

An anti-report on the education commission report.

Introduction.

First of all apologies for not being able to produce this at an earlier date. This is the first moment i've had free to get this done-unfortunately it doesn't enable me time to get the draft round to other comrades who attended the meeting on youth liberation-so the report is basically a personal viewpoint on the situation-but i feel it also reflects much of what is being said amongst the comrades who came to the meeting on youth, on Sept 5th. The proposals, already circulated, call for a drastic re-appraisal of socialist perspectives on 'education'. They are minimum proposals which we feel open up new ground on this topic-new ground that needs to be broken if we are to drag the socialist movement, by the scruff of its neck, out of its present impasse on 'education'. Like the proposals, i hope this report is, direct, to the point, and a reasonable starting point towards seeing the struggle in the school system through the eyes of those who are forced to put up with it -pupils (the consumers of the school system). It is not an attempt to daub teachers as the untouchables, but an attempt to get our perspectives round school into perspective. As one comrade has said before, we will raise many difficult, sensitive, questions and in the short term offer only a few real clear answers.

We want, from the conference, what we intend to give-straight talk-searching questions-honest answers-criticism and self criticism.

Building the power of youth.

This is the core which our proposals, and this report, are based round. It is not of secondary importance, but absolutely central to get a clear picture of the class struggle taking place in school.

The most prominent feature of both the education commission documents and their proposals to conference is the complete failure to take this factor of the oppression of youth, within the school setup, into account. If we fail to recognise this factor then it stands to reason that our perspectives will be incorrect and totally ineffective.

Because it avoids taking seriously these divisions within the classroom and the need to help youth build their strength and power as youth, it falls straight into the unthinking chauvanism we are attempting to fight against.

QUOTE FROM EDUCATION COMMISSION BACKGROUND DOCUMENT.

"....They place great reliance on passing resolutions and paper affiliations and delegations from union bodies, instead of informing people about the cuts which are effecting them and their children". (Our emphasis).

Perhaps it would hit home to more of us, if it said "People ...and their wives". The point is this-the struggle of youth for liberation is the struggle to be regarded as people in their own right-not the children of people. Its a 'slip' we will continue to make until we recognise just how deep and ingrained our chauvanism is, and more importantly, when we get to grips with the essential task of helping build the power of youth in all their struggles which includes the fight against adult chauvanism and oppression from teachers, parents, and bourgeois 'education' as a whole.

FEMINIST LESSONS

Its no accident that we're relating this question of youth liberation to the struggle of women and the feminist movement. Having taken this question close to heart over recent months (in a conscious political way), its amazing the similarities that crop up. Like the way many 'socialists' play down the need to build youth power. One hears the same old backward sentiments that lots of male 'socialists' were echoing back in '69 towards the emerging feminist movement...like how "they're essentially reactionary", and "a waste of time". Big Flame, more than most, has taken the feminist struggle seriously. But do we have to wait for kids to gob the lessons of youth liberation into our faces before we stir from our apathy? Are we going to continue to offer nothing to the kids who "have to put up with the mess called education" (to

quote 'a 14 year old trouble maker's reply to the education commission). We raise these questions here, and we will be raising them at the conference cos they are key questions the education commission report failed to answer, yet need to be answered.

What makes our task all the more urgent is the apparent ease with which the fascists are seemingly able to incorporate and pervert the rebellious energy of white working class youth into their movement.

"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". W. Reich, 'What is Class consciousness'.

Disillusionment or powerlessness.

The report puts the blame for 'Truancy, violence, indiscipline, rejection of school on a combination of the effects of the cuts and disillusionment amongst kids at trends on the labour market (job prospects etc). Sure, this is no doubt true but hardly the major reason for truancy etc. Its a tendency, that runs throughout the report to look outside school for answers while refusing to see what is staring us in the face, inside school. It is surely a combination of the oppression (faced by kids) and the acute feeling of powerlessness to act, and organise active resistance to this oppression that leads to the more elementary gut responses mentioned earlier (truancy etc). One obvious point on truancy is that kids have marginally more power to control their own lives on the streets, away from the school and family.

The education commission reports, and proposals (from the Liverpool teachers group), like the rest of the left's perspectives on 'education' fail to take into account the following central points:

*Its youth, as school students, who have to put up with the 'education' system.

*Youth are no small part of the school system - they are in the majority.

*That teachers do have power over school students.

PROGRESSIVISM.

"The tragedy is that 'progressivism' has made radical teachers and others vulnerable to these attacks, because it doesn't have any strategy beyond the school gates". Education commission report (my emphasis).

The attacks the report is referring to are those of right wing traditionalists on 'progressive education'. The tragedy, contrary to the report quote above, is that 'Progressivism' doesn't have, never has had, and never can have, an effective strategy inside school. For they fail to recognise, for various reasons, pupils as the only sector within the school system, who literally have nothing to lose (But their chains in the fight against bourgeois education).

'Progressivism' is stuck firmly in a rut, with regards to its perspectives on 'education'. 'Progressivism' is the limits in which teachers can work towards changing 'Education'. Teachers have too much to lose by stepping outside this framework - their jobs, their status, their power over kids. It is this situation that we have touched on before - the old sore tale about similarities between teachers and foremen - the straightjacket situation teachers find themselves in, whereby if they openly support the kids, and their struggles, they face the sack, if they don't support the kids, they have to put up with the aggro of the kids. So we are saying the obvious, teachers are not in a good position to play an open role in supporting the struggle of schoolkids.

How we cope with this situation seeing as we have no school students within BF at the present time, I'll deal with later.

For the present, it would help if the education commission could fill us in on how orientating pamphlets to parents can possibly increase youths strength within the school setup?

This is not an argument against looking outside the school set up and broadening the debate on education. But we have to be absolutely honest with ourselves

to the effect such a strategy would have towards youths position within the school setup. Will we not be bowing to the most chauvanistic impulses of parents? Or do we forget, for the time being that there is one hell of a big contradiction between us, on one hand, politicizing MR and Mrs Joe Soap's fears about "Their Johnnie", and on the other hand the fight of "Their Johnnie" for more independence from Mr and Mrs Soap and his right to fight back against the oppression he experiences in school. Sure lets take the issue outside schools but lets always be fighting in the sort of ways that can Build the power of youth (not shit on them).

If we took the time to take an unbiased view of the 'education' setup (by unbiased i mean not always through the eyes of teachers) we'd see that most of the revolutionary lefts' strategies for education (perhaps all of them) are a bit like the Womens commission deciding to give men the leading role in the struggle of women against male chauvanism, (the mind boggles!).

TEACHERS.

"In compensation for the inadequacies of our daily work, we are given power over the pupils. The pupils tolerate the situation so often because they are powerless in the situations that arise. And they go on from school to work in conditions that they would never tolerate unless they were already used to FEELING POWERLESS, used to other people having power over them.

We do not, we cannot, give up that power simply by declaring ourselves "on the side of the kids". We can no more do this than men can declare themselves on the same side as women. A lot of the power has to be taken from us, it is for the school students to declare we are on their side. So in recognising that we have a common interest with school students, we must also recognise that there are divisions between us. These divisions will only begin to break down when school students recognise and begin to build their own strength".

... "In doing this we also have to appreciate that we are probably going to be the "sofest" target against whom kids will test themselves. We cannot admit that they should have power and then expect to be the arbiters of What is the right and wrong ways to be using it".

From a draft for the section on
'Ways forward' at the end of the prop-
-osed 'education' pamphlet from BF. (DC/WL)

The above quote amply puts the relationship of teachers to pupils in a more realistic perspective. It is refreshing to see teachers willing to look seriously at this question. So like the rest of the revolutionary left, the education commission fails to recognise the way in which the class struggle manifests itself within school and the classrooms. It fails to see the amazing potential for struggle amongst youth inside (and outside) school. And that is our gauge for weighing up potential - a few examples.....

* Figures for truancy - every day a million kids miss school, at least half of these are wagging it (playing truant).

* Political activity with kids ^{has} often been met with severe harrasment. At my old secondary school, people selling 'the little red schoolbook' were arrested by the police... this happened at many schools in Brum (probably elsewhere?).

* Little red schoolbook originally banned - for being obscene. Same happened to the infamous 'Oz-Schoolkids issue'.

* Anti army recruitment leaflets recently put out by B'ham TOM - caused B'ham heads to have an emergency meeting - pressure was put on Jill Knight (well known progressive!!) MP for a govt ban "On this sort of thing". The B'ham Evening Mail too responded with a scatheing editorial on it. We were hitting the bosses. WHERE IT HURT (Q-Why are they so worried?)

* This potential often reflects itself in the knife edge relationship between certain pupils and teachers.

* There seem to be increasing accounts of arson attempts on school buildings.

*Though numerically fairly small, the NUSS is a clear sign that more kids are recognising the need to work collectively (with other schoolkids).

*There have been walkouts up and down the country from kids complaining about School uniform and dress regulations, Expulsion of certain teachers, Cane etc. Though not on a large scale, we should never the less recognise that the feeling is there, against the school setup, amongst a hell of a lot of kids. Unless we can help develop this feeling, and help build the confidence and strength of kids to fight back against 'the bastards who keep em down', then as our 14 year old comrade points out (in his reply to the education commission) kids will continue to take out their frustration "On cats, old people, brick walls, blacks and each other".

"Our experience is that there is a wealth of interest, ideas, resources and support waiting to be taken seriously".

(DC/WL) Draft for end of pamphlet.

Because of the two obstacles mentioned earlier - The difficulty of teachers being able to support school students openly - and the absence of school students from Big Flame at present - Interventions alongside youth at school will have to start with us at the school gates.

BP/BBF.

PROPOSALS TO CONFERENCE ON YOUTH AND EDUCATION!

*This conference recognises the general imbalance of socialist perspectives on education, BF included, in that they fail to reflect either the numerical ratio of school students to teachers (the former also being the consumers of the education system) - nor do they take into account the oppressive relationship of teachers over school students. Failure to act on these points will leave the revolutionary socialist movements' perspectives on education trapped firmly in their present impasse. We call on BF to make the struggle of school students against bourgeois education the mainstream of our theory and practice round education.

*We must begin at once the task of developing a consistent theory and practice alongside youth in all their struggles - School/family/Work/Dole/on the streets/ Sexuality.

With fascist organisations like the National Front and National Party making significant gains in their work with white working class youth - it is essential that we help build a revolutionary youth movement, in this country, which could be the logical expression and reference point for young people struggling to control their own lives and to be regarded once and for all as people in their own right not "Peoples Children".

BP/BBF.DP/WLBF.TV/LEEDS BF.