

(2) ANALYSIS CANNOT BE MADE ON THE BASIS OF FALSE PARRALLELS.

The YG have compared the relationships between teachers and pupils to foremen and workers, men and women, black and white, homosexual and hetero-sexual and even the British army and the Catholic masses in Northern Ireland. This has been done to justify the essential correctness of any struggle of youth, to confirm the oppressive role of the teacher and to write off any activity among teachers, even to the point of comparing ~~xxx~~ the appearance of a Conference resolution from the Liverpool Teachers Group to one from a supposed "BF Haléwood Foreman's" Group (see YG document ii.).

Comparisons of this kind can make clever points and certainly establishes the good guys and the bad guys; a necessary procedure in BF to win the emotional support even the most politically untenable position can generate if it makes the right noises. Unfortunately the comparisons are usually ~~xxxxx~~ useless and harmful, precisely because they fail to xxxxx pinpoint the specific conditions in which social relations arise (including the oppressive role teachers play). It is ~~xxxxxxx~~ remarkable that the YG has totally failed to give any analysis and definition not only of the educational crisis, but even of the general role of education in capitalist society. Instead they have relied on the foreman analogy. This analogy implies that the teacher like the foreman is caught between class forces and is forced to take an authoritarian role. But the situation is qualitatively different. The foreman does not have a contradictory class position; he is unambiguously the final chain in the capitalist command, whose function is to guarantee the continuity of production. He may face counter-pressure from the shop floor, but there is no ambiguity, he is the bosses' man. The teacher is not in such a position. The function of education is not production, but re-production of the conditions of production. That is to re-produce the class hierarchy in society and to socialise the future workforce to the degree required for their future positions. But the whole point about this is that it is a contradictory process. Like all elements of the super-structure, the education system is relatively autonomous from the capitalist economy. Unlike production, re-production cannot be directly controlled, partially because it has a strong ideological component. That education is not simply a straight capitalist process of child-minding and brainwashing can be seen by the recent state and right-wing attacks of progressive education, comprehensives and radical teachers. Teachers are one of the means by which the function of education in a capitalist society is carried out. This undoubtedly involves social relations of authority and ideology that are anti-working class. But it would be wrong to over-exaggerate this. The recent conflicts in education (Tynedale etc) show the considerable degree of space there is for radical and progressive teachers to both - work against authoritarian relationships with pupils and to present a counter-ideology. While not pretending this is easy, it can be done and it is our job to see it generalised and systematised. There is a socialist strategy for teachers, there is none for foreman - the difference lies in the distinction between production and re-production. All strategies based on the analogies between schools and factories are wrong. The YG is merely an ultra-left face of a long running error. The IS group base their teachers work on a shop-floor analogy, only here teachers are the unambiguous good guys - workers, fighting a trade union struggle. Consequently they ignore the oppressive relations and ideological role the teacher plays. There are many other variations; their common feature is an under-estimation of the ideological function of education. Hence they all under-estimate the real space and basis for much radical action by teachers. The YG by using the factory-foreman analogy concentrate solely on authority relations, which although one aspect of education, results in them not grasping the basic function of education in capitalism and therefore failing to produce a correct strategy. They put a lot of stress on teachers not being able to support kids because of the fear of losing their jobs. There is obviously some truth in this, but again should not be over-emphasised. The teacher works within the space available and all radical teachers take risks to support necessary action. Like all militants in any situation the radical teacher must judge the circumstances before taking action, but in our pamphlet (page 30) we outline a number of practical means of help that socialist teachers can give pupils who are organising.

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As for all the other parallels (men and women etc) similar cases could be made out showing that the social relations that arise derive from totally different conditions and therefore political perspectives are of qualitatively distinctive nature. Parallels are the refuge of a poverty-stricken analysis, they function as a substitute for the actual concrete conditions being analysed and act as a cheap 'vote-catching' exercise. Lacking a concrete analysis the YG can only substitute moralistic advice to teachers on not being oppressive, giving up their jobs and waiting patiently to being over-run by the revolutionary hordes.

(3) BIG FLAME POLITICS IS NOT BUILT ROUND THE "MOST OPPRESSED."

To justify working solely round youth/pupils and ignoring teachers the YG states that "our orientation where there are divisions in the class are always to the most oppressed." (YG Document ii) This statement is wrong on two counts. First the relations between ~~xx~~ pupils and teachers are not primarily "divisions in the class." The YG follow the old ~~xx~~ East London BF group, Power of Women etc in being obsessed with conflicts within the class, not between the classes. Hence in all their documents they blithely ignore the cuts and the current crises in education, which ~~xx~~ is the current manifestation of class conflict in education. Secondly the concept of structuring political practice around the 'most oppressed' is unscientific and ~~anti-xxxx~~ anti-marxist. Oppression is a notoriously ~~diffix~~ difficult thing to define, but even if it could be, it would not be the main yardstick for intervention. BF would have some very strange practices if this was our method; again the concept is moralistic. Even if pupils or anyone else could be shown to be the most oppressed of a given sector if the class contradictions were not expressing themselves in the struggles of pupils, but rather by ancillary workers or teachers - then that is where the revolutionary organisation must be. We cannot enter into interventions on a solely voluntaristic basis and create struggles from nothing. Although of course there is a case for slow and patient, long-term work to build up the potential of an important sector. But the revolutionary criteria for intervention is first of all where the class contradictions are expressing themselves, recognising that they usually follow a long term pattern. This is why we work with car workers - the location of industry within the economy, the advanced nature of the work process and methods of exploitation, the composition of the workforce - these ensure that they are a potential vanguard and that they will always be somewhere around the centre of class struggle. They are not the most oppressed industrial workers, it's a lousy job, but nothing in comparison with workers in small sweatshops and factories of certain kinds, for example.

In their enthusiasm for being the 'most oppressed' the YG lose sight of reality. In document ii, TH states that "school students have nothing to lose but their chains in the fight against bourgeois education." Populist rhetorical rubbish. If this is so why isn't there a widespread pupils movement? Just because you are oppressed doesn't mean you have automatic potential for instant struggle. Every group, even those right on the bottom have things to lose by struggling. Some revolutionaries might not think so, but then they have been substituting their desires for reality for a long time. School students are no exception. For instance any pupil knows that exams are the real ticket to future success and rising up the educational ladder (after all TH got to university somehow). Even if the ladder and the future job market is rejected and hated, ~~xxxx~~ ~~xxxx~~ pupils, especially radical ones are faced with real concrete choices and difficulties about struggling. Like all of us the pupil faces the ~~xx~~ problem of choosing the ground to struggle at minimum cost to them and their sanity. Let's forget who's the "most oppressed" and get down to studying the actual problems of intervention in education and youth.

(4) ALLIANCES BETWEEN PUPILS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS ARE POSSIBLE AND NECESSARY

The first problem of intervention is what to struggle about and how. To start with it's necessary to have a realistic assessment of the balance of forces, to see who can be united against the enemy. But who is the enemy. The YG make the ~~xxx~~ typical ultra-left ~~xxxx~~ error of identifying the enemy as

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the 'agents' of capitalist oppression. So the YG document iv states that the fight back of blacks, women, gays and youths ~~is~~ must "inevitably be directed against their immediate agents of oppression." So the targets are whites, men, hetero-sexuals and adults (including teachers). This is dangerous nonsense. It is for socialist within these ~~xxxxxx~~ sectors to analyse the basis of exploitation and oppression by capitalism and the state and how it manifests itself in daily life and to draw up strategies ~~it~~ to fight it and advance their independent needs. The target and enemy must always be the real origin of oppression. Of course any struggle of this sort ~~must~~ will come up against and if necessary fight against people who are long term allies, but short term agents of oppression. But this must be done in a context of ~~xxxx~~ recognising that they are non-antagonistic contradictions and that points of unity can still be found.

But the YG are blind to this and are against any unity. Their second document states "there is no possibilities of any sort of alliance between parents, teachers and pupils." Why, because "abstract calls for unity fail to recognise the power of adults over kids." But this fails precisely because we are not making abstract calls for unity. It would obviously be wrong and fails to recognise power divisions to call for a permanent alliance between these three sectors. But it is not wrong to try and identify issues which provide points of unification and a process of unity in struggle. There are certain struggles in which it is correct to advance the slogan, 'black and white unite and fight' (as BF has done) while recognising that it is an inadequate general perspective. So for pupils, teachers and parents -- there are issues which united action can take place on eg. the closure of a school, the sacking of a teacher, the victimisation of pupils and general cuts and crisis issues. The obvious case is the joint action that was taken to get rid of an NFE teacher in a big London school by pupils, parents and teachers. Such concrete unity in action is the perspective of the NUSS (National Union of School-Students) and of the Black Parents and Black Students Movements, who work in close co-operation. It has been said that involving pupils in cuts committees is utopian. We do not think so. Of course the pupils would have to be organised in some kind of action group or NUSS branch. Representation already exists on this basis in some areas. It is presumably our policy to encourage some type of formal organisation of pupils or do we think only spontaneous action is ideologically correct? Refusal in advance, of alliances on principle, as the YG does is abdicating any responsibility for certain aspects of the struggle and is a sectarian blind alley.

(5) WE HAVE TO START FROM WHERE YOUTH IS AT

Also part of making a realistic assessment to start interventions is understanding at what level of consciousness, action and organisation youth and in this case pupils are at. ~~xxx~~ We are in favour of developing the power of youth, but you cannot do it by over-estimating your strengths as the YG does. They have stated that "students are already the vanguard of this struggle" (against schooling) and have referred to the "amazing potential" of the struggle by pupils. Unfortunately the evidence is not so convincing. The examples given by the YG document ~~iii~~ include - truancy, anti-recruitment leaflets; repression of OZ and the Little Red Schoolbook and "increasing attempts of arson on school buildings." This hotch-potch has at its heart a confusion of spontaneous action, usually of disorganised and individualistic nature, with conscious and organised activity -- that which often results from a schools movement. Such spontaneous action is part of the rebellion of youth and is the raw material on which something organised and conscious can be built on, but it is not a substitute for it, or for an analysis of why there isn't a real schools movement. An interesting difference emerged when DC (who is a teacher and supporter of the politics of the youth group) wrote in a draft of part of the education pamphlet - "A lot of the power has to be taken from us, it is for the schoolstudents to declare we are on their side." We rejected this because it was abstract and didn't deal with how power could be taken - it could lead to teachers making absurd tactical errors on altering power relations. We changed it to read - "We welcome the fact that those students, when organised, will demand that we as teachers, give up our power to them."

