

FRATERNAL CRITICISMS CONTINUED

On the previous two pages are reprinted articles from Republican News dealing with the issue of kids/vandalism and truancy in the 6counties.

The articles 'Truancy in our schools' and 'Fianna code of honour' (code of the junior wing of the provisionals-boys) gives us a glimpse of the attitude amongst sections of the republican movement towards the problems of kids. The reply-"Fraternal criticisms from supporters of the movement" was written by a member of B'ham Gay Liberation front (GLF) together with a member of Brum Big Flame.

There is certainly a great deal of debate within Big Flame, centred around How/and on what basis we should raise criticisms of those fighting British imperialism in Ireland. (See also 'Notes on Ireland' this bulletin).

I hope the article will tidy up a few loose ends around that dilemma and that it will hopefully stimulate more contributions and/or constructive criticisms from other comrades to papers like Republican news and An Phoblacht. SEND CONTRIBUTIONS VIA BRUM !!

One other thing i hope the rep news article stimulates is the need for Big Flame to take a much closer look at the struggles of kids.

Rather than leaving it there, i thought i'd add some of my own and other peoples observations on this long forgotten subject.....

THE NEEDS AND STRUGGLES OF YOUTH

I think we should start by looking at the class make-up of Big Flame and other revolutionary socialist organisations. It must be made clear that a great proportion of cadres from these organisations, including our own, (though mainly young) are from backgrounds other than working class. I'm not being hostile to having such comrades in the organisation, far from it-it would be stupid to suggest it.

Middle class comrades and our academic comrades (and we have a fair few) have a vital role to play in the working class struggle.

But remaining on the subject of youth in general, and in particular working class youth, i think its high time we put ourselves on the spot and tried to find some answers to these pretty obvious questions;

1. Why the vast majority of working class kids don't join or look towards revolutionary socialist organisations/ideas ?
2. When they do join, or develop an attachment to our politics Why is it? (Definitely not because we've taken seriously the problems and struggles most close to their hearts).

If we're honest with ourselves, we'd see that there has been little consistent work (theory or practice) by revolutionary organisations around the question of young people, their oppression as , and their needs as young people.

AN EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT TO COMMUNISM

It takes a hell of a lot for a working class kid to develop any sort of emotional attachment to communist ideas, let alone take (what would be an immense step for them) and join a group that is actually fighting for these ideas. And theres one good reason for this; Revolutionary socialist have rarely taken the struggles of these kids seriously and have subsequently never really looked at the real and immense day to day struggles these same kids go through in the school/youth club/in the family/on the streets.

The only time kids problems come to the fore with these people is when the kids frustrations explode, and they 'wag' school, go nicking round the shops, vandalise property etc etc etc. Its not just the republican movement who are in a dilemma over how to react to these actions. There is utter confusion amongst English revolutionaries too.

All they can offer is better facilities for schools WHICH SMACKS of sheer reformism anyhow—maybe not to an 'adult'—but to the kids definately. To the kids school is prison, they're not really interested in whether the cuts are leaving them with less, pencils rulers (or teachers even)—in fact from the point of view of the oppression kids face in school, they probably welcome it as a way of giving them a bit more scope to get out of school work. Its easier to play about if theres less teachers around to control you.

Perhaps we should attack government cuts in prison building!!! (if it ever happened). But all of these contradictions are there for the picking—and why?.. Because any perspectives on education, even from the 'so called' revolutionary left has never been orientated towards the kids needs, but have been geared instead towards parents and teachers. As long as the revolutionary left orientates towards parents and teachers and waves away the oppression kids face at the hands of both (teachers and parents), then our educational politics will invariably be reactionary and rooted more in the interest of the bosses and capital than the working class. And i don't think i've overstated the case at all.

We rightly try to come to terms with the oppression of women by men. Not with abstract slogans about the 'unity of male and female working class'—cause thats bullshit—its just waving away the oppression of women by men with a slogan.

As we tried to say in the rep news article (but it was misprinted) There will be no socialism without an end to youths oppression as there will be no end to youths oppression without socialism. The point i'm making is this; age-ism is as rampant, and as equally reactionary as sexism or racism. Theres no hiding it away for the sake of some false 'unity'.

Our old chums I.S. are experts at this. Having ditched for some reason the old Rebel youth paper, they now often speak about these fantastic schools of the future run by teacher/parent committees,

Oh yes, nearly forgot, plus school kids AS WELL (sometimes!!!).

CHILDREN—SEEN AND NOT HEARD

There are exceptions from this attitude—the odd individual may get a half decent article in S.W or Red Weekly or (dare i say it) Big Flame, on some kids struggle, perhaps once in a blue moon but even then its looked upon as something of secondary importance, or in our case "something we'll have to discuss one of these days!" Well comrades theres no time like the present!

Kids struggle—class struggle

So its not really suprising, givin the situation kids are in—that when kids have got together to fight for their needs and interests, in an organised way, that they have been easily stepped on/diverted/or simply left to fizzle out. In this climate it becomes so bloody difficult to relate their experience to the overall class struggle (as portrayed by the left). So the contradictions mount up, and alongside the kids simplistic urge for freedom and control over their own lives comes the irrational and reactionary urge to 'grow up' and be 'adult'—where they can exercise some control, and invariably over someone else (most certainly their own/or someone elses' kids).

If its difficult for us as revolutionary socialists to relate kids oppression and struggles to the struggle of the working class as a whole, then think how difficult it is for the kid to come to terms with : this relationship herself/himself.

In short, theres a bloody great gap between the two, big enough to drive a heard of elephants through. Its hardly suprising that in this vacuum even fascists like the national front have little trouble planting a seed or two of reaction.....

According to the october edition of Britain first(organ, at that time of the N.F) badges are available to young N.F supporters inscribed with motiff "National Front rules O.K".

And its not enough to simply feel sickened by this, and to be frank it makes me want to puke. If kids turn to the fascists then we'll have no-one to blame but ourselves!!!

"The masses have a precious instinct for the correct interpretation of the facts, which only remains inoperative when the revolutionary organisation offers them nothing while the quacks offer them everything from levitation to the waters of Lourds" Wilhelm Reich-'what is class consciousness!
.....(or the quacks of the N.F offer them 'Paki-Bashing' B.P)

Working class kids in particular are at the bottom of the barrel, up against so much, with very little support from the so called freedom fighters of the left. So when kids do fight back, its more of a gut reaction than anything else. An instinctive response, often of sheer frustration, like one big rasping raspberry; there frustration explodes-they 'wag' school/turn to vandalism/go shoplifting etc etc. (I don't want to go too deeply into these actions as they were dealt with in the rep news article).

But its so bloody hard for these kids to recognise clearly the obstacles in the way and even harder to actually then fight back clearly with other kids. With either no, or very little income, and up against tough psychological conditioning, to say nothing of the whole range of 'bosses' in the school/family/youth club/on the streets, its hardly suprising that their frustration comes out in such unclear individual ways. Its hardly suprising that in such a competitive, dog eat dog society (such as is capitalism) that they (kids) get turned against each other, and often hate each others guts.

KIDS--THE PEASANTRY

To put the oppression of kids in its right perspective its worth doctoring a quote from Frederick Engels. It would seem that within the family the husband is the boss, the wife the working class, with the kids nothing short of being the peasantry. Or if we were travelling by British Rail-First class, second class and pig class respectively. (Where all this leaves a young girl, or a young black girl i couldn't say).

From my own personal experiences, developing a socialist understanding (of sorts) came through facing up to parental pressures and holding my ground through fierce arguments (especially with my father), which often came to blows.

Like most working class kids there was a certain gut reaction to what i was up against, i knew darn well "it just wasn't fair". I despised my old mans military attitudes, which he'd bought into our house after 15 years in the forces. Within the house i was literally treated like a squaddie while he played the officer. I hated every bloody minute. It was either a case of me facing up to a long hard fight (till i left home) with little moral support, or comprmise to his lousy ideas, which no doubt, have bought some

would

degree of 'peace', or at least less friction, but would still have left me totally dominated, inhibited and unable to act for myself in my own interests (as a kid).

Maybe the example of my father is the exception rather than the rule, but i'm still convinced that to some degree or another this type of oppression is part of most working class kids day to day lives, 24 hours a day (in such an environment even your sweet dreams tend to get marred).

IMPACT OF CLASS STRUGGLE OUTSIDE SCHOOL WALLS

The level of class struggle outside the class room, as well as militant action of teachers has certainly had some impact on the struggles of kids. There have been school-kids strikes, not only over recent years in this country, but as far back as the national school strike of 1911. (Its worth noting that this strike would have been lost and forgotten, had it not been uncovered accidentally by a socialist who stumbled across newspaper reports in the archives of various reference libraries around the country - see Bibliography at end of this document).

Organisation and tactics from outside the schools found their way inside - with strikes, and unions for school kids (National Union of School Students/NUSS).

The 1911 strike included demands for guaranteed income, in some cases, plus flying pickets (who said the miners or building workers set this ball rolling?).

Put into an overall perspective though, the level of organised militancy/Collective militancy from school kids is still pretty small. (Though i'm prepared to concede that the media has hushed up a fair amount of news on such struggles).

Which brings us to another problem as older militants, keeping in close contact with kids struggles (in school/family/community).

Contact with kids would have to be far removed from our present patronising attitude towards them. For a start the kids would smell our chauvinism a mile away. After all, contrary to popular opinion, they aren't stupid.

Again, this means, for a start that our educational perspectives must be orientated to consumers of the education system, school-kids. Our primary orientation in Education must be to struggle along-side kids, and to fight in their interests, for their needs.

WORKERISM

We've all heard it branded about; how the 'real struggle(?)' is on the shop floor, in the factories (invariably with the male industrial working class).

Its this tendency to crude workerism, that has helped mystify what the struggle for a socialist society is all about. This kind of blinkered outlook, has traditionally meant that struggles outside the factory are deemed irrelevant, or of secondary importance to the 'real struggle'.

More recently the left has been forced to widen their horizons by the struggles of women, black people, gays, working class communities against rent increases and for better facilities.

One of our strengths, in Big Flame is the breadth of our analysis and indeed our practice. We have stated in our document 'Our perspectives our work', quite rightly, that 'the working class is divided on the question of age'. Its high time we actually looked deeply into this question of age-ism, so that we can attempt to develop a consistent theory and practice that meets the needs of those most directly oppressed by this division Youth and old people.

REICH ON THE STRUGGLES OF YOUTH

I've already used a quote from 'What is class consciousness' by Wilhelm Reich. Not for the hell of it, but because on the subject of youth, in particular, i feel he made some very relevant observations, most of which are still very relevant today nearly 30 years later.

The extracts i'm re-using below are also from 'what is class consciousness' and basically come from the conditions of pre-nazi germany-though i repeat-much of the extracts below, are, i feel, still so very relevant right now.

"The ideal of young people cannot be to serve a fuehrer uncritically and die for the interests of capital, proclaimed as the interests of the fatherland-but to take control of their own lives and shape them to their own violation. Youth can only be responsible to itself. Then and only then will the division between society and its youth disappear.

When youth has grasped its seperation from society, it will at the same time recognise itself as oppressed and become ripe for social revolution. In transcending the gap...

CONT...

SCHOOL

Bell	Don't interupt
Line up	stop laughing
Be quiet	fetch the cane
Sit down	I'm the teacher here
stand up	Its not funny
Wheres your book	stop laughing
	stop talking
Start work	Hands up
Stop writing	Come out front
Sit still	No looking
Who's whispering	Clear up
Don't answer back	Open your desks
Bell	Bell.
Keep moving	
copy this dpon	
Leave the room	

Taken from Rebel feb/march 72.

through practical action, structuring the social order to conform to its needs, and really, concretely, objectively freeing the way for its urge to liberty, it would become the agent of social revolution.

We cannot theoretically prove to the youth of all lands and continents the need for social revolution, but only develop it from the NEEDS AND CONTRADICTIONS OF YOUTH. In the centre of those needs and contradictions stands the tremendous question of the sex life of young people.

In contrast to the conceptions usually held by political parties until now, work with young people shows that their insight into the class struggle is either very superficial or shaky, or, when real, hard to encounter—either in the intellectually precocious (EARLY developer), or in such children as come from a home with a revolutionary background, where they experienced no oppression.....

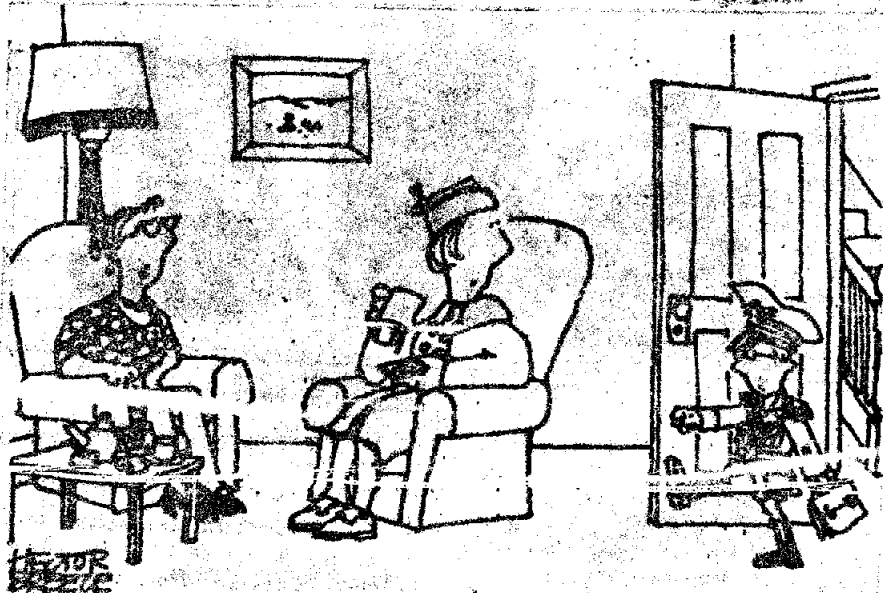
.....Love of sport, military parades, uniforms which please girls (and vice versa), military music & etc, are factors mainly damaging to the working class movement at present, since the right has better opportunities for organising these needs. Football in particular works in a politically depoliticising sense and promotes reactionary tendencies. These are in principle reversible, and could even be of use to the left when we have got rid of the economic belief in the omnipotence of hunger.

Concrete constituent elements of class consciousness and inhibitions present in the individual proletarian.

.....Among children.

The childrens movement has always been one of the weakest points in the revolutionary camp.we have simply noticed and turned up a few facts which must be followed up, and we only ask of our comrades that instead of making empty criticisms and talking of Leninism all the time, they apply the latter properly by 'learning, learning and learning again' to look at every thing anew and understand without exception everything in an original way. I have already argued that our policies with respect to working class children were too dry and rationalistic and unsuited to children, and that with the exception of a very few childrens' group leaders, we were unaware of what a child really feels and thinks.

.....One revolutionary child, brought up not to accept religion, may bring turmoil to a whole school, but it would remain a matter of chance unless it was organised. The leaflets which the left had children distribute in Germany had little effect, since they put more emphasis on learning



dreary slogans by rote than upon awakening the child's interest in the real questions and concerns of the working class movement.

.... You may enter a farmer's parlour in the mountains; the parents are socialistically inclined, but every time their child meets a stranger it is told; 'Say hello nicely; or, 'Well what do you say then?', and as the child shrinks with fear it is told it is good. The ideological struggle against 'being Good' is one of the most important tasks of the revolutionary front.

... With very few exceptions, every working class father takes revenge on his child at home for his enslavement at the factory. Here at least he wants to be lord, to be able to give orders and have someone to obey him. If it isn't the dog it's the child.....

... the prohibition and punishment of masturbation in small children by parents, teachers and priests has long been a subject for lively discussion amongst the public. The communists could not make any use of this, partly because they were subject to bourgeois inhibitions themselves....

But it is here, precisely here and nowhere as much as here, that there lies the central problem of bringing up children to obedience or to lively spontaneity. These are class questions not 'personal' matters.

(Reminds me of an old joke - 99% of boys masturbate, the other 1% are good liars - BP)

.... If a 'professional' should counter with the arguments that questions of bringing up children are still in dispute among scientists, we should reply; certainly they are in dispute, but the presentation and solution of these problems can only be attempted in living struggle around the matter, and not in the scholar's study. We may be wrong in details but that the right is intent upon the suppression of masturbation is beyond question; that we must not fight infantile sexuality, equally so.

(Criticisms of the Comintern and Y.C.L. (young communist league) of the German communist party (K.P.D) in the 1930's).....

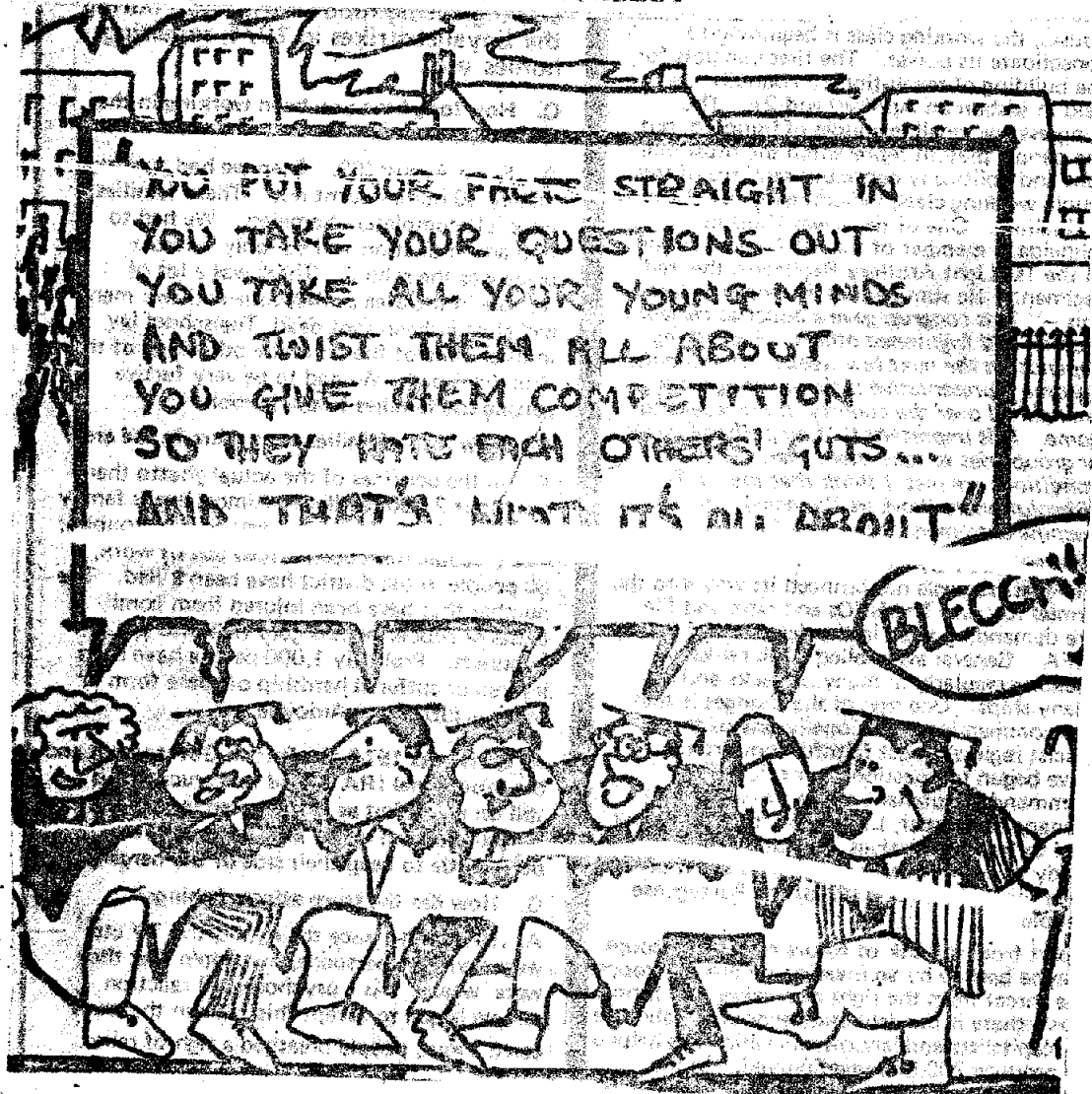
..... they conceive an absolute contradiction between personal and political, instead of seeing the dialectical relationship of both....

Precisely the same principle, of coming to practical awareness, applies to the youth of all sections of the populace. Where the young are in the factories, they will take part in concrete trade union work. Where they are not in the factories, they will concern themselves with the arrangement of their personal lives; the solution of conflict engendered by their parents, the question of sexual partners, the problem of getting somewhere

to live. In this way, they will not merely conceive new forms of social life from their own experience, but go on to practice and finally fight for them; It will be moreover be impossible to restrain them.

The job cannot be done by lectures about the political situation or even about the sexual problems of the young! That would be manipulative from above. The young must start now to shape their own lives in every sphere; they should put into practice and carry out whatever they consider right and whatever they please to bring about. They will then soon realise that they come up against hard barriers, and that the realisation of even the most simplest, most obvious needs are rendered impossible: and hence, in practice, they will recognise what revolutionary politics is and why a revolution is necessary. They will only feel directly where and how they are oppressed when the capitalist authorities intervene to prevent them obtaining contraceptives - or organising mutual assistance in setting up house, first with threats, then arrests, finally with heavy prison sentences; then they will learn to fight, not on some abstract plane, not on the basis of slogans external to them, but in conflict with the hard reality of life under capitalism.....

.....The awareness that they have a perfect right to arrange their lives for themselves will undeniably lead them to fight for it. They need only support an organisation, a party, which understands them, helps them, and acts on their behalf.



PROPOSALS AND AFTERTHOUGHTS.

1. In the short term we should, wherever possible, open up interventions round schools—in particular those schools which have had some sort of history of struggle (from the kids). In Bram the press has reported about 3 school kids struggles in the past 6 months. Mainly centred around the issues of school uniform and dress regulations (where there's no uniform), discipline, and rotten school dinners. Though in any intervention issues such as these we would need to pose the obvious—the right of kids to organise politically.
2. Anti recruitment work (in the troops out movement) should be given the serious attention and workrate it deserves. It should never be seen as some sort of 'extra' to other T.O.M. work. In fact anti recruitment work, important in itself, could also supply the ground work & contacts for opening up other interventions with kids (point 1). (cde DC/WLBF or myself can supply cdes with relevant info/leaflets etc if cdes need it).
3. More info on kids struggles in our publications.
4. Economic position of kids should somehow be taken into consideration in the cost of our propoganda. E.G. of how the most sympathetic people can overlook this... 'classrooms of resistance' costs (i think) about 85p. If kids wanted to buy it, they'd find it hard to raise that sort of cash.
5. More popular, cheap, modes of propoganda—Badges/stickers/comics etc—for kids. In B'ham TOM we're looking into the possibility of printing anti recruitment stickers and/or badges carrying the apt slogan "Bosses army—
—No way, Stuff Recruitment O.K." Using a nice old pic from a liverpool B.F paper showing a young kid doin' a Harvey Smith.
6. There must be excellent material siting in Naples (lotva Continua) on the 'Kids Cafe' there. Can the I.C. get hold of it, and translate it? Could be some excellent stuff on organising with kids in the community.
7. In the long term, we should xim have in mind the publication of a Big Flame revolutionary youth paper. Politically rooted in the struggles and needs of kids in general and working class kids in particular. There has been such a paper in this country before, called 'Rebel!' (now alas long dead). Technically (and i'm sorry if this sounds a little too brief and crude) a rev youth paper would need to be situated somewhere between the style and presentation of Rebel and that of the newly formed 'Resistance comics' (from Six Plough bookshop Belfast) which is all comic nowt else.
8. Role of education comission/Role of revolutionary teachers.
Big Flame as a whole, (not the education comission cause' of the teacher) will need to examine the question of kids in education very carefully. We must ask ourselves some pointed questions. In what institutions, if any, is it possible ~~for~~ for revolutionary teachers to play an open revolutionary role? One cde in BF i spoke to on this point, was quite open about his dilema, as a teacher and a revolutionary in a secondary school. He saw himself in a similar position to schoolkids as Big Flame sees foreman and supervisors in relation to line workers (on the track) at Halewood, Daganham and Longbridge.

For any comrades who may be unclear on this point, i should explain that in our basegroup interventions at ford haleswood/Daganham and British Leyland longbridge we see the foreman or supervisor as a 'tool of the bosses' a 'Gaffas man' - and i don't think we overstate the truth here.

Although i think its a mistake to put the foreman beyond redemption as we so often do. But there is no doubt that the relationship of (very antagonistic one) between the foreman or supervisor and line worker is very similar indeed to the antagonistic relationship between teacher and pupil.

The one glaring question is - is there a role for a revolutionary teacher given this antagonistic relationship? If there is at all, then where is it?

My own personal feeling is that in many sectors of the school system (one of which is definitely at secondary level) there is very little scope for a revolutionary teacher unless she/he can see the distinct possibility of the teachers she/he works with ever recognising they are 'tools of the bosses' and recognising the need to be alongside the struggles of kids, fighting in their interest, which is in the interest of the whole working class. In the vast majority of cases i don't see that coming about until the kids themselves have forced the teachers to take their struggles seriously. We have got to re-orientate our educational work and perspectives towards pupils. This must be the mainstream of our theory and practice and not teachers or parents.

One of the few areas where there does seem to be any scope for revolutionary teachers seems to be in tech colleges. At least there seems to be some scope for changing the syllabus in a progressive direction and getting away with it.

Thats about it!

BP BBF

Maximum feedback through I.B please.

*Correction: previous page/point 8 should read... "Not the education commission cause of teacher ratio/numerical bias".

WORTHWHILE READING ON KIDS

PAPERS AND MAGS....

1911 school strike - Ruskin college, childrens rights workshop.

Resistance comics - 10p + postage / from: Plough books, 72, Castle st, Belfast, I.

REBEL - (Long dead rev youth paper) - try ageing, or ex I.S. members!!

RADICAL EDUCATION

BOOKS/PAMPHLETS.

What is class consciousness - Reich: Socialist reproductions, 57d, Jamestown rd, London. N.W.1.

Sexual struggle of youth - as above : as above.

Little red schoolbook.

The Gates: written by Stepney schoolkid about his fear of school pub. Stepney basement / don't know address, sorry.

Classrooms of resistance: writings and poems of kids about many varied struggles around the world; edited by Chris Searle.