups but has nothing to do with political work among the masses?

Some comrades will no doubt brush this question aside as irrelevant, pointing to special French conditions (which moreover is a peculiar kind of provincialism in a Trotskyist organization!). Underlying this is the question of why the European document does not contain the Fourth International's traditional schema, according to which the revolutionary "core" attracts and organizes the social vanguard of the working class by developing *guidelines that give the maximum effect to the vanguard's intervention in the masses?* Why is it not clearly stated that the various sectarian left groups do not form any "vanguard" but rather a "rearguard," that they are an obstacle to mobilizing the masses and that workers or others who want to be active in the anticapitalist struggle take a step backward politically if they join these groups?

Likewise, in this connection there is reason to ask why the European document does not forthrightly oppose the current in the European sections that regards the Social Democrat parties as bourgeois? Neither the author of the document nor its Danish supporters can be unaware of this current (it exists in Germany, England, France, and Denmark\*).

The document's unclarity in its use of the term "vanguard" and its insufficient criticism of the worst sectarian aberrations could have the result of justifying the RSF's present line. This line has been all too strongly marked by a sick preoccupation with what the other left groups think about the RSF (at the last congress a lot of expectations were expressed that the RSF's "breakthrough" would be synonymous with "getting the other groups to discuss on the basis of our premises." Regardless of our positive or negative experiences in practical work, this prognosis proved false. The various left groups, of course, continued to hold firmly to their private, sectarian way of posing problems!).

## The Dialectical Relationship Among Sectors

A serious deficiency of the RSF is that the organization has never participated in—to say nothing of leading—a real struggle. On this problem and the interconnection

among the various arenas of work, the majority tendency in the Ligue Communiste wrote the following in "Dialectique des secteurs d'intervention," p. 15 (this paper was a contribution to the first congress of the Ligue in 1969): "Our 'trade-union sector' will grow up as a result of the *real struggle* we are able to conduct. For a long time to come such struggle will be carried on in the milieus where we have a following, that is the high-school and university students." (Emphasis in the original.)

In the RSF this "dialectical interrelationship of sectors" has been perverted into a "theory" that we cannot work among students until we have a "trade-union sector." In reality this is a rationalization of the deplorable fact that the RSF has been adapting to workerist currents in the university milieu, and, as pointed out above, the European document encourages this tendency.

There are grounds for wondering why the European document abandons the "dialectical relationship among sectors," as it has been applied—at least on paper and doubtless also to some extent in practice—by the Communist League.

## Trade-Union Work

The above observations do not mean that the RSF should not intervene in the trade-union movement. But they do mean that we must stop isolating ourselves in sectors such as the university students where there are clear possibilities for participating in real struggle.

On work in the trade-union movement, the European document actually says very little—despite stressing heavily that all problems involve the need for developing a number of Fourth International cadres in the plants. Naturally the document cannot offer specific tactical recommendations for the work of the RSF in this arena. We ourselves must analyze the specific situation (i.e., the labor laws). The document correctly points up forming a class-struggle tendency in the unions as one of the most important tasks for the section. But why does it fail to contain any balance sheet of the experiences in trade-union work in countries such as Germany, Italy, and France? Why doesn't it take up the debate that has gone on in the Ligue Communiste about the difficulties of maintaining contact with militant workers? Today this problem has a great and immediate relevance for the RSF!

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\*The comrade in the RSF who is referred to here denies that he has accepted the theory that the Social Democratic parties have become bourgeois.