



AVANT! Reflections on the Student Movement

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About *Avant!*

Avant! is a political journal focused on publishing groundbreaking articles on Communism and the current movement. Drawing from a various pool of ideological influences, *Avant!* hopes to push the ideological needle forward by allowing for free and open debate.

About *Volume 1*

Written from the perspective of student and youth activists, this volume asks the questions of the social position of the student, its relation to capitalism and class society. We seek to critique and undermine predominant conceptions of students as a special revolutionary force, as well as the contemporary dynamics of American Leftism which dictate our youth. This includes both the ideals and tactics of established national organizations which have lead to a degeneration of offensive class struggle.

These questions are defined by two essays: 'The Student Psyche in Political Crisis', and 'Democratic or Organic Centralism?'.

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Democratic

and

Organic Centralism

in the

Youth Movement

INTRODUCTION

Organizational structures, and their competing effectiveness, have been among the primary conversations of debate surrounding the Communist left for several decades. Following the fall of the New Communist Movement these discussions slid back into irrelevance, and Democratic Centralism has solidified itself in what little Communist movement exists in America. The 21st Century represents a stagnation in Communist ideology. Individual Communists act little more than historians of their favorite epoch, and cannot fathom acts outside their prescribed formulas written over a century ago.

Historical Materialism gives us the tools to effectively examine the mechanisms of history, and in this evaluation we can ascertain that as society shifts the methods of class struggle also adapt. We do not expect to use the same tactics and strategies of the European Peasant Revolts or those of the French Revolution, so why do so many “Communists” relentlessly mimic century old organizational strategies? As with many other issues, a healthy dose of idealism and a misunderstanding of history are to blame.

Lenin’s work stands as a sort of Gospel for many on the Left. Instead of critically examining works such as *What is to Be Done?* and *State and Revolution*, and understanding their role in the material conditions of a still highly feudalistic empire over 100 years ago, many treat these as “how-to guides”. That these seminal texts represent a blueprint for struggle, and not as a representation of class struggle in a specific time and place. This is not to deride or deny Lenin’s

contributions, but rather to understand them in relation to the totality of history.

One specific demographic of struggle that is significantly stunted ideologically is the youth, and accompanying student, movement. Once the bastion of new, revolutionary ideas with the youth being lively with debate; the contemporary movement has been thoroughly centralized around the organizational principle of democratic centralism and Leninism. We will come to argue that the principle of democratic centralism is an inefficient model, if not outright hostile, for the current class struggle, at least as it relates to the youth and their organizing.¹

Youth organizing has a special connotation. While the youth are not inherently revolutionary, as many on the Marxist left proclaim, they do serve as a useful microcosm of wider bourgeois society. Any ideological hypotheses we have can be thoroughly experimented on with the youth. Youth organizing lacks a sense of permanence that other facets often have, mainly due to the transitory nature of young people (specifically students).² With this in mind, we can begin to analyze the effectiveness of different organizational strategies, namely those of democratic versus organic centralism.

¹ Youth organizing is the only experience in organizing and taking part in the class struggle that I personally have. I do not want to attempt to universalize the monolith that is the struggle against Capital, however many overlaps between youth and traditional organizing may exist.

² Young people often lack ties to an area that older proletarians have, such as children, a partner, or a consistent home. It is not uncommon for younger people to move away from their hometown permanently or for a short period of time. This is exacerbated with students who themselves are often disconnected from the traditional social relations of the community they live in and are not expected to live in the same area that they obtained their education (Many graduates may end up having to move for employment if they have a specialized degree or skill set).

WHAT IS CENTRALISM?

Democratic Centralism is the organizing principle that nearly all Marxists abide by, but what even is it? Democratic Centralism is the method of structuring an organization in such a way that prioritizes operational unity. Lenin formulates Democratic Centralism in *What is to Be Done?*, and would later be evolved to stress the fundamental importance of “Unity of Action”, rather than outright freedom to criticize.

“The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and full freedom to criticise, so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action; it rules out all criticism which disrupts or makes difficult the unity of an action decided on by the Party.”³

It would not be long until the Democratic Centralist principle became law in the party, as by 1917 the Party had firmly adopted that line.

"The Sixth Congress adopted new Party Rules. These rules provided that all Party organizations shall be built on the principle of democratic centralism.

This meant:

- 1) That all directing bodies of the Party, from top to bottom, shall be elected;
- 2) That Party bodies shall give periodical accounts of their activities to their respective Party organizations;

³ Vladimir Lenin. *Freedom to Criticize and Unity of Action*.

3) That there shall be strict Party discipline and the subordination of the minority to the majority;

4) That all decisions of higher bodies shall be absolutely binding on lower bodies and on all Party members.

The Party Rules provided that admission of new members to the Party shall be through local Party organizations on the recommendation of two Party members and on the sanction of a general membership meeting of the local organization.”⁴

When codified into the Party Platform and Program, Democratic Centralism shifted from an organizational strategy to a principle of governance. A policy that negates the historical conditions that led to the creation of Democratic Centralism in the first place. Its codification led to the establishment of a Party Bureaucracy that stifled freedom of expression and allowed for the conservative Stalinist clique to take root and plant itself firmly in the party’s leadership.

As time went on, various flavors of the International Communist Movement became disillusioned with the Soviet model and posited their own alternatives. While Maoist and Trotskyist cliques criticized the function of the Soviet bureaucracy, they failed to adequately critique the organizational form that assisted the Soviet degeneration. Only the various sections of the “Ultra-Left”: the anarchists, German-Dutch Current, and the Italian left, tackled the topic of organization, among those namely the Italian left (who is the topic of this essay).

⁴ *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Page 198*

By the mid 20th century, Democratic Centralism had proven itself to be an idealist and, at times, reactionary organizing principle. Instead of uplifting debate and conversation it shut it down. Instead of advancing the Party it closed it off and neutered its development. The battle cries of “Unity of Action” had fermented and degenerated into a “Unity of Leadership”.

“The danger of bourgeois influences acting on the class party doesn’t appear historically as the organisation of fractions, but rather as a shrewd penetration stoking up unitary demagoguery and operating as a dictatorship from above, and immobilising initiatives by the proletarian vanguard.

This defeatist factor cannot be identified and eliminated by posing the question of discipline in order to prevent fractionist initiatives, but rather by successfully managing to orientate the party and the proletariat against such a peril at the moment when it manifests itself not just as a doctrinal revision, but as an express proposal for an important political manoeuvre with anti classist consequences.”⁵

Opposed to Democratic Centralism and its degenerative tendencies, the Italian Left raised the banner of “Organic Centralism” in its stead. Unlike Democratic Centralism, Organic Centralism can be harder to pin down as an ideology and principle.

⁵ Amadeo Bordiga. *Section 5 of the Lyons Theses*.

*“All this should be treated much more broadly, but it is still possible to achieve a conclusion about the party’s organisational structure in such a difficult transition. It would be a fatal error to consider the party as dividable into two groups, one of which is dedicated to the study and the other to action; such a distinction is deadly for the body of the party, as well as for the individual militant. The meaning of unitarism and of **organic centralism** is that the party develops inside itself the organs suited to the various functions, which we call propaganda, proselytism, proletarian organisation, union work, etc., up to tomorrow, the armed organisation; but nothing can be inferred from the number of comrades destined for such functions, as on principle no comrade must be left out of any of them.”*⁶

Organic Centralism can be summed up as the notion that factionalism is not an inherently negative behavior that must be combatted and shut down, and that internal factions of the Party, or any organization, are actually **beneficial** to its developments. These principles can be seen in the historical tradition of the Communist Movement, and even in the Leninist annals of history. Marx himself was a factionalist in the 1st International when he struggled against the lines of Bakunin and Proudhon. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were factionalists when they broke with the Mensheviks of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. In each of these situations, the organic development of the proletariat and its organs was spurred on by factional splits in the existing movement against bourgeois reaction.

⁶ Amadeo Bordiga. *Considerations on the party’s organic activity when the general situation is historically unfavourable*

Organic Centralism does not posit that there should be infinite splits until the “Invariant” line is held supreme, but rather that unity of action necessarily cannot be arrived at from strict ideological unity. In fact, adherence to strict and remorseless ideological unity was one of the deciding factors that led to the murder of the Bolshevik movement in its infancy.

“Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”⁷

We are currently in the *farce* stage of ideological and historical development. Questions of centralism and its role are of the most pressing matter to our current movement, both proletarian and youth. Even though the 21st century remains one of the most ideologically free and liberating epochs of the historical movement, it is going through its own period of “Bolshevization”.⁸ “Unity of Action” has again become the rally cry of the left. A “Unity” which necessitates the ideological dictatorship of methods that have proven themselves to fail time and time again. If we are to preserve any semblance of authentic struggle in our movement we must ruthlessly critique and struggle against these idealist measures.

⁷ Karl Marx. *18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*.

⁸ “Ideologically free” in the sense of comparing our situation to the pre-WW2 era with the mass level of Bolshevization and centralization of the party lines around the sect of “Marxism-Leninism” following the power struggle in the USSR.

IDEALISM AND ORGANIZATION IN THE YOUTH AND STUDENT MOVEMENT

What one must understand about the Youth movement is that it is dominated primarily by students. Students on their own serve as a problematic demographic to build a revolutionary base off of, but that is not the topic of this essay.⁹ Of the many concerns present the primary is the organizational strategy of the youth movement. Whether consciously aware of it or not, the prevailing principle of the day is Democratic Centralism. Leninists and Crypto-Leninists currently have a monopoly on the student “movement”, which itself is the majority of contemporary youth organizing. Leninist cliques, such as Students for Democratic Society (SDS) and the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) are heavily tied to the “established” Communist Parties in the US, with SDS being the unofficial student wing of the Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO) and PYM being closely linked to the Party for “Socialism” and Liberation (PSL). Other smaller parties influence separate student unions, and even unaffiliated and independent student groups fall into the wider Leninist ecosystem. Leninist principles of vanguardism are copy and pasted onto the student and youth experience, and these mass organizations either are operated as micro parties or themselves become an organ of said party. In both instances, idealism prevails as the basis for organization.

⁹ This topic is covered much more in depth in the following piece *Student Psyche in Crisis*, which is also found in this journal.

Many aspiring young Leninists and Revolutionaries will join local organizations and parties. In fact, they might even create their own organization. In any case, the rigid cycle of Leninism and Democratic Centralism begins with the poor youth unwillingly thrust into it. Let us, for example, look at a pre-existing social organization and its effects. Take the Students for a Democratic Society. SDS is a nominally left-wing student movement that is built around the theme of international solidarity and espouses an anti-war message. This is all fine except for the fact that SDS is a direct funnel organization to the wider national party of the Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Gullible and impressionable young teens join the SDS looking to make a positive impact on their community, both local and international, but from the very minute they join they are ideologically groomed into accepting FRSO's line. I'm not saying that it is necessarily wrong for an organization to have a specific ideological slant, but what I am saying is that this is kept under wraps and key and is not made clear from the start.

Let's rejoin our aspiring young radical. Now a semester has passed and they have become fully ingrained into the SDS, or any other youth group's, culture. They attend protests and rallies. They might lead chants or give speeches. After a certain amount of time they get approached by a more senior member of the group and are informed about this exciting new opportunity to join a national movement. Most young people would be ecstatic to hear this news. Their sense of self worth is inflated and they can now call themselves a *Communist*. When joining this nationally oriented party, they are introduced to the works of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, etc. They are taught this in a closed environment where the

gospel in these texts is already pre supposed to be accurate and true. It is here that Democratic Centralism strikes its first blow.

Following the premise of adherence to organizational unity, it is a logical conclusion to extend this out to a strict unity of ideological matters. After all, ideology is just the rhetorical form of physical organization. When parties and organizations are formed it is often in mind that it subscribes to a specific strand of Marxism, such as a *Marxist-Leninist Student Group*, a *Maoist Party*, or a *Trotskyist Reading Group*. Under this principle an objective truth is already decided upon and anyone who joins must be ordained in these Communist ecclesiastes. Democratic Centralism in this manner is not an organizing principle, but is a tool to enforce a rigid ideological hierarchy. Prospective cadres and members are exposed to Communism through the lens of the equation already being solved long ago and that we just need to apply the correct historical formula. Since the youth is shackled by the principles of Democratic Centralism they are not able to criticize elements of the ideological or organizational base without risk of expulsion or re-education. Such that Democratic Centralism has fully ceased to be democratic in any meaningful capacity and has devolved into vulgar centralism. Or rather than a *de-evolution* it is the logical conclusion. It has deviated from its idealized conception of democratic debate and instead replaced it with the reality of its implementation: that the minority must be harshly combatted.

Returning to our stand in Communist, they have now fully joined the ranks of the Party and are a committed and faithful cadre in the ideological service of Marxism-Leninism (or Trotskyism, or Maoism. It really doesn't matter, the

function of centralism doesn't change in its relation as a way to bind the youth to the Party). Since their ideological base is merely adopted and not critically examined they have ceased to be a Communist and are instead a vector of organizing for whatever social club they decided to join. In essence, the Communist becomes a living, breathing automaton designed to regurgitate whatever party propaganda was fed to them, and is all too willing and happy to do so. This all operates under the principle of Democratic Centralism, and this system is kept in motion via its reproduction with new cadre.

Now is where we diverge in our analysis, as the young Communist has two pathways they can take. They either submit themselves willingly to the Party and allow their local youth organizing to become just another organ of the Party, or they engage in the creation of the micro party. Let us examine the former first, since it lines up neatly with the narrative of the youth we have crafted. Picking up where we left off, this young aspirational revolutionary has joined a national party and is now a faithful leader of its student and youth wing in their local area. Being such a faithful soldier of the Party, they are sure to implement all of the ideological and organizational directives that are set upon them, no matter the cost. Across the country, perhaps the world, this process repeats itself ad nauseum. Thousands of well-to-do young Communists fall to the trap of nationally led organizations. In order to please their superiors and to fall in line with the centralization of the Party, local organizing is subordinated to the realm of obscurity and national campaigns reign supreme.

In the organic development of revolutionary theory and praxis it is certain that as locations change so do the strategic, tactical, organizational, and even ideological considerations. While it is possible to prescribe a national strategy in some cases, in most others regional differences are often far too profound that a qualitative change in tactics must be considered. For example, across the United States there exists a great variance in class consciousness, economic development, and other class considerations. It would not make sense to use the same tactics in the radical city of Chicago and the rural, less conscious South. However, parties take their nationally coordinated campaign and offer it as a panacea to the afflictions of Capital.

When national organizing interests trump local and regional interests it only ends up splintering the efforts of those at the local level. Under threat of not following the party line, local activists and organizers are coerced into abiding by national action. For example let's look at a local case of the relationship between a nationally led organization and how it interacts with local organizing. Coalitions are the lifeblood of any local organizing scene, uniting both competing sects of the Communist movement and single-issue or identity groups. These grand alliances can only work if all those present are willing to come together and run events communally, however due to the presence of nationally led groups this dynamic can often sour. Let's say that a local coalition has an event planned for next Friday. It takes a large amount of effort to coordinate several groups and their respective membership as well as promote it to the unaffiliated masses. Now, in this example, one group has been given the memo that next Wednesday is set to be the host of a "National Day of Action" and their local chapter is expected, sometimes required, to schedule an event.

Often these national events and local events are being organized around similar, if not the same, topic, but the national Party cannot exercise control over the local coalition in the same manner it can its local branch. This presents an odd situation for all parties involved. Locally, the coalition has already expended a large amount of effort and manpower to get the event up and running; the regional branch itself has obligations to both the local coalition *and* the Party. Given that the Party necessarily trumps the locals, if not then why else would it exist, the branch is fundamentally coerced into abiding by Democratic Centralism and following the will of the Party, as nationally coordinated actions would have been decided upon democratically. Following this, the branch coordinates its own event that competes with the local coalition and this causes confusion amongst the workers who are not up to date with party politics, and causes strife and antagonism among the local activist scene. In this equation no one wins and everyone loses, and it all boils back down to the backwards organizing principles that have been forced onto everyone involved. As far as the regional branch is concerned, it has ceased to have all autonomy and is turned into an organ under the direct control of the Party. Under the direct control of the Party, the branch slowly becomes completely alienated from all forms of local organizing as its base for existing is constructed inorganically and is hostile to the rest of the locality. This is not just an organizational coincidence, but is a long standing tactic of many groups, and is something we have much experience dealing with. Locally this strategy has only led to branches that act in this manner to be looked at with derision and they have been fully relegated into ideological poverty, obscurity, and both rhetorically and materially meaningless, “protests”, “rallies”, and “marches”.

The branch can continue down its current path of self isolation from the wider “movement” in favor of appeasing Party bureaucrats, or it can take a second road. In any given organization that is tied to another it is bound to have, at some point, an antagonistic relationship with its parent. Youth wings tend to break in some way or fashion from the Party proper, and while still being tied to it begin to form their own micro-party. Adhering to Leninist principles, many of the youth will take democratic centralism and apply it to their wider based mass organization, in practice turning it into a “micro-party”. Due to the previous conditions laid out in the relationship between the branch and the Party, the branch’s efforts in local organizing can be strained, or at worse they can be politically isolated. If the branch seeks to remain politically and ideologically relevant it necessitates a split or division away from the parent Party. In this struggle, the division’s cause is seen as a tactical difference in strategy and the ideological component is left unthought of and thus the same ideals that caused tensions to ferment and cause the split are still firmly in control. In order to protect itself materially and ideologically the leadership of the local branch keeps Democratic Centralism as a central principle. Democratic Centralism acts as a shield for the branch, now in all intents and purposes the “micro-party”, to wield in the struggle against the parent Party and elements in the branch that would remain loyal to it. Centralism again serves as a tool to solve practical differences in the short term while doing nothing to solve the long term implications of its enactment. While a split certainly helps with the validity of the new micro-party in the eyes of the local community, it does nothing to fundamentally, or even meaningfully, change the social relations present in the organization. Leadership has only nominally been replaced with a centralist and faux democratic chain of command. It is the perfect analogy to

the conception many Leninists have of revolution, that if only we rearrange the managers of society we could flourish.

Solutions lay not with discarding national strategy, nor with the adoption of localist and regionalist attitudes, but with instead with a radical shift the social relations that are present in political organization and how leadership and participation exists. These shifts come under the analysis that there are specific strategic and tactical considerations to keep in mind, as well as ideological obligations. In our own personal experience, we took the route of tactical decentralization. All official positions that previously existed and their associated privileges, as well as the very notion of the micro party were all immediately abolished. In its place we pushed for the organic development and organization of our members, and while there were some growing pains we adjusted well and the membership is more active and we have more meaningful campaigns. However, this is just one example. In your area or organization it is possible that a tactical centralization could be the more effective development. As long as the ideological component remains consistent, matters of tactics and strategy do not need to be universalized.

Democratic Centralism utterly fails to achieve any of its ideological or practical goals of unity or anti-factionalism, in fact it is the very reason why factionalism and disunity come about in the first place. Had there not been a rigid hierarchy in the social organization of the relationship between the Party and its branch, there would be no factional struggle launched by the localists since they would be free to pursue campaigns at their own discretion. Historically, these

principles have not succeeded in their goals and have only existed to cement whatever leadership body exists, whether that be the Stalinist Clique that betrayed the Russian Revolutionaries, the Khrushchevite Bloc that summarily betrayed the Stalinist Clique, or in a more apt example the German SDP and its expulsion of its youth wing that got too radical for its own good in the 60s. Throughout history we can see that Democratic Centralism has only ever been used as a tool for the ruling circle to defend its leadership under the guise of party unity. Unlike the Trotskyist sections of the movement, we do not claim fault to lay with the personal failings of those in leadership, but with the very principles of Democratic Centralism that embolden leadership to alienate the general membership and secure their own political legacies. The ultimate tragedy is that the current groups ruling over their national parties are only ruling over micro sects of the movement and will have little to no legacy to speak of. If fault lies with Democratic Centralism and the way it manages social relations, then what is the way forward for the Communist Movement? And how should we approach inner social organization?

THE WAY FORWARD

Central to the Communist thesis is the abolition of current social relations and its replacement with a new social order. Following this understanding we must also realize that our current inter-Communist social organization must continually work against the current order and inside our own spheres we can begin the process of developing new social relations. Democratic Centralism has shown itself to be little more than a series of principles that do nothing to degrade Capital, but instead reinforces it through rigid hierarchy. The question still remains, how we can begin to shift our relations while still living under the dictatorship of Capital, and the solution presents itself as adopting a new and different structure. I believe that the solution lies in discarding Democratic Centralism and adopting Organic Centralism as our sole principle.

Democracy as an ideal itself is harmful to communism and contemporary communization of social systems. Organizational structures are inherently tied to their matching modes of production and the overwhelming consensus among Capitalists is that democracy is the preferred social model. Democracy is so intrinsically tied up with Liberalism that the two cannot be separated and thus the calls from Communists that it is actually communism that will bring about “true democracy” often ring hollow. Not only are they incorrect in their assertion that liberal democracy is “not real democracy”, but that our structure under communism will be inherently anti-democratic. Instead of vague platitudes of equality we must uphold the authentic character of Communism that is the organic self organization and development of the proletariat in abolishing itself, and it is Organic Centralism that can lead us down that path.

Organic Centralism holds the keys to the self abolition of existing social relations in that it prioritizes the development of the proletariat first and foremost. Many often take “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” in purely economical terms, such that a Communist society is one that merely distributes and reallocates resources in a more efficient manner, however this also applies to the social relations. In the Communist Party, each member will act according to their ability, meaning that they will organize in a manner that is best for their conditions and that they will receive what support and guidance is needed. Unlike some others on the Ultra-Left, it is not my position that the Party should be the arbiter of all action and ideological matters, and nor is it my position that localism and regionalism should reign supreme; that the very notion of the Party should be scorned. It is my position that the Party should be an existing outlet of Communism in practice, that it directly begins to break down social relations in its immediacy and provides as an example to the proletariat of what communist society can look like.

Back to its application to the youth movement, Organic Centralism can be very neatly applied to it because many in the movement already practice Organic Centralism. Inside many youth organizations, structure is guided by the principle “those that can, do”. Democratic Centralism often presents itself in a manner such that it is employed in strictly ideological matters and used as a defensive tool to protect the legitimacy of leadership. However, inter organizational structures are often merit based and revolve around several factions and cliques that take up different segments of work. Rather than being

directed to fulfill their expectations, the individual finds one, or more, segment of organizing that they find fulfilling and they act on it. Whether it be mutual aid, education, etc, there are often several inter-organizational factions that form for the advancement of the groups practical efforts, and these factions work in tandem for the betterment of the entire organization such that there is *a free association of organizers*.

The principle goal of Communism lies not in its program but in its content and character. We simply cannot expect to usher in a classless society when we operate off the Liberal and Capitalist framework of social relations. In our everyday lives and political work we must tirelessly effort to hasten the communisation of our communities, not in the hopes of constructing political capital to wield, but with the goal of destroying both Capital and politics in one fell swoop.

Student

Psyche

In

Crisis

NOTE TO THE READER

“By means of its school system and its ideological and political life, contemporary society hides the past and present violence on which this situation rests. It conceals both its origin and the mechanism which enables it to function” – Dauvé (1974)¹⁰

What can we as Communists consider the student? What is their relation to capital, and to the proletariat? These questions were pivotal in providing an outline for this work, specifically because they are all too often ignored by the Left.

As a student organizer myself for several years, I had to consistently define, redefine, and define once more my own relation to capital. Yet, nothing seemed to stick. Given the climate I began organizing in, I was never convinced students were on the cusp of a social revolution in our age, but I was adamant about our position in the forefront of a luxurious activism. I was convinced that students were an embryonic proletariat to be, and as educated members of said group, we would hold unique positions of power over the fate of the Communist movement. It goes without saying that I adopted aspects of Marxist-Leninist ideology to fit such a position, and thus I became the quintessential modern student organizer, ready to build a student movement rivalling that of the New Left and beyond. Furthermore, I was curiously encouraged to develop these views by institutions of the Left (especially Communist Parties) themselves, which obstructed me from developing a material criticism or any coherent framework to build from.

¹⁰ Dauvé, Gilles, and François Martin. *Eclipse and Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement*. 1974.

This article, then, is largely a criticism of my own work and failures; I only wish to highlight these failures so future uprisings can learn from them in their entirety. But this criticism goes beyond bourgeois ideals or tactical errors, it's regarding the ineptitude of the ideas of the Marxist-Leninist Left as a whole on the question of student organizing. Thus, this work is also a criticism of our beloved Leftist institutions.

So much time has passed between now and the epoch of student activism, and yet it remains to be said that we as a social movement maintain some very unclear-if not absurd-ideas regarding the student movement and its relation to capital. What is the relevance of a student movement? Ask the most popular Communist organizations and you are not likely to receive a satisfactory answer. Even further, it is precisely because their views find little historical basis, the current attitude of the vast majority of supposed Communists (especially self-described Marxists and Leninists) are and have been with the student at heart. The student movement is the defiant movement, they will say. But they have only embraced the campus struggles to reap their own concessions, rather than to struggle.

These attitudes and ideas are not new or specific to this era: They have spawned in the backdrop of 75 years of American demographic shifts, a swiftly changing political landscape, and a spectacle of fetishism that permeates more and more of each proceeding generation's consciousness. They have held firm even as the universities themselves morph in size, purpose, and scope. The central forces in molding this landscape have left much more arable fields of radical content completely untouched, and it is also for this reason I feel the need to address 'The Student Psyche in Political Crisis': That being the psychology of students, their position in midst of

turmoil, and the Left's engagement and handling of students as a social force. It is imperative to make an analysis of these relations, as our generation has now learned, even seemingly minor mistakes in social analyses lead to our blood being spilt. Given we are in the midst of a solidarity movement with Palestine, or perhaps having already seen its culmination, it is important to reflect on the tactics and the people that have shaped such an era.

AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR IDEAS

Over the last year and some change, the Left has re-engaged with the potential of the student-led uprising. In response to the uprising of October 7th, 2023 and the subsequent mutilation of Palestinian society by Israel (with the significant backing of their generous American beneficiaries), Palestinians (with heavy collaboration on part of the Left) have forced the Palestine question back into American domestic politics and everyday life. The response has been generationally defining not only for Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim Americans, but also for the American Left in general. In the subsequent alienation of the Left by the political establishment, these conditions have produced new (old) organizing structures, quasi-militant programs, and campaigns aimed at the center of the imperial core. It has also become a stamp of cultural rebellion, in a country where support for Israel has been sharply declining amongst each proceeding generation and the youth feels more intentionally misrepresented by the political elite.¹¹ A struggle has proceeded with the intent to sabotage the United States' relationship with Israel, be it in military, academic, or ground level social settings. For most of the Left, this relationship carries over from the sphere of Palestine and into the very nature of American and-unfortunately to a lesser extent-world capitalism. A movement rebirthed due to the nature of Israeli aggression, the actions were a bright sign of evolving consciousness in what has so far been a traumatic decade for the working class.

¹¹ Wirtschafter, Valerie, Shibley Telhami, Yun Sun, Nazita Lajevardi, and Elaine Kamarck William A. Galston. "The Generation Gap in Opinions Toward Israel." Brookings, August 20, 2024.

As stated above, these attempts to strike at the heart of empire have been inextricably linked with the student experience since their conception. Many of the initial eruptions happened to be on campus, and were typically led by a refocusing of the goals of the ‘Boycott, Divest, Sanction’ campaign and how universities played a pivotal role in the normalization of the Israeli State. Many academic sponsored birthright trips and study abroad programs to the regime, provided lip service via the placement of Zionist academics and curriculums, and provided support to Zionist campus organizations. An immediately visible threat was created that was not present in other aspects of American society. Initially a mere preservation of genocidal ideals, the question of divestment rose as a north star due to the economic relationships universities maintained with defense contractors, with many around the country facilitating the Israeli State as million dollar benefactors. It would be no surprise then that the university became integral to BDS and to Palestine solidarity. Furthermore, these relationships are why the Palestine Solidarity Movement largely became practically entirely a student movement by Spring of 2024, the hub of which almost all dissenting activity revolved around.

In the totality of said activity, we students had largely attempted to use our civil rights in order to affect political policy, thereby regarding the legal institutions as a worthy “Other” to speculate on and field with our interest. Contrary to what activists hoped, this only legitimized the American State as the worthy judge of our activity. This can be seen in the thousands of marches, pickets, rallies, and other events designed to generate awareness and opposition to US involvement in Palestine, with demands that amounted to mere calls for divestment, the removal of politicians in favor of smaller, indie politicians, and abstract claims against “imperialism” which could be

remedied by the political process. While easy to dissect now, over a year ago these demands and displays seemed impenetrable.

Albeit immediately lacking in content, the events themselves still successfully drew hundreds of thousands of individuals across the country which fostered a distinct Anti-Zionist culture. This period also saw large movements of self-organization in the media. If we had anything to our merit it was an effective, coherent online presence and mode of reproduction for propaganda we hadn't seen for years! Furthermore, it was the Left that facilitated much of this, whether it be through growing student mass organizations, providing bail/monetary support to arrested students, or by providing political guidance to the plethora of organizers around the country. Yet some 14 months into such an outburst of activism, much of this infrastructure has proved toothless. The burgeoning student movement which outpaced even the organized Left is asleep. The American institutions are as shimmering as ever, universities lay relatively unscathed, and global capitalism seems to have hardly seen better days . Why?

As a Communist, I am especially interested in how new formations of radical youth dissent- especially in opposition to the US-backed genocide-have developed in regards to the established Communist Left in America, and how that has led the historical situation to deteriorate. As we will grow to understand, it is not a matter of any one political issue but a relation between social categories; The Left influences and feeds the student movement, and the student movement in turn influences the Left's understanding and outlook in some respects. This relationship has solidified over the past few decades, where the sphere of university organizing has served as a sandbox of organization building for the larger Communist Parties and associations.

Due to the financial-campus relations cited, this movement saw a historical shift back toward the importance of the student. It asked the student to carry the banner and weight of the campaigns forward, ultimately with the intent to confront something. Perhaps the State? Here lies a plethora of social questions that have not been addressed by our solidarity. As a student organizer both before and during this movement, this article expands on ideas developed from our own experiences with these variables and the subsequent clashes with the social landscape and the political authority. It goes without being said that this analysis will also include the outlook of student organizers nationwide in an attempt to universalize some of the findings we come to.

I have also felt the need to elaborate on these questions and tactics both as they relate specifically to the question of Palestine, and what this means for the American Left and future movements that aspire for revolutionary abolition. As such, we will be analyzing the social components of the on-campus Palestine movement and how those interactions have unfolded in the past year. This analysis will include the general shape and structure of the modern student movement across America, as well as how these elements fed the trajectory of the campus movement we experienced. Findings of such do not intend to be a diagnosis of all that went wrong (or right) in the context of the mass movement, but simply contextualize the class dynamics we want to study (student-based). Moving further, we will take a step back from this movement in its specificity and analyze the class position of the modern American student. This will take us to a point where we have a defined understanding of students as a social force, their unique behaviors, and how their imprint has been felt with the latest revolts. As needed, an analysis will also be done with the question of the State, campus

administration, and how the increasing militarization of campuses will affect the aforementioned elements.

In the entirety of this work, we seek to better grasp the expectations for students in future movements, and how the Left's policy and attitudes toward students can be reshaped for the sake of forming more decisive class struggle networks. It is also imperative to develop these ideas in an effort to change the Left's perception of studenthood as a whole: To highlight the startling non-class character of studenthood and the political obstructions at hand.

A BRIEF COMPOSITION OF THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

Following the uprising of October 7th and the 6 months leading up to the Encampment protests, students and young people proved once again to be a dynamic political force. Where previous popular movements, such as Occupy, failed to capture coherent political legitimacy or offer any demands for the public realm, the student protests between late 2023 and early 2024 were almost unanimous in their political content. Practically every university with a pro-Palestine contingent, of which there were scores, developed demands related to: 1) the end of economic investment (via university endowments) in the military industrial complex, and the establishment of student oversight in regards to future university investments, 2) the end of normalization with Israel proper (via cutting study-abroad ties, issuing public statements of support with Palestinians), and 3) the offering of resources to Palestinians and those displaced by the genocide. Not all university movements featured the 3rd demand, and some included special interests specific to their university, such as featuring certain programs or educational content. However, they seemed to spontaneously and unanimously include divestment and anti-normalization of some form, depending on which companies their respective universities invested in and whether or not information was publicly available regarding the matter.

The organizational and tactical relevance is primarily down to divestment as a demand from student organizers. This was nothing new: The

seeds for this tactic had long been sown, notably with the infrastructure of the international ‘BDS movement’ that was formed in 2005.¹² Although it was largely unsuccessful for many years in terms of concrete action, small steps in the ideal sense had been made by the eve of October 7th. Essentially, it held a near international monopoly on what the wider movement constituted, making it a de facto springboard for any dissent. It also came to serve as a reference point for how American organizers understood their role in activity, and what could be put forth in the name of the Palestinians. However, the radical movement was doomed the moment it grasped BDS’ hand.

The issue with BDS as a leading movement mainly lies in that it fosters a reactive *political* and *economic* policy that normalizes the working masses as consumers; It is the “demand-side economics’ of movements, and to address workers as such only allows them to take part of a spectacle of fetishism and consumption while keeping them docile. It reinforces the ideas of consumption as a moral obligation, as activism, or even as revolution itself. That the commodity itself is actually a righteous and holy thing, if only produced by the right proletarians! We as Communists must understand there is no commodity, no product of exploitation, that is revolutionary in any proletarian sense and there never will be. Just as we don’t dream of labor, we must shun dreams of consumption, and if we do not we must admit those dreams are thoroughly poisoned by the world around us. BDS is simply the sickly pearl of this ‘ethical consumption’ which sought to be decisive in a national victory, but could not imagine the struggle of Palestinian freedom outside of world capitalism. It was merely an aggrandization of reification:

¹² BDS Movement, July 9, 2005. <http://www.bdsmovement.net/>.

Perhaps abrasive enough towards the Zionists to encourage mobilization from the Anti-Zionists, but ultimately leaving all parties in submission to the commodity form.

Due to its scope, BDS also makes the mistake of legitimizing bourgeois political power. It counts as its victories not the liberation of the world proletariat or even decisive blows against capital as a social relation, but the tacit approval of bourgeois counties, cities, and even entire nation-state apparatuses that make declarations on its behalf. In this, the movement posits an incrementalist, progressivist outlook that society is slowly humanizing itself and becoming more civil, and that we just need to do a little more activism to warrant a kinder capitalism. A kinder capitalism in which workers-or rather, “the people”-have more of a say on economics, wholly missing the hostility of economics as a bourgeois science. For in this world BDS imagines, it is not capitalism at all but a machine that produces and distributes wholly independent of the human will. A non-capitalist capitalism where no classes exist, just capitalist production churning along as if it had always done so. Any Communist can and should quickly see the collapse of this idealism, but wrapped in the plight of the Palestinians it ultimately confused the masses, allowing bourgeois figures and statesmen to draw on their affection for simple acts of lip service or allocation. The model society was transfigured from what we dared to dream of to which capitalists granted us a looser leash.

I fear when all efforts bottle the Palestine question into a question of spending, it only legitimizes capitalism even further, thereby leading to a devolution of the struggle into an easy-to-share, regurgitated mess of sloganeering. We were told (and told others) to boycott Israel, so we did.

Whether or not the boycott was to be supported became a trending moralist identity. We were told (and told others) to buy Palestinian, so we did. Sympathetic youths bought Palestinian shirts, flags, stickers, keffiyehs and other commodities as the ultimate show of loyalty to the liberation struggle. It did not happen immediately, but once it did, every aspect of the solidarity movement was penetrated by capital. There was no haven from its reign. And with that, what was supposed to be a radical defense of *life* became a question of the allocation of individual and institutional *consumption*.

We must also consider that incrementalist movements like BDS are not worthy of our affection. While it is true capitalism offers some room for dissent, ultimately most “gains” are rolled back later and lost in the vacuum of time. They are designed as such, and any variable (whether boycotts or labor law) responsible for a fall in the rate of profit will eventually be on the chopping block. As such, even the very liberal and collaborationist aims of such a shimmering solidarity movement are doomed to get lost as well. BDS is a warranted fight against imperialist institutions collaborating with Zionism, but these changes cannot be peacefully enforced under the existence of capitalist empire (i.e. government divestment/withdrawal of aid, seeking an ethical, intellectual, and less penetrative capitalism). Thus BDS talks down, becoming a shopping list for working class people to abide by. To identify their consumption as a radical struggle. BDS does not confront the root of the empire, its social relation, so ultimately it cannot confront Zionism. In other words, its illusion begins to crumble. As it is that “capitalism could appropriate even the most radical ideas and return them

safely in the form of harmless ideologies.”¹³ Approach capital in its own language and you have successfully accomplished its rebirth.

So in its infancy, this new movement was at a limp due to the inadequacy of its influences and sterile demands. Now let us better understand the soldiers tasked to carry out such a campaign: The students themselves. The implementation of the campus-specific demands (divestment, anti-normalization, solidarity) was usually resting on the wills of an established array of student groups, that in turn formed a vaguely united coalition. Student formations were typically composed of a pan-Left coalition (of which boiled down to national Marxist-Leninist mass organizations, YDSA chapters, and to an extent anarchist and localist organizations), a sizable and/or dominant influence from Palestinian cultural or NGO organizations, and a large Muslim presence throughout. The aforementioned groups (especially the Muslim student population) comprised the vast majority of the individuals dedicated to the Palestine question or susceptible to shared sentiment, so naturally they became campus hegemony to direct local energy. There were notable contributions from other organizations and student unions, but across the country, these groups mostly served as smaller special interest groups within the wider coalition.

So it was decidedly the Left, Muslim, and Palestinian contingent which shared all matters of control, communications, and decision-making. The *language* and *propagation* of the movement, then, was shaped by these communities’ organizers and their complex internal relationships. Furthermore, the general share of critical decision-making *within* each

¹³ Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Situationist Internationale, 1967.

coalition generally depended on demographics and whether or not local Palestinian organizations were deemed “militant” enough, especially to match the Left organizers. The same could be said for the relationship between the Muslim and Left organizers, for of all the organizers, the Muslim organizers were the least prepared for such social questions. As such much of the language and propagation took to the Left, and Palestinians to a smaller extent where they constituted a large and active enough component. The irony was that in most circumstances, as we will see, the student Left’s tendency toward pseudo-militancy was to the detriment of all involved, and largely remained a reformist presence in a liberal movement.

The general trend of these coalitions was to get as many people as possible-through united social media campaigns, public gatherings, and eventually demonstrations-to engage with their work. These tactics proved quantitatively successful, so much so that the coalitions grew much faster than they were all prepared for. Within the span of a few months, these student clubs and interest groups suddenly shared thousands of eyes in a confusing web of collaboration and competition. The successful coalitions were able to maintain this momentum while stifling differences as they came, ultimately to continue growing their following and disseminating their propaganda via whatever means were at their disposal. At the same time, the unlikely alliance of largely secular, atheistic political clubs and a marginalized, but all the same conservative religious community, became a sore spot where any development could not live. Muslims generally carried the sentiment that this was either a Muslim issue, a Muslim *and* Arab issue, and/or a nationalist question. As such they carried an anti-imperialist consciousness that was strengthened by their faith and solidarity, but rarely was the issue of class society or capitalism wholly relevant to them.

Meanwhile, the secularists and Leftists tripped over each other in message and hardly offered a decisive declaration of their own, ultimately only being able to mimic the sentiment of the Muslims. It was a mincing of words when Communist language was most needed. The Left would watch the displays of the Muslims and Palestinians and make a show of anti-imperialist solidarity themselves, full of incessant *practical* opportunism, but struggled on a national level to direct energy toward American class society themselves. It was ultimately a case of feeding into nationalist sentiment whether its belief was genuine or not: Give to the Palestinians what is the Palestinians, America is funding a genocide, and corporate interests dominate Washington. But for example, what corporate interests? This equation seems to imply our government and social order is only the result of a few millionaire politicians and lobbyists, and that if we can remove these people, we can win everything to be won; Indie politics in full swing. It was essentially a message as reigned in as an NGO attempting to impress donors, only this time it was for youth communities and their attention.

But even in the few instances where it was not for a lack of trying, a spontaneous class struggle mentality did not seem to reach the vast majority of the movement's population. The genocide of Palestinians thus became an isolated question, no matter how the Leftist organizations attempted to lecture to the Muslim and nationalist population. As the majority of the students-subsumed in genuine economic misery-overlooked this issue, the radical energy was only composed of "good actors": The Communist, the Muslim, and the Arab/Palestinian. Maybe even the odd political liberal or humanitarian. It goes without saying good actors cannot move society if the masses are not in an advanced position to respond, and given the vast differences in what the moralistic actors regard as desirable, they will not

always share the same aims. Thus, these subjects reduced themselves to the anti-imperialist and anti-war camp for the sake of social unity.

We have to understand this is not necessarily the fault or detriment of either Leftists or Muslims, nor of the Palestinians, but rather that as distinct groups, one could not move the other in any meaningful direction. Language and opportunism was rampant and criticism should be harsh, but this was not a mere matter of propagation. If it was, this movement would not have followed the same outcome across the country and around the world. No, the primary contradiction was how little the genocide of Palestinians materially impacted the average American. It is true many Americans are destitute, but not because a few billion dollars are sent to Israel next year. Even for the American student, it's a faint heartbeat at best, given that *none* of their tuition dollars materially fund the genocide either: The university endowments which erupted in scandal were simply not comprised of income generated by students. So from an American context, this was always going to be the deathbed for the movement. Palestine was rendered obscure, and the material obscurity of an issue will always bring about a contagious confusion. This confusion ultimately led the movement to an inability to express itself or its social relationships to the masses, which thus meant watered down propagation and a series of cyclical trials and experiments, before finally being enveloped by the State at the end of the academic year. As we understand that all of this chaos was created on a weak foundation, it is no surprise such a radical message-and movement-could not be born.

Now let us refocus on the agreements of the Leftists, Palestinians, and Muslims in their coalition. While muting the language of the Palestine movement to broad "anti-imperialism" was the most beneficial agreement in

the short term, the vehicles for change became fraught by the back end of the academic year. A tired repetition had cemented itself as the norm. As there was no material relation to struggle, progress within the movement was abstract and hard for the student masses to gauge. What constitutes victory when you're constantly on the defense, and when your victories (student government proposals, petitions, successful demonstrations for social media) have no material consequences? The line for organizers became blurry. Having reconciled with the fact they cannot wage a war of liberation for Palestine, they drift further into opportunism and backslide to a liberalism even preceding BDS. While I would like to believe these groups have formed meaningful working class connections, the class reality is that each represented elite positions within their respective communities, and each directed the traffic of the movement in a way that was not altogether *radical*. This was tepid reform with a short rageful streak. Thus, I fear these links will be remembered as the spontaneous coming together of individuals promoting abstract social justice rather than a point from which revolutionary ideals will sprout. They were solely relationships of tact and convenience. Not to be an indictment on the many students that risked their academics, career prospects, or livelihoods, but rather unfortunately it was the most likely product of the movement as a whole. Whether it was ever possible, I cannot say, but given what transpired the movement failed to tie the livelihoods of Palestinians to the livelihoods of Americans, and especially to American students. The Empire's consequences thus could bear down on the Palestinian while the American proletarian worked and the American student developed their labor power, and as long as both of the Americans went back to a warm home after a day of protesting there would be little recourse. As for the radicals and the radical students still holding out, we

simply could not simulate the violence the Palestinians faced. And with a movement so unsure of itself, *any* amount of repression could be the silver bullet. As we will see in the next section, then, the pronounced crackdowns of Spring 2024 would prove to be the student-and therefore Palestine solidarity-movement's decline back into obscurity.

RECOLLECTIONS FROM THE HUNGER STRIKES AND THE ENCAMPMENTS

“When philosophy paints its grey in grey, then has a shape of life grown old. The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the coming of the dusk” - Hegel (1820) ¹⁴

Looking back at what exactly has transpired in the 2023-24 academic year, I find it crucial to look at two flashpoints of action at my university: The Hunger Strikes of March and April 2024, and the Encampment protests of late April and May. Ultimately, they were the most pronounced attempts at divestment and achieving political sway, and were the most costly in terms of the variables discussed in the preceding section (social relationships, radical fervor, etc.). Both forms of protest asked far more of the student population than was likely to transpire, and both were ultimately unsuccessful in their goals. In the advent of asking why students would even bother to starve themselves, why would they attempt to occupy their university in such a manner, we should remind ourselves over the *total* monopoly of the movement by the student organizers and *total* monopoly of the demands by the spectacle of consumption. Students led their peers down a road of little vision, again, due to the fact their original ammunition was a mere abstraction from reality. The slogans, as we are to be understood correctly, constituted another failure to transcribe the confusing ideals of the

¹⁴ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 1820.

movement onto the masses, and we have also understood that the concessions students made *with each other* ultimately sealed yet another fate. In such an environment on edge there was little self-criticism or reflection, just a need for continuous action and the feeling of progress.

What we have understood is that these variables deformed the Palestinian question, a national liberation movement and genocide that in our very American context amount it to institutional consumption. As mentioned, students have the unique position of their perceived communities direct funding of Palestine's emaciation (even if endowments are not funded via their tuition, it was viewed as an abstraction and representation of them still). But again, divestment itself is just a larger item to check off a shopping list: If the administrators don't comply, if the avenues aren't available in a legal sense, then there is no divestment; Just as there is no consumption of Israeli/Palestinian goods if a store owner refuses to source them. When a movement for the freedom of a people amounts to a decision on a spreadsheet, it creates very convoluted notions of what you're fighting for.

Given there were no official channels for our university to address divestment from the weapons manufacturers, when confronted by angry students our administration feigned responsibility and/or ignorance to the issue. They lied through their teeth and spit our questions back out to us. But we could do nothing. We screamed through the streets, filled public spaces, and carried the names and images of martyrs. It would make the local news and then we would hurry back to class. Students rallied and marched on a weekly basis, highlighting the absurdity of a school investing in the destruction of schools abroad. It would get us a feature with a local journalist or two, where we platformed our demands and pleaded for recognition. We

built memorials to resistance for the entire campus to see, and held boycott campaigns and invited speakers from across the country to share information on the question of ethical consumption. It would only further abstract communism to what we now seemed to seek, a class-less capitalism free of blood and exploitation. Between October and February, all of these things were done and replicated well past their limits. But for all of this effort, we were just as close to divestment as we had been prior to October 7th. Our President remained silent, and the Deans watched us closely, never getting too involved themselves. Thus, with a choice of looking despair in the eyes or pushing onward, we organizers continued the same tactics of civility that had led us to such a chasm.

As ideas began to wane and demonstrations began to subside altogether, the leading decision-makers in our organizations finally acknowledged several errors of the past. We had grown complacent, happy to film our demonstrations and speeches, but on our cameras we had not captured anything of substance. In acknowledging this plateau while simultaneously ignoring our relation to capital, the Hunger Strikes were born. Organizers decided that in order to move our demands forward, those willing would put their bodies on the line in a feat of symbolic endurance. It would be theatrical and brilliant, a litmus test for our administration's thin morality. Perhaps we would even get some concessions, a few wondered. Some leadership split on this decision, sensing trouble, and bowed out of the movement as a whole. The remainder of us were committed to seeing this through.

We theorized that each day the Strikes continued, our university was supposed to become more desperate to silence us, which they could by granting us a seat at their table. Given the careful planning with the media

for such a protest (and the announcing of the strike a month in advance) we would open the door... for a *dialogue*. In the span of months we had managed to dilute the Palestinian issue to an issue of consumption, and now it had lost even that glimmer of idealism. We were doing anything and everything just to meet with a multi-millionaire university president who had no bother for us. This represented a steep decline from our original intentions, and essentially demonstrated that we had subconsciously accepted defeat. So again we spiraled to new heights of legalism. We held interviews with national and international media. We flooded campus conversations with our announcement that we would starve ourselves for Gaza. We rallied and marched and cheered again, more viciously than before. After a month of build-up and a public stand-off with administration, on March 18th of 2024 we took our plan into action.

With the official protests, 17 students took part in indefinite strike until the university divested from weapons manufacturers and the like. But again, the feeling around the campus had been one of minor retreat: There had already been a significant anti-Zionist presence on campus, we had made our point, and students were mostly tired from the repetitive activism they were set to engage in. Their foot was halfway out of the door by this time, their attention subsumed once again by the trivial affairs of student life. And of course it was easy to give up. The movement had no real impact on their lives or prospects, should it win or fail, and a Hunger Strike was not going to change that. So despite capturing the attention of the news and some popular culture, the actual protest only served as a stopgap for what little momentum remained. They only managed to muster a final heartbeat before the movement on our campus completely flatlined, and protestors that still attended marches did

so with sympathy for *us* as much as Palestine. Yet another unfortunate predicament of the student example.

Over the course of 16 days, we mobilized in student centers, inside administration offices, and took part in daily civil disobedience. A high amount of energy was spent networking, and several national and international collaborations occurred. Many student organizers were also recruited during this time, and the scale of public pressure was largely unprecedented for a mid-major university. Yet as the strike prolonged, the pressure never seemed to escalate to what was necessary, and the campaign was rendered to a mere dissemination of information, the telling of the traumas of Palestine from the eyes of wealthy Americans. It turned heads as a stylish feat of self-sacrifice, glittering in our images and words on a daily basis. This was all done to the tune of 130,000 people that engaged with our personal content, and tens of thousands more through mainstream news; We would silently congratulate ourselves on this reach, continuing to starve so that this number would increase and our university would respond. Several critical moments became widespread coverage when some Strikers were hospitalized. Yet it never brushed divestment or a change in the university's consumption. A single statement from university officials towards the end of the Strikes disregarded them as nonsensical and unable to achieve any headway, that the university could not and would not change patterns. They would ultimately be proved correct, and halfway through the 3rd week of starvation, we subsided quietly in the night. We posted to thousands the next day that the Strikes were over, yet our fight was just beginning. It was ironic considering our exhaustion and , but ultimately served to be true-for a moment-with the Encampments.

Concluding my thoughts on the Hunger Strikes, early signs should have warned this action of the lack of bargaining power we truly had. After all, this form of protest was an attempt to *manufacture* bargaining power on the cheap, to activate a student body that was growing limp and to pressure through legal means that did not exist. The movement may have had mass support, but there was no threat to the daily operations of the university. Their functioning was never called into question. Students played within the bounds of what the radical organizers told them to, which was to respect property at all costs. Workers on campus were ambivalent to the cause, having never been addressed by the movement in the months prior. And tactically, administrators were able to pinpoint the errors of the student organizations. They contacted the families of student leaders and threatened a lawsuit should anyone be harmed in the strike, and publicly shifted any blame onto the strikers should they obtain injuries. This tactic filled our very inexperienced base with immense confusion. They played a hand of force before the strike arrived, then completely vanished from thin air. A degree of physical separation-the fact that capital was never called into question-was always guaranteed, but now they held a public degree which reduced us to vapid headlines. The Strikes illustrated that political power could not be engineered on a whim, as well as the superiority of capitalist media.

Following such a month, a period of recovery was intended for organizers. However, this rest was readily ended within the span of 2 weeks. In reaction to the failure of the Hunger Strikes, campus organizers worked with Student Government in passing a divestment resolution from weapons contractors, one of the first in the country to do so. And again, this presented the dichotomy between avenues taken by students and what was material; The university president hardly acknowledged the decision of the body, leaving

what students were still devoted to the cause further enraged. Another victory merely an illusion. Furthermore, due to the Encampments which burst across the scene around the country in March and April, most notably the 21 hour occupation of Hamilton Hall at Columbia, new means of action were suddenly publicly acceptable.¹⁵ Whereas the apprehensive liberalism of the student movement was on full display for months, the question of capital, of property and the students' relation to campus capital was becoming more visible. Cracks, no matter how minor, were beginning to show in the order campus administrations maintained. Students across the country retaliated as one occupation brutally crushed by the NYPD was followed by another at Humboldt, and in the matter of days the movement was prepared to make one last offensive before the Spring semester ended. It would be an enlightening time for students who were up for the task.

As we are aware now, the Encampment protests were either crushed violently or ignored until the point of obscurity. Reasons differed across the country, but I would like to address both the experiences of our Encampment and how it related to the national perspective. The handling of our Encampment, from its conception to the facilitation and stewardship of its being, was a perplexing struggle that combined the worst elements of the student character and the established Left.

Following the Hunger Strikes and Divestment Resolution, the organizing camp was largely looking to piece together a later uprising on campus the following autumn. Discussions varied, but the relation to capital was clearer than before, and organizers were willing to take risks and capitalize on

¹⁵ Bose, Meghnad. "How Protesters Occupied a Columbia Building for 21 Hours Before NYPD Stormed In." Columbia News Service, May 1, 2024.

current energy for the greater movement. However, due to the popular interest of the Encampments, several Leftist organizers estranged from our “elite” coalition work decided to brand and launch their own Encampment on campus. Despite the poor relationship, we flocked to such an event in the hopes of defeating our administration’s attempts to bleed us of our rage. These Encampments, a combination of picnicking and State brutalization, would last for 2 days.

Following rumors of an Encampment at the university, campus administration made it clear before it was declared that occupying any lawn during operating hours would be accepted. However, if a *single* tent were to be put down, a hilariously arbitrary designation, they would use the tools at their disposal (a militarized police force) to shut us down. So the Encampments were originally branded online as mere marches in order to ensure students would be able to coalesce without being broken up by police. This decision was one of the few that was acceptable, albeit it carried the element of risk in that most students were not aware of exactly what was to occur. Far worse was the actual preparation from organizers. Under the organizing leadership, there was a gross lack of planning for virtually any scenario besides a picnic on the grass, as well as a critical lack of transparency in decision-making. This sewed distrust and confusion amongst those who were expected to make the ultimate sacrifice of building the Encampment. And if these constraints stifled the ability of the Encampment to flourish organically, the decision of site was the pivotal swing back to liberal attitudes. After a year of marching on the sidewalks, students were now expected to occupy an open field! Hardly a critical function to the infrastructure of the university. This reduced any potential contest of capital that protesters could cause, instead turning them into the same, sing-songy chanters that they had

been for the entire academic year. Only this time, there would be a police force ready to break up the festivities. In the span of short planning, the entire movement was yet again relegated to an afterthought by the Leftists themselves, who made these decisions for reasons unknown. And once more, if this was all that was to occur at the Encampment protests-a little bickering and even an arrest or two-one might be right to think that it was ineffectual but hardly a disaster. This could not be further from the case.

At the start of the protest the Leftist speakers would share some feeble words about the bravery of the students, about the need to fight against university administration, and about the heroic struggle that would ensue. Then, they would march roughly 100 to 150 students and community members to a lawn next to the Student Center where we would presumably set up. The first day, 2 of us students immediately rushed to set up a tent. With no support from the organizers (who beckoned us to continue from afar) we were immediately surrounded by campus police, and we furiously signaled at the crowd to set up a perimeter while the tents were being built. Due to the confusion of what was happening, students only managed to link arms in a semi-circle, graciously inviting the police to walk around the human barricade and into the birthplace of our Encampment. Cops were ultimately able to grab 3 individuals-including one who was tasked with tent building-and drag them away to waiting police cruisers. The coalition organizers were furious and the Leftists within *that* group attempted to perform a “de-arrest”, whereas we tried to prohibit officers from reaching their vehicles with the arrested in tow. We theorized that we had the numbers, with the officers in numbers of maybe 2 dozen, but to our surprise the supposed Communists were not ready for such a feat. They and their marshals (which of course included members of the fledgling Marxist-Leninist Parties and NGOs) corralled angry students

back to the lawn, telling them it was “not worth it”, at times even physically pulling students away from the de-arrest efforts. Yet another infantile split. For their enjoyment, we would sit on beach blankets and listen to songs for the rest of the day. At 5pm when curfew was announced and police began to enclose on the scene, the same organizers bravely announced our picnic would return tomorrow. At this point any question of whether such action was genuinely organized for Palestinian national liberation could be met with a resounding “No”.

If the first day was a combination of human error and poor communication, it was also our window for a genuine struggle. The next day, the campus was swarmed not only by police, but over 150 state police in riot gear, helicopters, and envoys of personnel prepared to make mass arrests. Rows of squad cars lined the streets, both marked and unmarked. The Leftists began the day timid, unsure of how to respond. They haphazardly forced our group to the same lawn, which was the primary source of police activity that morning. In fact, it was already kettled by police before we arrived.

Thus, the second day of the protests seemed to be another picnic. We laid across the lawn on blankets as activists engaged with local media, celebrating their resistance as such. Then, when it was time for a large Muslim prayer, the protest organizers covertly encouraged students to form a ring around our site. This is where we were tasked with building tents once more. We crawled around on our knees, frantically putting together a small collection of dwellings, sweat pouring out of hastily wrapped keffiyehs in the Florida heat. It was surreal for it was ridiculous; We existed in a solidarity campaign that prayed at the altar of the State and the commodity form, had no class basis, and yet even in acknowledging this absurdity our rage was enough to

see it through. We as a community were, no matter how limp our demands or tactics remained, a pit of rage and alienation. It was entirely a shame that we expressed our solidarity in the language of capital.

By the time we had built a half dozen tents, a 5pm curfew was again announced and students braced for what was to come. This time, we refused to heed any calls from campus police. Their appearance was not worth our time, worthy of mockery. As they continued to shout over a portable PA system, we screamed back, drowning out any hope of reconciliation. Their antidote? Out marched the riot police, forming a black wall roughly 75 feet in front of us. As they took up space, other scores of officers and staff positioned themselves behind us, attempting to pick off and question isolated protestors. This scene lasted for a half hour or longer, a tense stand-off between two diametrically opposed groups. One, carrying flags, banners, and wooden shields, and the other with guns, tear gas, and armor.

After it was clear the students were not going to leave, the tear gas was hastily fired and police descended like flies from all angles. The riot police were the first to charge. They came down onto our site with ease, tackling and beating students to the ground. When the vast majority of the students were chased off the fields and back toward the Student Center, teams of police on bikes herded them into corners, trampling several protesters that were present before arresting them. Other cops moved on foot in small groups as the protest site was abandoned, eager to make arrests of their own. Onlookers were harassed as much and pushed away by university officials and State thugs, minimizing any witness to the violent scene. There was a militaristic brutality exhibited for all to see, including our campus administrators who watched from afar with unironic pleasure. Gas continued to float in all

directions for another half hour after the site was secured. In the aftermath, police recorded a cheerful interview where they would claim roughly two dozen arrests, before admittedly bringing the number down to 13.

None of this was genuinely surprising in my opinion. We of course understand how the police think and operate, and we know the little tolerance the university had for us. This was also far from an isolated incident, given that students across our state were arrested simply for setting up chairs. What *was* more telling was that while these police descended on the encampment and kettled students on their campus, the Leftists who organized the protest were not present. Those that were trained to lead the masses completely faltered at a collective level. Less surprising was that many of the Muslim and Arab organizers were also not present, instead forming a crowd of spectators and filming our encounter with police from afar. This crowd was-by relative size-so large that it constituted at least 70 or 80 individuals, to the 100 or so students that defended the protest. The marshals, the lead speakers, and lead organizers were not present when an ounce of physical conflict entered into the fray.

It is of utmost importance to understand this dynamic, where the activists (whether Communist, Muslim, or Palestinian) who were leading many of the efforts on campus for an academic year were willing to abruptly leave such a setting to save themselves. They as students valued the appreciation of their labor power over their own movement. And with so many of them sitting out, it was not a crackdown on a valiant cell of vanguardist Communists like has been revised in their media, but a crackdown on regular students and community members who were brave enough to stand their ground. It was not a test of ideological fervor at play, as if anything, the ideological students

“organizing” the traffic of this movement were the first to heed the police warnings and leave. They organized a protest and left as the picnic ended.

The sole intoxicating tension within the whole experience was that brief stand-off with police before they descended. The 100 or so students left screamed at the physical imposition of the State at the top of their lungs. Unarmed, facing such a militarized presence, yet so determined. With more jubilation than fear we were completely defiant of any attempt to stifle their protest. This group, becoming increasingly rowdy, then turned its attention to the activists, the Communists, Muslims, and Palestinians who had abandoned them at the sight of police. They demanded the bystanders drop their phones and “Stand with us!”, materializing the chasm between the two groups. This would go on for almost 10 long minutes as the riot police toed about; It was as long as that lawn had ever been, but in the same breath you could hear a pin drop. The contradiction between the activists had been established. In this swift and organic decision, the crowd at once realized how fickle much of the student activism was up to this point. This experience with activists would sow mistrust, apathy, and dampen any remnants of organization for some time to come.

The weight of possibility, and subsequent brutality by the militarized police department, ultimately proved to be what severed any relations between the student coalitions described in the previous section. Many of the organizers blamed one another for specific failures, and whether or not these claims were truthful or not, it is without a doubt a question of the Encampment organizers themselves and not of the average student or worker in attendance. The answer was there at the Encampments themselves. Those that stood there screamed to the activists nearly all the way until the police

began to escalate and close in. Our plea had been made, and it was the most established of Leftists and niche of activists that let us down. Of the bystanders looking on from safety, not one would join hands with the students. It is a logical decision, but it calls much of what we understand about the Left's relation to the student movement into question. It was not a fearless and intuitive expression, but rather a very depleted, despondent, and fractured movement that relied on the directions of an opportunistic few for guidance.

It is perfectly clear to me in the aftermath of such an event that students are a force to be reckoned with and capable of feats of resistance. But an intense wave of repression flooded our school after the protests of Spring 2024, and when they were needed the most, student organizers abandoned the "community" they preached they would defend. Even if their resolve failed to waver, these organizers just continued to march the same orders and tactics out to the masses as they had before. Not only in Florida, but to a similar degree regarding the Encampments in Chicago, New York City, Minneapolis, and so on. This leads to fractures within student bases themselves, and many are understandably going to be sheepish in the face of the militant presence of the State. The student mass then becomes apathetic when they see no real action taking place, or a semblance of plan to come. Their questions of tactics, of power, and of decision-making in this regard were plentiful and should all have been addressed. But due to such an act of repression by the State and the corresponding absence of Communists to address the movement, the student movement soundly dissolved into the abyss it was before.

We also must again be honest in regards to why the Anti-Zionist movement centered on campuses as to elsewhere: The intimacy of divestment to student identity, rather than student superiority. As a student taking part in the movements, I believed it to be due to the storm of youthful fervor, the relative poverty of students, and the seemingly doomed prospects awaiting us. This was a purely idealistic and hilarious judgement, one based on suspicions that would never be proven. Rather, the centrality of the student forces were due to their relation to an bourgeois institution they identified with, and thus desired it to consume a “BDS” diet as they were managing their own consumption. They were mistaken to believe the university was theirs, or that they as individuals or collectives bore any importance to the administrators from which all decisions are made. The students could not distinguish between the university as a critical capitalist function, their niches of grassroots organizing, and the engineered community they were being fostered in, so of course they felt it was theirs. But it does not make their identity any more material, nor does it present a path forward to target social relations. Rather, it is a damning indictment on the transitive class character of studenthood and its aspirations. The student as a relation will thus need to be called into question.

What’s imperative to grasp from this section, however, is that the student movement in itself is not a special force of unholy bounds. It is not a place that all radical things must come from, nor is it where we will recruit our leaders of the proletariat. There are very real limits of studenthood, limits that can only be tested and broken through by the students’ self-abolition and integration with the proletariat. In the proceeding section, we now will build on the class character of the student, and its imprint on their psychology to further develop these arguments.

STUDENTS AS MUSICIANS OF THE FUTURE

“The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, by images.” – Debord

In order to properly analyze the efficacy of the student resistance and its role in developing revolutionary activity, it is necessary to understand the class composition of the American student population and the student relation itself. This section will build off the traditional Marxian understanding of the proletariat’s role in capitalist production (the sale of wage labor), and the unique psychological position of the American student in this regard. We will also analyze the recent trends in the development of study in America, and how this pattern will further affect the composition of students as a social force.

Students tend to be one of the more enigmatic groups of our society, for they constitute a wide variety of the population’s characteristics. Some consider them largely members of the working class, on the basis that most are only forgoing the typical sale of labor power in order to increase its value. Some consider them not to be working class for the same reason, given that students do not typically sell much labor power during their time as students, if any at all. Both arguments certainly have their merit, and the accuracy of both depictions are accepted for they clearly exemplify an aspect of the nature of the student. And if we are to accept both claims, it further illuminates that the students’ position and level of precarity is hard to pinpoint at any given moment. In this contention, I would suggest the question of whether or not a student fits the description of a *worker* in the time of their studies is secondary to the question of the *proletariat*. Or, if the immediate existence of the student is threatened by capitalist relations, if

they require an immediate sale of labor power to live, if they profit from any capital whatsoever, rather than if they partake in any wage labor at all. All too often we witness the mistake of using these two terms interchangeably, which seems to miss the forest for the trees when assessing social groups. With this being said, let us put together the modern student's identity piece by piece.

In assessing the social character of an incoming and outgoing student population, we must address that not all students are bound to wage work in their future, given families that own capital also send their children to university. Furthermore, even the "would-be workers" attending college are typically from vastly wealthier backgrounds than that of the proletariat, which is loudly amplified by the prestige of the university and whether or not the institution is private. Since the undermining policies of Reagan and the neoliberal turn of the 80s, this relationship is only being further exposed through various dynamics. From a study analyzing the disparities of collegiate attainment between 1988 and 2007, "Comparing the educational outcomes of children from the lowest net worth quintile with those from the highest quintile reveals differences of *32.1 percentage points for college access* (21.4 % vs. 53.5 %) and *44.6 percentage points for college graduation* (9.1 % vs. 53.7 %). The increase in rates across net worth quintiles is relatively linear for all levels of educational attainment, although the increase in high school graduation rates in the bottom half of the distribution is somewhat steeper, and the increase in college graduation in the top half of the distribution is steeper. This study also finds a similar relationship to home ownership (*a 40% difference in college degree attainment between the bottom 20% of Americans and the top 20% in terms*

of home ownership value).¹⁶ In regards to college attendance and the total population of students, another study in 2011 found that even *after* controlling for cognitive ability and family background, “there exists a 30 percentage point difference in college attendance rates between children from families from the top parental income and wealth quartiles compared with those from the bottom quartiles”, which is roughly parallel to the previous citation.¹⁷ ¹⁸ Furthermore, when we look amongst students who do not drop out and actually receive a degree, the college completion gap for high-income and low-income households has widened by *over 50%* between the late 1980s and 2010. ¹⁹

These findings certainly push back against the notion that university-and certainly degree attainment-has become altogether accessible. While it is true there have been improvements made, by and large the average college student is still middle or upper middle income, which gives us a better picture of the student’s social position (white collar work). Familial wealth is only one aspect of our understanding, however. More important is the amount of students actually engaging in wage labor themselves and developing a consciousness of work. Study found that for full-time undergraduates between 2010-2020, 41% worked in 2010, 43% worked in 2015, and 40% worked in 2020. However, only 10% of all students in all 3 study periods worked 35 hours or more this time. 3-4% worked less than 10 hours, 9-11% worked 10-19 hours, and 15-16% across all 3 periods worked

¹⁶ Pfeffer, Fabian T. “Growing Wealth Gaps in Education.” U.S. National Library of Medicine, June 2018.

¹⁷ Johnson, Rucker E. “The Impact of Parental Wealth on College Degree Attainment: Evidence from the Housing Boom and Bust.” *Berkeley*, May 2020.

¹⁸ Lochner, Lance J, and Alexander Monge-Naranjo. “The Nature of Credit Constraints and Human Capital.” *American Economic Review*, October 1, 2011.

¹⁹ Bailey, Martha J., and Susan M. Dynarski. “Gains and Gaps: Changing Inequality in U.S. College Entry and Completion.” National Bureau of Economic Research, August 1, 2011.

20-34 hours. In 2020, where 40% of students worked: 3% worked less than 10 hours, 9% worked 10-19 hours, 15% worked 20-34 hours, and 10% worked 35 full hours. Thus, the majority of them (60% in 2020) are not active workers and most that do labor cannot be considered full time (27% in 2020).²⁰ This signifies that the vast majority of students cannot possibly be considered proletariat as they currently exist, as they do not require to sell their labor power to live. Being generous, a significant amount (12% in 2020) of all students do not work enough for a reasonable subsistence rate, leaving us with a functional minority that are remotely reliant on the sale of labor power (25% working at least 20 hours in 2020). This does not mean that even those 25% are proletarian, but it is not feasible to accurately calculate ourselves. It is merely a charitable assumption, and the sum of these studies imply that the vast majority of students are wealthy and less reliant on wages in comparison to their proletarian counterparts.

So students may be more representative of a middle and upper class American strata, and they certainly are not a vast productive workforce. But we stress this does not mean their fate is somehow bourgeois either. It simply only shows that the type of person to attend and graduate from a university is becoming more elite. Further, while capitalism's ills are of course not limited to the blue collar, the lumpen, and the most destitute, the type of person to attend university is not necessarily a *future* proletarian. Even if the economy is further proletarianizing workers through the process of monopolization (New business creation has declined by over 50% in the last 30 years, and over 40% of 25-34 year olds are too "fearful" of their economic situation to consider a petit-bourgeois pipe dream), this is not as

²⁰ "College Student Employment." National Center for Education Statistics, May 2022.

representative in the show of college attendees.²¹ In relation to the broad masses, students are still ascending toward self-sufficiency in the dream of property ownership. In 2023, while only 7% of Americans own their own business regardless of size, 17% of graduates run their own, and another 16% of students claim to have intentions of starting a business after graduation.²² ²³ Whether or not this is all an illusion is a fine counterpoint, as much of the proletariat may also dream of their self-management; The qualitative difference is that students are forgoing work to create this *now*, they are building connections for this *now* and have access to resources the proletarian wouldn't. By all means, these findings again dispel any idea that college students are a growing proletarian force in the face of looming economic collapse.

Thus, we must aspire to think about students more dynamically. This group is not one class of *would-be*, but a crossroads of numerous social classes competing for economic prospects. Furthermore we are seeking to identify students as *students*, addressing them not for the flurry of outcomes they could be alone, but also how they exist socially *now*. This includes their individual social histories in the case of familial support, and how they currently function in the case of their sustenance. Let us address the latter condition now, beginning with the prevailing assumptions the Left has made in regard to the student experience.

With the advent of the New Left in the 1960s, various new ideas culminated in the rubber stamping of an exciting revolutionary social force. Sociologist

²¹ "Small Business Statistics in 2024 | the Zebra." *The Zebra*, 14 Mar. 2024.

²² Dyvik, Einar H. "Percentage of Americans Owning a Business 2023." *Statista*, 4 July 2024.

²³ Ozdemir, Kuzeyhan. "What You Need to Know about Launching a Startup Right out of College." *Harvard Business Review*, 27 July 2023.

C. Wright Mills, who coined the term “New Left” , saw the rise of the youth intelligentsia as the predominant mass to organize around at the expense of the traditional proletariat. “What I do not quite understand about some New-Left writers is why they cling so mightily to ‘the working class’ of the advanced capitalist societies as the historic agency, or even as the most important agency, in the face of the really historical evidence that now stands against this expectation”. “In the Soviet bloc, who is it that has been breaking out of apathy? It has been students and young professionals and writers; it has been the young intelligentsia of Poland and Hungary, and of Russia too. Never mind that they’ve not won; never mind that there are other social and moral types among them. First of all, it has been these types. But the point is clear — isn’t it? That’s why *we’ve* got to study these new generations of intellectuals around the world as real live agencies of historic change.”²⁴ Furthermore, Mills admits the moralism of students but embraces it because regardless they vaguely show “no apathy”, and the Left has adopted this viewpoint accordingly. Thus, it seems he favored the youth’s idealist spirit and struggle against conformity more than genuinely initiating a study on their social composition. Further, there is an emphasis on the *output* of resistance as an expression, rather than the *content* of resistance. This precedent of prioritizing action and moral fortitude over Communistic practice, as we understand, has grown into our generation as well.

As cited by FRSO-one of the most influential Communist organizations in regard to the student movement-these ideas can be seen in the slogans of Mao. He specifically made a plethora of vague statements of youthful fervor

²⁴ Mills, C. Wright. “Letter to the New Left”. New Left Review, September 1960.

and represented the youth as bastions of progress by nature, which has completely detached itself from a historical study. I will bother to quote one Maoist slogan which is listed by FRSO in their defining pamphlets on student activism, to serve as a microcosm of the greater problem: “The young people are the most active and vital force in society. They are the most eager to learn and the least conservative in their thinking.”²⁵ ²⁶ As a fundamental idea to drive one’s practice, this point of view is a vapid fetishization of youth, drawing on Mills’ attitude that the youth is more active and therefore more revolutionary. Yet, how and in what dimension is a youth more vital to society? Is a worker not more active in the material production and reproduction of society, is a worker not more shackled by the chains of capital than a student youth especially? Furthermore, there is nothing that makes a youth “less conservative” for they are the product of capitalist spectacle and consumption themselves. A generation is born ideologically impotent and left to feed on whatever experiences are apportioned out, leading to an embattled consciousness but certainly not one that promises an abstract linear progression (as seen in the rising reaction of our generation to counterbalance any instabilities). History, unlike what these ideologues believe, is not a cyclical march towards progress and civilization. It can rise and fall, reach new heights and plummet backwards as Mao should well be aware. There is no death of conservative ideas for there is no death of *any* ideas as long as they can sink their teeth into the machinery of capitalism. As we have seen in recent American elections and culture in large, young male voters are becoming increasingly conservative in relation to past

²⁵ Sykes, J. “On the Student Movement in the U.S.” *Marxists*, Freedom Road Socialist Organization, 2009.

²⁶ Tung, Mao Tse. “Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse Tung.” Peking Foreign Languages Press, 1966.

years.²⁷ This is not an anomaly but a facet of greater history-and capitalism-itself, and to insist on the superiority of whoever is young is either an illusion or a purposeful attempt at deceit. Youth does not exist outside history.

Now let us understand the assumptions made by the New Left and carried forward still by the Leninist Left in regards to student activism. The following equation is a summation of these claims and context behind Mills' influential thesis, as well as based off my own experience with various Party organizers:

A.). As new independents, students have nothing to their name. No career, capital, or income above sustenance in most cases.

B.) The material conditions typically provide for more energy allotted to community organizing, given most students do not have locked 40 hour work weeks and generally live in large, young, and urban environments. These environments are compact and expose the youth to new ideas.

C.) Students are then of an urban proletarian nature, and their isolated social behavior is identical or at the very least comparable to that of the general proletariat. Combined with their education and allocation of time, they become an ideal body to organize.

This generally assembles into a broad logical formula: If A is true, and we can say that most students have no wealth or capital or high value labor power, and B is true, and we can say that most students have optimal social conditions from which radical sentiment develops and spreads, then C is not only true but understated. With the characteristics of a poor worker, youthful fervor, and fluidity of time and social capital, students are now identified as

²⁷ Anderson, Estelle. "Circle Releases Preliminary Findings About Youth Voting Patterns in 2024 Election." *The Tufts Daily*, November 20, 2024.

one of the foremost attractive groups to base build from. It is no wonder that their condition has long been idealized and prized as a group that will push revolutionary momentum forward.

My refutation of this concept begins not with the idea that American students are overwhelmingly bourgeois or proletarian in the Marxian sense, as noted earlier. The vast majority obviously don't hold capital to their name, but in their studies, they are certainly not proletarian either. For an elementary reference, as Marx isolates the defining characteristics of the proletariat: "In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed – a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce."²⁸ Furthermore, Engels insists that "The proletariat is that class in society which lives entirely from the sale of its labor and does not draw profit from any kind of capital; whose weal and woe, whose life and death, whose sole existence depends on the demand for labor". "There have always been poor and working classes; and the working class have mostly been poor. But there have not always been workers and poor people living under conditions as they are today; in other words, there have not always been proletarians."²⁹

The majority of students do not fit this position. While they resemble a working class entity placated by petit-bourgeois fantasies, their immediate livelihood does by and large not rely on their sale of labor power. They may

²⁸ Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. "Manifesto of the Communist Party." *Marxists*, 1848.

²⁹ Engels, Friedrich. "The Principles of Communism." *Marxists*, 1847.

be poor or indebted, but their existence-for now-has already been granted reprieve. Their life and death is not dependent on their commodification but their consumption of other commodities (namely those bundled under the university experience). This contradicts some of the initial assumptions the Left has of students as well, particularly that there is an immediate positive relation between students and the proletariat, and that the student movement necessarily lends itself to the Communist movement. Further understanding of a student's labor power helps define this chasm.

Students and their labor power exist in an entirely unfinished state. Now, one could argue that *all* labor power is in an unfinished state, and this is certainly correct. All workers, whether physical or mental laborers, experience rises and declines in working capacity. Their subsistence levels, such as the need for rest or nourishment, change as they age. In the context of purely mental labor, even, labor power is never a finished product as information is required. Not only raw intellect, but the ability to develop one's skill set parallel with the development of new technology and technique. All of these things make labor power a very fluid dynamic and value; I am simply making the distinction with the student on the basis that education is statistically the most distinguishing of measurable characteristics that change the value of proletarian labor, for the vast majority of the working class. Those with at least a bachelor's on a conservative end will grow an income around 70% more than high school graduates and dropouts, but some sources even estimate around 83-85%.³⁰

So, most students are forgoing the sale of the bulk of their labor power, typically taking on some form of debt in the process. The debt they undertake

³⁰ "The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, Lifetime Earnings." *CEW Georgetown*, 31 Aug. 2023.

is specifically so that the subsistence price of their labor power rises. All of this, we are certainly aware of. It is the entire concept of attending a university in America, but as both the stimulus to the economy in terms of labor and consumption, they have transformed into something altogether different: They consume *now* on the premise that their status in the future is likely to rise. Or, students are consuming very real commodities marked by the price of their future labor power, that could not possibly be maintained if they sold their labor power today. It is here where it is necessary to introduce the concept of the “musician of the future”.

Marx states of this dynamic:

“In order that a man may be able to sell commodities other than labour-power, he must of course have the means of production, as raw material, implements, etc. No boots can be made without leather. He requires also the means of subsistence. Nobody — not even “a musician of the future” — can live upon future products, or upon use-values in an unfinished state; and ever since the first moment of his appearance on the world’s stage, man always has been, and must still be a consumer, both before and while he is producing. In a society where all products assume the form of commodities, these commodities must be sold after they have been produced, it is only after their sale that they can serve in satisfying the requirements of their producer. The time necessary for their sale is superadded to that necessary for their production.”³¹

Now, I am not refuting Marx here when mentioning that students consume commodities of the future period, nor contradicting his assumption that goods in nonexistence cannot be consumed. Our musicians of the future, the

³¹ Marx, Karl. “Economic Manuscripts: Capital Vol. I - Chapter Six.” *Marxists*, 1867.

modern pre-formation of the worker, cannot indulge themselves on unfinished commodities. However, through the accumulation of student debt (both in money and *time*) and economic expectations, they *can* consume what would otherwise be relegated to a future time. Students then become the ultimate masters of speculation; We can see this relationship by the time spent in college in comparison to the opportunity cost of full time wage labor for 4 years. Or, more infamously, with the amount of debt taken on by the average American student for their expenditures: General estimates cite \$37,853 in federal debt and \$40,681 including private loans, an accumulation that takes a mean average of 20 years to pay off.³² This includes tuition as well as the typical housing in gentrified and heavily policed neighborhoods, exorbitant dining costs, and the like.

While we can see a refutation in the uniqueness of this development, in for example, the already widespread use of debt via credit in American society, it is a qualitatively different relation. Whereas students supplement their lifestyle based on future returns, in 2022 a study revealed that 46% of credit card debt is due to emergency expenses (i.e. medical crises, damages, etc.), 24% is due to day-to-day expenses, with only 11% due to excess commodity consumption that is beyond needs.³³ Thus, this form of debt doesn't quite provide the status of that of a "musician of the future", for the majority of it is taken on to maintain current rates of labor power. Not some notion of-and concrete path to-increased welfare in the future.

³² Hanson, Melanie. "Average Student Loan Debt [2024]: By Year, Age & More." *Education Data Initiative*, 16 Aug. 2024.

³³ Suknunan, Jasmin. "These 5 Expenses Are Contributing the Most to Credit Card Debt This Year, Survey Finds." *CNBC*, January 2022.

Because students consume at a rate that is unsustainable *and* reliant on the valorisation of future labor power, the individual student is not simply a destitute proletarian with debt, tossed into an organizing sandbox as the earlier equation suggests. No, the student's prospects actively shape their psychology: They, more than any other group within society, are looking forward, desperately but also *romantically*, plunging into the fantasies of tomorrow off the consumption of today. Hence many believe they are the next petit bourgeois success story, and certainly more of them have access to it.

Regardless of material economic factors, this is a dream that they have paid the price of years of accumulated debt for, and they will grasp it at all costs. At the rate their debt increases, their consumption increases, and they cling even more to this idea of sacred entrepreneurship or white collar success. Inasmuch, "Certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the essence... illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness."³⁴ The relation to images, their transcription and appeal, all relates to the student psyche on a deep level. As consumers at their absolute depletion, the society of the spectacle is one in which they cannot afford to abandon. This is a sacred rite of passage for the modern student, an apparition that will chase them as long as they remain in studenthood and likely well beyond. And as these students are not facing the brunt of traditional wage labor, they are further susceptible to isolation from the grim

³⁴ Feuerbach, Ludwig Andreas von. *The Essence of Christianity*, 1841.

realities of capitalist life. Instead of entering the workforce as proletarians, students are caught up in the remainder of their youth experience. It is a cry for help as much as it is a generalized confusion, trying to make sense out of the chaos of capitalist society without knowing to search for a key. They proceed to sink deeper into this world of consumption because in either an ideal or material sense, the very survival of the self depends on it. As Debord puts it:

“The spectacle is a permanent opium war which aims to make people identify goods with commodities and satisfaction with survival that increases according to its own laws. But if consumable survival is something which must always increase, this is because it continues to contain privation. If there is nothing beyond increasing survival, if there is no point where it might stop growing, this is not because it is beyond privation, but because it is enriched privation.”³⁵

Or in our example, capitalism ceaselessly needs to artificially raise the floor of “survival” in order to expand, the student experiences this through the increasingly lackluster and debt-ridden life. In the advent of an exceptional era where the end of history is supposed to have been reached, the feats of capitalism to have conquered the world, privation only dominates further. But the student, even though they are acutely aware of this, cannot afford to expand upon this information. They are still asleep, and no amount of theoretical exposure could ever “enlighten” one when they live in a world so materially constrained yet free, pampered yet brutally wounded. Just as the rich are said to have “socialism for themselves”, the student has a facade of life outside of capitalism: A life non-classed. It is due to this development

³⁵ Debord. Page 39.

that the student does not act the same as the proletarian, and neither will they react the same to capitalist crises. In time, if they are proletarianized they may do so, but then this would just be an essay about the well-to-do proletariat. Something we wish to speculate about, but with our current understanding, cannot say definitely will exist.

Although the proceeding sections will primarily delve into student organizing as concrete structures in this era, there is further work to be done in understanding how students *actualize* themselves outside of merely their own self. This brings us to the self-organization of the student in comparison to proletarian formations. Broadly and historically, the worker self-organizes through the maintenance of relationships with their fellow workers. This could be at the site of their employment, their social centers (civil-rights oriented communities, mutual aid, anti-gentrification movements, spontaneous community uprisings etc.), or anywhere else in between that provides them a space to test the fabric of social relations. Typically we have expected it to occur at the primary site of reproduction, the employment centers. None of this is because workers are revolutionary ideologists or altruistic beings. Rather, it is simply that the majority must engage in battle together to see a drastic change in their living conditions. There are of course scabs and strikebreakers and workers that take up hideous occupations, but for the masses at large they are forced to convene with all.

Students, because again they are not experiencing the peak of their promised value and have an institutionalized path to do so, primarily self-organize in an individual sense. The concept of studenthood itself is their first form of self-organization, with the goal of petit-bourgeois or labor aristocratic pursuits. In this deeply ingrained aspect of the student's imagination, then,

the dreams of self-management (and management of the collective) contend with the genuine aspirations for any other experience. Thus, when students do organize in the collective sense, as we have explored, it is not typically in the interest of abolition, Communism, or the workers but to placate their demand for community management in *immediacy*. This proceeds to undermine the youthful urban setting that is so brimming with potential, and therefore the ability to complete tasks that are in opposition to the hegemony of capital. It also directly poisons the niche of radical campus organizing.

While I agree that university is indeed the “sandbox” of organizing, this is mostly derogatory: The sandbox itself is a place of play, not a reflection of life itself. It is an environment and ecosystem that has little relation to the social relations of working-class communities, and its inhabitants are not facing the material circumstances to engage in a struggle for “bread and butter” gains. We forgot this in the wake of the Palestine Solidarity upheavals, but even in this scenario mass participation was limited: A survey at the Encampment epoch found that only about 8% of the student population was taking part in demonstrations for either Palestine or Israel.³⁶ Furthermore, given the political geography of the modern day university, many of these campuses exist directly in opposition to the local community. If a community was not displaced by the construction of the campus, it will be by waves of vicious gentrification afterward. So, what’s left for the student is a population either largely apathetic to any social issues, completely unaware of their material reality or place within society or having struck gold they are ingrained in a niche but ultimately not tied to the masses in a meaningful way. This is a sorrowful truth of the student’s place in society.

³⁶ Habeshian, Sareen. “Exclusive Poll: Most College Students Shrug at Nationwide Campus Protests.” *Axios*, 7 May 2024.

Even the SDSers of the 60s and fragmented Communists of the 70s had this in mind, no matter how haughty and out of depth they appeared when actually engaging with the local proletariat.

In a rather ironic sense, student formations are built to steer them away from the very environment that is touted as so suitable to revolution. This contradiction is emphasized from all aisles of the Left, which is aware of some campus deficiencies. For the Statist Parties, the social democratic civil groups, nonprofits and anarchists alike, the true prize of the student environment is not actually present on campus. Here as much, we agree with the Leninists! Mao admits this truth, asking the question: “How should we judge whether a youth is a revolutionary? How can we tell? There can be only one criterion, namely, whether or not he is willing to integrate himself with the broad masses of workers and peasants and does so in practice. If he is willing to do so and actually does so, he is revolutionary.”³⁷

In summation of this section and in a very self-admitting fashion, we must consider that the campus is ultimately not a radical environment, even if facing outwardly it seems to be so. The true test of any struggle on-campus is how it relates to the working class and communization, with the Palestine question representing a vicious failure. Because students and workers are incredibly different even *if* the former ultimately becomes the latter, it becomes hard to handpick a mass movement that translates from one community to another. The following sections will utilize the positions I have taken on the modern student movement and individual student behavior, and combine that knowledge with what the contemporary political landscape looks like for students (crisis). We will first engage with the political

³⁷ Tse-Tung, Mao. “The Orientation of the Youth Movement.” *Marxists*, 1939.

construction of modern American universities and their attempts to create community, and how this induces a “communal” malaise the individuals in this section harbor. Then we will grow to understand the political landscape of the university in the relation to the Left. We will analyze the political elements in both a material and ideal manner, i.e., what it is they bring to the landscape, how their ideas are implemented and the ramifications for student activism. It goes without saying there are a multitude of problems on these fronts as well, and this analysis will be useful for Communists who want to steer clear of archaic, dogmatic attitudes.

THE ARTIFICIAL COMMUNITY AS SPECTACLE

University as a *community* is more overwhelmed by jubilation and celebration than any other. It is placated by worker's despair disguised as bourgeois delight, an environment thoroughly declassed. This is a defense mechanism that we have briefly explored in the previous section: It exists to maintain and reproducesocial relations at a critical moment in working lives, to inoculate the naive student into a deep web of coercion. Although touted as a riveting, intellectual jungle where diverse peoples and ideologies collide, the university in actuality is a prison of restricted information. What enters the campus in the ideal is already highly processed and plucked of its weight, in order to be manufactured down to bite-sized pieces of information that the student can stomach before moving along. It is which that has been deemed useful to the reproduction of society, to enterprise, and to the State. Although present everywhere at all times, this can be most visibly seen in the overtly reactionary states through the war on "DEI" and "Cultural Marxism". This is where the more conservative sects of the bourgeoisie completely impose themselves on the modern campus.³⁸ Individual courses and faculty are removed, social sciences and arts are slashed at, "critical" programs are done away with entirely, and the campus shifts its resources back towards what capital deems the optimal appreciation of labor power. In this sense, the "critical studies" are simply small concessions of information, a diluted half truth, that bourgeois institutions forked over in response to social unrest. Now that the masses have been satiated, they've decided they don't

³⁸ Cineas, Fabiola. "Florida Has Launched an 'Unparalleled' Assault on Higher Education." *Vox*, 2 June 2023.

need more historians or social workers or activists; It is suboptimal for capital. So out goes those programs and focus pivots towards the technological “productive” sciences. As these policies relate to practically any informed understanding of America, we can regard this as the most overt obstruction which placates the intellectual prison.

This section, although certainly relating to what the bourgeoisie mandates as acceptable education, is more so regarding the nature of the university as a community in relation to the proletariat. After all, we understand the government mandates not as the sale of something precious and the damnation of a vibrant atmosphere, as many liberals cried in 2023, but rather as an additive reinforcement of the university’s original intent that *all* universities share. This much is usually understood, but what is forgotten is that the university’s relations with local communities have been entirely parasitic since their founding. This has resulted in working class movements *against* the universities as a center of reproduction, and thus in the context of Communistic organizing we have an entirely different question than the one most student groups are asking. The proletariat and the university are diametrically opposed forces, and any attempt to “reform” the university from the students is ultimately a rigid, insulated concession to them alone. What’s more is that these concessions (campus safety, student housing, transportation etc.) typically prove to be weapons pointed at the local proletariat themselves.

Although the national export of each university is appreciated labor power, the local export has long been urban renewal. Especially with the construction of *urban* universities, neighborhoods across the country have been bulldozed and long forgotten. Some of the most dramatic examples

(although all urban/suburban universities share these principles across the country) can be found in Chicago, Illinois. When 106 acres of land in the Near West Side were allocated to the University of Illinois in 1961, there was an uproar in the local community. At the City Council meeting where the zoning designation was approved, “Female neighborhood residents pounded desks, threw council journals across the chamber, waved their arms, and shouted insults at council members and Mayor [Richard J.] Daley as the committee filed out. “The first surveyor is going to get it in the head with a crowbar,” one woman told a reporter. The crowd later staged a three-hour sit-in at the mayor’s office. Overnight someone tossed a dummy with a dagger in its back onto Daley’s front lawn.”³⁹ This was not a short burst of anger, but a pronounced campaign led by the proletariat which lasted over 2 years. “Neighborhood activists held meetings, marches, and more sit-ins to protest the campus project until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the city and the university. Despite unrelenting grassroots opposition, UIC was coming to the Near West Side. Building the campus meant uprooting an ethnically and racially diverse working-class community near the Harrison and Halsted intersection: Greek-town in the northernmost section, a growing Mexican-American community along Halsted Street, several heavily African American areas south of Roosevelt Road, “Little Italy” along Taylor Street, and the commercial free-for-all of Maxwell Street—a corridor of mostly Jewish-owned shops that hosted a weekly open-air market. When classes began at UIC in September 1965 nearly 1,900 families and 630 businesses had been displaced” (Anderson, 2016). Since, thousands of students have benefitted from this construction as a favor to them alone. But what of the

³⁹ Anderson, Richard. *Making the West Side*, 2016.

proletariat? In order to feed the student psyche, the university does not only quell the proletarian one. It removes it from perception.

This type of violent expulsion, replicated across the country, is in complete contrast to the quiet peace the campuses rest on. It is a domain outside of reality, entirely artificial, entirely concentrated. There is a decisively violent character to the university, but for fretful students who engage in these environments, there is very little that they can observe. Furthermore, as any social beings, they are trained to seek protection and sustenance. It is the natural culmination of human needs. Their pronounced self-interest, their desire for safety and protection, however, does come at the cost of the local population both in swift bouts of urban renewal and gradual gentrification even after the establishment of their turf.

One of the most profound measuring sticks for this distinction is that of militarization, which again largely benefits the student population at the expense of local communities. When a university is established, in order to draw in urban professionals and retain them in the surrounding neighborhood, they typically take the route of militarized safety. This is a formidable approach, as the effective rate of police presence is considered one of the strongest factors for the successful long term gentrification of a neighborhood.⁴⁰ We can understand this through the University of Chicago's "Wall Around Hyde Park", a highly militarized police and surveillance force which entrenches racial segregation in the surrounding areas.⁴¹ As an entity established on behalf of students (creating a safe, White urban setting amidst fears of racial integration), UCPD's presence has simultaneously ensured the

⁴⁰ Bolger, Conor. "White Flight and Gentrification in Hyde Park, Chicago." *Trinity College Dublin*, 2016

⁴¹ Fan, A. "'A Wall Around Hyde Park': The History and the Future of the UCPD". *UChicago's Undergraduate Political Review*, 2014.

supremacy of property values, as well as a 25% decrease of the Black population between 1980 and 2014.⁴² Those that remained were further relegated to the poorer, Northwest sections of Hyde Park. Nonetheless this area is still prone to frequent over policing and discrimination at the hands of police, and will continue to be squeezed into surrounding neighborhoods as time marches onward.

Whether with the University of Illinois at Chicago as an extreme example of urban renewal, or the University of Chicago's militarization of Hyde Park, it is clear to what extent an individual campus can dictate and alter a surrounding community. Campuses can shatter a neighborhood with the efficiency of a carpet bombing campaign. But these developments are not left solely to new construction projects or police reinforcements. Rather, they seek to infiltrate everything. With a rapid influx of youth, the sensible university does not stop at a single parcel of land or even several. It is tasked to world-build to the greatest extent it can do so, to pull from its imagination the greatest possible illusion it has to offer the students. Spillovers then occur in the area surrounding the university, further displacing and pushing native residents out. White collar work is sought and provided, enticing a new group of young professionals, new amenities are produced at a feverish pitch to accommodate, housing prices continue to rise, and soon any resemblance to what was is no longer. Whether or not the process of campus-oriented gentrification is long or short, it has shown invincibility in entrenching itself in the urban environment.

The political question of these developments are almost entirely avoided by the students themselves. And why should they? As much as they themselves

⁴² Rob Paral and Associates. "Chicago Community Area Data." *Rob Paral*, 2014.

are swindled by the ridiculous housing prices, they are paying for their place in maintaining such an environment; The neighborhood was demolished with them in mind. The segregation and violence is a precondition of their study. Otherwise, of course there would be few students in the West Side, Hyde Park or in any neighborhood across the country not aptly providing for such a demographic. The underlying issue for *radical* students is that they bear a hostile social force to the local proletariat, and the issues they are concerned with cannot be communicated to the working class. Thus they need to understand as such when working on radical issues, not radical *student* issues. Those issues we fought for, such as having a seat at the table of university management, of resource allocation and reform, are quite frankly issues of little connection to the working class. They were certainly large reforms that swept up the nation, but these campaigns did abolish the campus-worker relation. Rather they actively reinforce social distinctions between the two!

And if we can expect social groups to act according to their self-interests and livelihoods, students may even advocate for the liquidation of the workers in their respective communities. It is clear as day, dressed in language such as to “Avoid x part of town”, “Avoid x Avenue”, or to “ Remain vigilant off campus”. These modes of thinking, replicated by so many students, exist not to assess whether or not the student is actually in danger or chasing shadows; The difference is marginal. Rather, it is verbiage which solidifies the student in a vocal opposition, even detestation, to their local surroundings. It is the mindset of fear that silently reinforces the preceding bulldozing, militarization, and whatever is necessary in the future to create a pleasant urban environment.

Let us take the position now of a university developing an artificial environment. What is left when the old neighborhoods and families are pushed away? Outside of the university's spacious remedies, there is a noticeable lack of *culture*. By this I refer to the little means of expressing oneself, both as an individual or within a collective, within the new environment. Interaction with it is foreign. Between the gulf of its past and present, all human relations in the university environment must now be instantaneously developed.

We have discussed the spectacle of white collar opportunity and entrepreneurship, but the university must also capitalize on reimagining campus life. In an artificial environment flowing with expectant youth, the university can forgo liberal politics in the name of amenities and pseudo-justifications. It can provide an idyllic scene of life by capitalizing on the student's lack of evident social character (that being how they relate to capital), constantly developing and redeveloping the campus and/or college town to meet every promise of life without care. The activities of the campus are all equally birthed in order to fill time in a day, an array of walking to and from a large amount of buildings engaging with an overwhelming fog of things with little concrete affirmation of relation to material life.

Everything in the environment is an abstraction, whether it is a student's relation to another student or their relation to the university (the State or private enterprise). A student and another student, now matter how proletarian they might both become, cannot document anything of substance, they cannot forge a proletarian identity together. They are, again, entirely non-classed. The social hubs they occupy are as consumers to the university, in the vein of courses or to businesses and restaurants. The

university leaves them only to reproduce their destitution. When this relation leaves them a nihilist they are violent consumers to each other's social capital, in a harrowing attempt to find any evidence of a social relationship that resembles their own. Even with all this effort, they do not exist outside a pseudo-State.

They might attend a State or private institution at the cost of thousands of dollars per course, but they do not recognize the university as the State or the firm. Everything is dressed to the pseudo-State's perception. The admissions office is a faceless machine of emails, sputtering dates and deadlines that are to judge the student's calendar. Class itself is the most intimate and simultaneously most alienating of campus settings, insofar that it unites passerby into a quasi social force of similar criteria. But this social force is entirely transitory and only seeks to appreciate its own labor power, thus any mutual relations are of the disposable variety. Petit-bourgeois competition is more likely to emerge than any proletarian consciousness. Meanwhile campus employees, the only interaction with any proletariat a student may have, are to be treated as machines in the background. As long as they are laboring, they are entirely inhuman and their purpose is subjective. Even looking a campus police officer in the face students could not grasp that this individual is the law. Rather, they are the one in charge of chasing the shadows off campus or perhaps simply another shapeless being. Otherwise they too are a subjective producer of noise and nothing else.

Any and all social identifications are directed arbitrarily by the university. Students will actualize themselves as a fracture of different identities and hobbies, in relation to social policy. Different schools within the campus only further isolate the individual student and performatively play to their

interests. Where one lives, eats, studies or spends time is all decided by the university. Thus, revisiting the approach of overtly sectarian states, we are able to better understand the anti-DEI policy as an extension of feeding this culture on campus. What one is to study and explore, what ideas they are to come into contact with, are all abstractions from class reality. Yet truthfully the relevance of Marxism or any other Left “ism” to such an environment’s population is genuinely peripheral, because this environment is absolutely foreign to everything unto itself. It is the culmination of post-class propaganda. This artificial nature of the university is a surreal camouflage that drapes its eyes over all its inhabitants.

Approaching this from an organizational standpoint, if we understand in previous sections the complacency of the student’s nature and the diverting effects of the campus, we can inevitably conclude the sheer ludicrous nature of attempting to form “revolutionary” movements in such a setting. A cell is plausible, given there are enough individuals of any social group to constitute a “cell” of Leftists. But for students to form a coherent movement of abolition is not on the horizon, for their transitory role is still one of a parasitic nature. Their movement’s scope (parity with the pseudo-State) is extended to themselves alone. Should the entirety of the campus staff go on strike against the university, the majority of the radical students would only be left questioning who is to throw out their trash.

Thus, in the case of the student population radicalized to embrace proletarian ideas, the first thing they must do is step outside of the collegiate environment. In this their movements must not heighten the contradiction between student and worker, but wholeheartedly seek self-abolition. Many student youths have already realized this, such as the UChicago Against

Displacement (UCAD) organization, which seeks to address the “school’s decision to indirectly fund racially restrictive covenants during the 1930s and 1940s to prevent integration of the mid-South Side and its role in orchestrating the later urban renewal plan that saw thousands of Black people displaced from Hyde Park.”⁴³ More work like this must be the primary focus, as we have already explored that the needs of students and proletarians do not always coincide. There is a contradiction of course: The local student population is likely to be hostile to such aims of integration. At least for the foreseeable future, this work will always be that of the small minority. The spectacle of university will have to lose its luster and ultimately erode away in order for further shifts to occur.

In the following section, we will build upon the foundations of the student experience (class character and social position) to understand their political activism. This includes the political landscape of the student Left, their subsequent recruitment to national organizations, and how this relates to the overall inefficacy to build lasting work.

⁴³ Jay, Corli. “Local Activists and Residents Issue Demand for Reparations From U. of C.” *Hyde Park Herald*, 11 Feb. 2022.

Political Factors of the Student Experience

What can genuinely be said about the purpose of the student? We have touched on this from a capitalistic perspective already, as the university exists to reinforce social relations, via the appreciation of labor power and the descent into the petit-bourgeois. From a Communist perspective, this leaves us with a project, a blank canvas from which students create their niches and develop their ideas and tactics alongside the working class.

Outside of the capital's domain, the campus environment is already dominated by abandoned ideologies of the 20th century: A living graveyard of the ideal. These ideologies, which have no appeal amongst the working class, are perpetuated almost entirely by fledgling Communist Parties attempting to imprint their mark on naive youth. For otherwise, as relics of the past their ideas would find it very hard to relate to 21st century American capitalism. We are not fighting a “bourgeois-democratic revolution” where “nothing goes beyond its scope”, and where capitalists “should still be allowed in a people's democracy” (Tse-Tung, 1939). The political questions that led to these conclusions of Chinese society in this case, or Soviet society in the next, were in addressing conditions obscure to our situation now. Yet even *if* the positions of the Leninists were correct in the 20th century (Our position is still a resolute no), the positions of the Leninists in the 21st century are beyond absurdity, bordering insanity. Our question now is of abolition, not seizure, yet that of the latter is still on the minds of all the contending Parties. For example, the Party for Socialism and Liberation proudly carries the banner of finance capital and bureaucratic capitalism!

This is the language this generation of Leftists finds itself in. “Instead of the CEOs and other top bank executives awarding themselves huge bonuses out of the bailout funds and continuing to run the banks on behalf of wealthy shareholders, the banks should be seized and turned over to committees of workers and community representatives to be run in the public interest.”⁴⁴ The question is, how exactly can a bank be run in the public interest? Is there not a very real animosity towards the banks as they exist, not as they are managed? Do they not serve to reinforce the entire system of value and plunder? PSL offers no such answer, for they desire a state capitalism run by “the people”. Seizing the 100 largest American companies is on their mind, not to abolish but to maintain them. It is no surprise then that their demands go nowhere. Meanwhile, Freedom Road Socialist Organization curiously labels “monopoly” capitalism as the true ill of society and advocates for “The working class will occupy the commanding heights of the economy, taking control of the factories, utilities, transportation networks, big technology monopolies, mines, big retail stores, banks, and other major financial institutions”.⁴⁵ It seems both FRSO and PSL idealize a petit bourgeois paradise.

These demands of seizure reflect those of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in their bid for power, completely losing sight of the fact we are in an entirely different epoch. And again, if a communist revolution is to be successful, it would almost certainly imply an immediate targeting of the financial centers. Money and exchange as a value, even *value as value*, would be made obsolete. The language of only seizing the “big monopolies” or the “big banks” reflects passive subordination to the logic of capital. They are lost in

⁴⁴ “Program of the Party for Socialism and Liberation.” *PSL*, 27 Apr. 2023.

⁴⁵ “Program - Freedom Road Socialist Organization.” *FRSO*, 2022.

their own hapless appeals to the proletarian class which evades them. Should the proletariat rightfully attack the banks, where would these Parties even stand? If history gives any clue, these results would be a disaster. As put, “Communism is not a new economy, even a regulated, bottom-up, decentralized, and self-managed one.”⁴⁶ It is the *real movement* to completely upend the social relation, which already exists regardless of our idealism or social democratic programs.

“Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.” – Marx (1845)⁴⁷

Thus our revolutionary demands do not begin or end with seizure and economism. Yet it is clear as it was a people’s democracy in the 20th century, these same ideologies demand a people’s democracy in the 21st century. They are incapable of critique or exploration. Hence all of their remedies for the present society are nonsense and rooted in fetishist delusion, wrapped in a socially acceptable, social democratic framework. In light of these influences, our objectives *should* be the abolition of capital as a social relation, not its further use and domination like many Leninists crave.

This is merely an introduction to the contradiction between the contending Parties and the student’s attention they desperately fight for. Before moving further, it is important to briefly re-establish the concepts we have already explored. And it must be said again and again: Student organizing is not a higher echelon or plane of existence. Rather it is the opposite! As an

⁴⁶ Dauvé, Gilles. “From Crisis to Communitisation”. *PM Press*, 2017.

⁴⁷ Marx, Karl. “The German Ideology.” *Marxists*, 1845.

enclosure for young adults, student organizing is an environment to acquire skills, build knowledge and experience, and *possibly* utilize those tools in a proletarian environment once the student has entered the “real world”. That is, once the student’s actions and consequences are finally their full brunt to bear, they no longer are working *toward* wage labor but seeking to *escape* from it. Again, this all rests on the notion that tactics, notions, and concepts retrieved from the student environment are compatible enough with the proletarian one to be transferred in the first place. For the dedicated students, better yet, they should seek to build their niches off campus and integrate themselves completely with the working class if they want more applicable training.

Here again is the contradiction we have arrived at in the last section: A rejection of the university as a protracted arena of struggle, of the student youth as a special energetic force, yet what Left unanimously recommends is the opposite. But *why* has it been expressed by vast swathes of the Marxist Left that student organizing is integral, that it is a primary source of struggle, and that it holds so much of the future of the revolutionary movement in America? The question was hinted above earlier: It is merely a manner of mediation, then logistics for an impotent ideology. Let us revisit the program of FRSO:

“As we see it, communists should work among students for three main reasons: 1) in and of themselves, the student movement can strike blows against the U.S. ruling class, 2) the activity of the student movement can spread advanced ideas to society as a whole, and 3) advanced students can take up Marxism-Leninism and join the struggles of the working class.”

- J. Sykes, FRSO ideologist (2009)

Again, we *agree* that integration with the working class is critical for students. FRSO is certainly correct on this front, as was Mao. But for both, this function is entirely different, as they seek integration for the sake of carrying *ideology* and a *program* for workers to mold into. That enlightened ideals will trickle down from the students themselves, even. Thus it is not a matter of leveling the social relation! FRSO views the students as mediators who will guide the workers toward the vanguard machinery through entryist tactics. Then, they will continue to uphold capitalist relations as such, to develop the supposed conditions for Communism and to implement it as a *political ideology*, not to fight *within* Communism as a real movement. We understand FRSO's line, then, as a half-baked equation to the student question. Understanding the primacy of student integration is critical, but they cannot comprehend anything beyond a centralized, bureaucratic leadership where educated students act as the worker's new master. While they seek integration in broad strokes, their practice will entail a superiority of the student relation and ultimately reproduce a State capitalism.

It is not surprising that FRSO falls into this trap. Lenin himself is not free from this criticism; His direction has a clinical link to this, with his claims of the student movement that "The party of the working class must make use of it and will do so. We were able to work years and decades before the revolution, carrying our revolutionary slogans first into the study circles, then among the masses of the workers, then on to the streets, then on to the barricades".⁴⁸ This is the historic chasm between the intellectuals and proletarians, resulting in our age of the entire Party (PSL, FRSO, CPUSA, etc in this instance) and the all of the working masses themselves.

⁴⁸ Lenin, V.I. "The Student Movement and the Present Political Situation." *Proletary*, 1908.

Let us discuss the question of logistics for the Leninists now. Any representative of these organizations, if honest, will admit they are not appealing to the working classes and have not been for almost a century. As such, the intentions of the established Communist parties in dealing with student organizing is to develop it as a natural stepping stone to legitimacy. Their own memberships are typically small and void of such working class presence. Furthermore, due to the sheer ludicrous nature of most of these parties, their hierarchical and/or needlessly deceptive structures, their ceaseless liberal organizing and their abstraction from the tasks at hand, they fail to retain those that they draw in. Either their memberships are beaten down by years of the same, hapless methods, are no longer a 1:1 ideological match with a dogmatic Party line (and therefore surplus to barren requirements), fall out with Party leaderships or they suffer from any combination of these examples and more. It is an exhausting predicament, an exhausting environment. Both for the Party leadership and the revolving door of Communists. But again, what does an organization hemorrhaging membership need to fill the gaps, when they are disaffected from the working masses themselves? They seek a healthy influx of disaffected young people, which of course bodes well for the lifeline of the shriveled Marxist-Leninist environment. These young people join the parties, and the cyclical nature of organizing continues. They will join, engage in a few years of activism in which little is tested or discovered, and if they do not ascend further into the organization they simply fade out. The Leninist approach to enter the Party “first into the study circles” never escapes them.

But what exactly do the young *do* before they themselves are replaced? A primary attitude is to build mass student organizations, ones that are led by members or sympathizers of a certain flavor of Marxist-Leninist ideology but

outwardly broad enough to attract more members. It creates a dynamic of- despite the mass organization itself being a product of the Party-secrecy where leading organizers must shield the “true” ideology from their membership. This is to slowly integrate and inoculate the member until they are fed enough of the Party line. It is a ridiculous assumption that all parties lean on, that their universal truth must be kept hidden from those in their midst. But such is what they rely upon, and it proves more fruitful than if they outwardly supported the regimes they do, or shared the opinions that rightfully would warrant backlash. Look no further than FRSO’s very public and very uncritical support for China, North Korea, Laos, Vietnam, Cuba, and any other nation which contains a national bourgeoisie hostile to America (yes, even take your pick with Russia, Venezuela, or Assadist Syria) (FRSO, 2022). Meanwhile, their SDS chapters frame these issues on a much more vague, “civil rights” basis, seeking to point out very real American abuses in these nations while ignoring the crimes of the national bourgeoisies. They will initiate programs lip service to these regimes in this context, which then paves the way for the impressionable member to accept them. To provide an interest in the working peoples of these nations would be preposterous: The entire *nations* are free from criticism as long as they take their anti-Americanism to the press. This is the process of absorption the mass organization undertakes.

This attitude is not unique to this time. Considering the following analysis from Karl Korsch in 1935, which rests on the same points of criticism:

“In the time after Lenin’s death and after the current “stabilization” of capital domination on a world-wide scale, and the year’s long “prosperity” in some countries, especially the USA, many people have newly come to

“communism” or “Soviet Russia” who cannot at all understand the critique of today’s Russia and the Communist party which we developed in the first decade of the Revolution 1917-1927. These people, whom I have for a long time designated in conversations as the “second wave of conscripts of Leninism,” have themselves never been united with the revolution of the Russian workers as a direct component of a world revolutionary movement of which they themselves participated. Rather, they are aroused by the “new Russia” and its leading Bolshevik party, with its “five year plans,” with its cultural progressiveness in pedagogical fields, law, art, and film, which have arisen from the Russian Revolution in its consequently forced national limitation to the Russian state, and which still has continuing vitality as a powerful revolutionary movement. They see that in Russia another group has risen to power, influence, and effectiveness than in the old European and American world, and to be sure another group with which the new Communists or “friends of the new Russia” to whom I am referring, can more easily identify with than with the previous type of leader in their own land, or the new fascist type of leader who is advancing toward this position in some lands (and who belongs to the historical group of a still older human type). The new friends of communism have in a sense the same relation to the new Russian state that Hegel once represented in regard to the new Prussian state: “We are today so advanced that we can only hold as valid Ideas and that which has arisen from Reason. More closely seen, the Prussian State corresponds to Reason.”⁴⁹

It is not that these organizations and individuals identify with working people, but with a multitude of bourgeois States perplexing enough to

⁴⁹ Korsch, Karl. “Position on Russia and the Communist Party.” *Jahrbuch der Arbeiterbewegung*, 1935.

warrant praise. It is no wonder their views must be concealed, for they are toxic to the worker's touch. Only a gross misunderstanding of proletarian internationalism could facilitate this abstraction.

This attitude, which is shared by all of the Left "hegemon", plays out in real time with a spiraling *multitude* of organizations vying for all the precious resources of youth. Each large campus boasts several different sects of the Left political scene at once, tripping over each as Communist Party youth sort each other out. Parties fight for hegemony, for the influx of organizers who will slowly but surely make them "serious contenders" on the American political scene, becoming territorial and hostile to organizations and individuals almost entirely parallel to themselves. Local organizations now have to contend with these implants and their programs, growing agitated themselves. All this does is further deplete the pool of each university for the growth of each Party's nationwide program. Never does it cross their mind that the young, disaffected people of the same campus, ideology, and community should come together. Even when they do, such as with the Pan-Left coalitions of the Palestine Solidarity Movement, these organizations cannot help but engage in a torturous display. Ultimately, they just make a fool of themselves and a caricature of the entire movement.

It goes without saying that any attempt to build a successful movement is incredibly stifled by the political landscape such as described, and the tactics employed nationwide are just as grim. Almost all such mass organizations use increasingly restrained approaches to organizing. Because they are built nationally and funded nationally, they often have the same cookie cutter organizational structure, approaches, and adopt the same campaigns nationwide. Many criticisms can be made against the Democratic Socialists

of America and their respective YDSA campus affiliates, but at least they occasionally leave their membership to do work specific to their environments. With the Communist Party groups, there is nothing adaptive to their own community, as if they are expecting the environment to bend to its will. Further, not only do they shelter their membership from their true ideals, but all these chapters of such organizations utilize the most tired of tropes that the Left has to offer. They act as a mass organization, but appoint police to train the mass membership on what it is and isn't politically acceptable for they believe they are the shepherds of the flock. They love to protest and disrupt, but only to a point that is conducive to attracting new members to their niche shadow ideology. There is no direction to achieve their goals, and there is no path behind the pattern of yelling and handing out fliers to the next session of yelling and handing out fliers. These steps would not be so negative if they were not thinking nationally, but because of the reinforcement provided by their feeding Communist party or organization, student organizers are typically not put in a position to innovate. There is no chance to elaborate on what has failed, or to address failure. Everything must be seen as a victory that is a mark on the course to the next great outbreak of revolutionary fervor. In a deeply unserious fashion, they have reproduced the Stalinist habit of over exaggerating developments for their individual gains.⁵⁰ An illusion so pervasive that even the bureaucrats themselves are fooled into believing it.

I believe there are several dire misunderstandings here that need to be remedied. For one, the issue begins with Communist Parties and their mass organizations. These national organizations, almost all "revolutionary

⁵⁰ Harrison, Mark. "Soviet Industrial Production, 1928 to 1955: Real Growth and Hidden Inflation." *University of Warwick*, 1999.

Communist parties”, are making horrible recruitment decisions by centering such a focus on student life. Mass organizations (especially on campus) are not going to grow these organizations into the next great Communist Party. At best, it is the revolving door of Party organizing; There will, if lucky, be enough followers of their Cold War politics to replace those that have dwindled out. Either way they will drive themselves to insanity. Even beyond the needs of the community or the trajectory of the Party, students as a whole are not this composition of radical hope that these organizations treat them as. They are not a radical group brimming with fervor that only the Party can radicalize and organize. Students are not waiting to be unlocked, and as we have discussed in the previous section, they are only becoming more white collar, more petit-bourgeois. Even student identity is founded on the supplantation of the working class community. Their class reality, whatever it may be, is far less likely to be susceptible to Communist propaganda than the working masses themselves. But because the Parties cannot look inward and understand where they have gone so wrong, they will never be appetizing for the working masses. For all of their democratic centralism, they have a small echo chamber.

This is the principle misunderstanding from which all other issues sprout. But even if the Left took this analysis seriously, they still make mistakes in regards to tactics. The pattern of building mass organizations for the sake of recruitment, yet not being open or publicly aligned to such beliefs, is a critical issue. Furthermore, it is to the detriment of everyone that the Communist Parties prefer their students to make their own chapters instead of engaging with what already is. This tactic not only divides the small percentage of radicals at each campus into even further divide, but fails to engage with anything of a proletarian nature. It is irresponsible and crushes the potential

of the student movement in any given area, and it is happening all around the country. There is no need for a wide variety of Communist organizations at a single location, especially when they are all offering the same product; The mass organizations should work together, and ideally join as one. A dissolution of their networks would be more than ideal for the freeing of action. However, for the Communist Party, this outcome is unacceptable because it reduces the chances of its own survival. The Party needs its reliable source of inputs, thus leaving any chance of conciliation impossible. Thus the Communist Parties are one of the primary obstacles students must resist against.

The last misunderstanding is a mistake in that Marxism-Leninism is not an ideology that has won the hearts of the proletariat by its ideals. This is not to say the proletarian and radical movements of the 20th century were *not* led by Marxism-Leninism, but rather it was not by merit of the ideology rather than its material imposition. Marxism-Leninism was adopted by intellectuals around the world in the quest for a development of their societies, thereby embracing material changes that the proletariat supported. But, the proletariat were not ideologists themselves. It was the intellectuals who crafted the language of these movements, and fed the proletariat its insignia through peace, land, and bread until the workers were comfortably supportive of its measures.

Enforcing students to carry out the mass work traditionally assigned to the intelligentsia is absolutely absurd. There are two stifling contradictions. One, the student-on-student organizational method is not mass work, it is by-and-large students organizing other students. If they are taking the role of the intelligentsia in propagating the language of Marxism-Leninism then, their

work is actually confined to the campus radicals, to the intelligentsia, itself. This is a remarkable misunderstanding given that most student organizing is done under the pretense of “mass work”, yet they are not engaging with any masses to be seen. Even if they are in the position of mass work with the proletariat, we criticize the idea that student activists have remotely enough ideological training to be intelligentsia at all. From what has been observed across the country, there is not a chasm of ideological training from the proletariat to these stand-ins. Rather, just as the proletariat does, students wholeheartedly embrace social democratic, even fascistic language fed through the tube that is the superstructure. If BDS aligns with their idealism, BDS will be the revolutionary bastion. If it is nationalism, or racial capitalism, so be it. Thus, on a theoretical lens, students are impotent as these stand-ins where Marxism-Leninism places such emphasis on rigor and ideal.

Yet, seemingly there is no Leftist ideology more prevalent at the student’s level than Leninism. Lenin’s slogans and piercing images are seen in the reflections of almost every student gathering, an echo of generations past. It is not unlikely to find universities sporting 2 or even 3 Leninist interpretations, who attract and repel each other in an infinite contradiction. These disciples embody not only the infighting of early 20th Communism, but of the ludicracy of our generation. It is a sadistic infatuation.

Beyond the sheer logistical nightmare, Leninism takes the worst of the Leftist movement and puts it on a display for all of the university to see. I am referring to 1.) The attitudes that result from Leninism when interacting with student organizers, and 2.) The backward Leninist understanding of world capitalism and notably American capitalism. In the next section, we will

consider both of these and especially in relation to what increasingly identifies as a student vanguard.

LIMITS OF THE STUDENT VANGUARD

The leaders of the Left would like to be bosses, but because they can't do it in a private capacity, they do it in a public capacity in the State. Going more deeply, these leaders have never understood that capital is the concept of a relation, of a struggle. Or even worse, if they have understood it, they have decided to be part of it by becoming one of those who command." – Antonio Negri (2006)⁵¹

If the mechanisms of the *radical* student experience primarily exist to siphon them off to Communist parties down the line, it is important to understand how the radical student Left thinks of itself. This is not self-serving, but to truly pinpoint the expected role of students in, for example, a revolution or popular revolt, the prior analyses of student behavior must be extended to their political ideals. Let us consider the following, as developed in earlier sections:

In this era, the self-actualization of the majority of the workers is to revolt through their relation to capital. It is thus also their shared relations with one another, and how one worker's livelihood is directly tied to others. There are stopgaps built into the capitalist system, including scabbing or becoming a manager, but for the vast majority of the proletariat these are not realistic. There can only be so many managers, only so many scabs and those that betray their class; The system can simply not afford for everyone to manage or climb the ranks. Yet for the student, this is clearly not so. The student is a melancholy individualist, precisely because their outlook and livelihood has a clear "upward" illusion. Most of them are bound to become proletariat, of

⁵¹ Negri, Antonio. "Goodbye Mr. Socialism ." *Seven Stories Press*, 2006.

course. So what is the difference? Is a student not just a worker with a down payment? No, the student is a worker with more elusive control over their fate. As far as they can see, even in this economic situation, the student can rise to some degree of decency (yet the Left looks at them expectantly for reinforcement!). Thus, the self-actualization of the student is dependent on their ability to develop a white collar career. White collar does not exclude them from the collective movement, but it clearly isolates their labor in the long term. This isolation means that even at their most impoverished, the college student has some bearing of progress that the average worker simply does not.

Now, when the radicalized students become radicalized, there seems to be a different process of self-actualization in this context. They still maintain dreams of material value and status, but they do not dream of owning a firm. While the docile student's realization is dependent on their career prospects and proximity to capital, the student *organizer's* realization is dependent on their proximity and ability to lead mass organizations, Communist Party infrastructure, and ultimately *people* to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. In essence, to become totally professionally revolutionary. Both the docile and the radical envision a lifestyle where they themselves rise above the others! This is what Negri argues when he claims that "The leaders of the Left would like to be bosses, but because they can't do it in a private capacity, they do it in a public capacity in the State" (Negri, 2006). Whether or not this decision is conscious does not matter, for it is the general trend that we see perpetrated by the Communist Parties. They recruit on a variety of factors, but the potential of a student to manage a mass base (in absence of State power) for the Party is a primary goal. This is not specific to community, campus-based organizing in the United States but also in the entryist work.

They typically assign different terminology or reasoning behind their brand of entryism, but it is all the same regardless. They can recruit a few scattered faces and subsequently ask them to enter a community which they are foreign to, for the sake of cell building and Party infrastructure. However, given the aforementioned importance of the campus as a political battleground for Communist influences *amongst each other*, this work becomes all the more intense and necessary for the trickling in of young, impressionable Communists. It is not an ideology, but simply a good manager that can make or break the Party.

This leads the organizer to view themselves and their cell of Party sympathizers as a community vanguard, an active force that will one day hold the reins of the proletariat. And this is precisely why the Leninists can never work with other Leninists or Communists: They all believe they are the true representative of the working class! All movements must have their branding, their preachers, their articles detailing their own accomplishments with their faces at the head of every march and demonstration. Everything is for grabs in an intense battle of counter branding, from posters to banners and signs. They must-not because of ulterior motives, but because of logistical survival-go to battle with other Communists for their space and social capital. They must prove how insignificant the others are, undermine them, and establish how their ideology will *eventually* win the masses. Their relations amongst one another in this context are absolutely resembling the Apostolic Churches and their claim to being the “One, True, Holy Gospel”, incessantly bickering amongst one another for a self-attributed title which has no substance to *any* workers.

Regardless of how unfeasible it may be, it is now the student organizers job to act as the leading community presence. Immediately a suicidal dichotomy is established, regardless of how talented or charismatic the organizer is. This dichotomy is between the material and the ideal, of what is relevant to the student population and what the organizer attempts to preach as scientific truth. It can also be a matter of inexperience and lack of tact, which is not specific to students organizing for Communist Parties. As noted by the relations of SDS and JOIN, a white working class organization in the 1960s: ““They had started to produce important results, particularly in Chicago where JOIN built lasting alliances with labor—United Packinghouse Workers and the Independent Union of Public Aid Employees—as well as local Black and Latino community groups”. However, the primary tension between SDS organizers and members of organizations such as JOIN, was one of classism and lack of autonomy. Sonnie and Tracy write that “for all of JOIN’s participatory politics many longtime residents started to feel SDS organizers were still generally calling the shots”. For these residents, it became apparent that many student organizers were unaware of their class privileges, the reality of life as a working-class individual, and the power imbalances within their organizations. These tensions eventually led to a fracturing of the left, with groups such as JOIN splitting from SDS, shifting their focus to being a working-class organization that organized working class folks within a wider movement.””^{52 53}

⁵² Jimmar, Alicia. “The Student Movement? The Role of Student Activism in American Leftist Political Movements: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives,” n.d.

⁵³ Tracy, James, and Amy Sonnie. “Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power.” *Penguin Random House*, 2011.

Things also begin stagnating when organizers see students no longer have the “bread and butter” issues to rally behind; We forget it’s been over 50 years since they’ve been drafted to a colonial war! They and their ideas are left to compete with-and relegate themselves to-what students usually engage in: Social/fraternal organizations, special interest clubs, university events, work, and so on while they hop on and off the conveyor belt of university. Any activism that takes place is typically shorter sighted and aimed at campus policy or concerns specific to the surrounding area, usually dominated by NGOs that have no real power but to throw around their investments. This all makes for a very rigid attitude. The modern Leninist, however, is tasked with transforming these attitudes to fit the needs of the Communist Party: Gradual and uniform acceptance of rigid dogma, a willingness to lead mass organizations, and to attempt to circle back to the working class one day; Of course, the Parties have no strategy for this. Or rather, if they have, they will simply hold enough positions in community organizations that when a revolutionary situation presents itself, they believe they will direct the divided proletariat like pieces on a chess board. Their revolution is framed around the supremacy of a political unit, rather than through the living relation of the proletariat to its abolition.

Furthermore, we have clarified that these needs are unable to be met by the *radical youth themselves* and that only the *proletariat* could ever provide enough sustenance for such a parasite. So it is an attempt to make the historically impossible task possible, and they take it up all the same. It is not that student leaders are conducting great evils on behalf of lurking Communist Parties, though my assessments are certainly not charitable. No, the primary issue is that the Leninists are approaching campus organizing from an entirely ahistorical and dogmatic standpoint. The ideas handed

down from previous generations have remained and shown no fruit. As J. Sykes of FRSO goes on to say, “Our line on student work has its roots in the New Communist Movement. Much has changed since then, and we as an organization have learned a lot and gained a lot of experience, but the basic principles remain”, in regards to the tactics and structure of SDS (Sykes, 2009). While not overtly problematic, when engaging with the SDS of the 2020s we see the grave mistakes of FRSO and their leadership; This is where they will employ a largely obtuse framework of mass structure to cater to a very niche group of activists, acting nationally and continuously stifling their own operations. Thus their “movements” will continue to get less and less relevant to the proletariat, and more and more segregated from the proletariat. Here we ask, should the basic principles for students remain over the course of the 65 year period? The New Communist Movement was bolstered by the degradation of youths and their generation being shipped off to fight an anti-communist crusade. Hysteria and fears were aided by the mass broadcasting of carnage in Vietnam. Draft avoidance, at the front of any young man’s mind at the time, increased college enrollment by 4-6% to avoid deferment and flooded the campus psyche.⁵⁴ They swelled with anti-war sentiment due to these issues, and critical social struggles engaged across the country. All of these factors contributed to student uprisings the country had never seen, and even then the movements were decidedly crushed, co-opted, or left to splinter off to obscurity. The late 60s SDS was riddled with holes and completely fell on its face. Over half a century on, now is not the time for nostalgia. The social composition of students has dramatically shifted. They are no longer singled out for bloodshed but are specially non-classed

⁵⁴ Card, David, and Lemieux, Thomas. “Did Draft Avoidance Raise College Attendance During the Vietnam War?” *Center for Labor Economics*, Feb. 2002.

members of society. The movements that do pop up (Stop Cop City, 2020 Uprisings, etc) are primarily going to be fought off campus and rightfully so. Thus, the basic principles (which are on full display in our recollections of the Encampment protests) that “mass” organizations like the New SDS employ are catered to a bygone era, ultimately failing to have the type of mass pull at their respective universities because they are addressing the generations of the past. This ahistorical projection of Bolshevism onto our generation has stunted its growth.

It is precisely that the Left, and more specifically the Leninists, want not to abolish social relations, but to further entrench them. Just as with the State, they do with the students. They don’t want students to seek self-abolition. Instead they feed off a steady stream of recruitment, cultivating a new class of faux-elites that will do “mass work” until they retire to their own devices. This leads to campaigns of no interest to anyone but a privileged student, and a degenerated Communist movement with negative mobility. The task for students now is to fight against the Leninists as well, rejecting their claims of authority and properly carrying the banner of self-abolition. This is not an abstract concept but a very real task and purpose. Now is the time for students to integrate, not rule from above.

While the ideological composition of the students has remained at a standstill for 75 odd years, the university has rapidly developed. They had built up their universities specifically to crush any potential uprising that may be produced. They have staffed and militarized each segment of campus, and they have cemented a well oiled political-administrative regime in the center. The days of waiting for the National Guard are over, for campuses can induce violence and suffering at a scale that has not been seen. These

developments require that students develop entirely new ways of facing their communities on and off campus, as well as how they protect themselves against a bureaucracy in place to crush them. The next section will discuss these developments in greater detail, to underline the type of threat students are up against and how to respond.

ADMINISTRATORS AND CAMPUS MILITARIZATION

The foundations of capitalist society, the basis of campus life, the social role of students and the debilitating role of the Communist Parties have evidently done their work. They have filtered out meaningful proletarian experiences and struggles, siphoned the many into a few, and divided those amongst surreal ideological lines. Now is the final variable to determine the expiration date of the modern student movements: The administrators and their enforcement of social relations. I refer to both university and state administration. University administrators serve as envoys of the capitalist class, and will make decisions that meet the needs of local, statewide, or federal officials. In Florida, protests were crushed as a response to growing Zionist language from the state's "law-and-order" bureaucracy rather than an individual university president acting on their lonesome.

"Now many of these protesters have said they'll be back in Fall and they plan to pick up right where they're leaving off. Well, when they return, rest assured we will be here ready to continue to provide the highest quality education at the lowest price while maintaining law and order on our campuses," Rodrigues said. "In Florida. There will be no negotiations. There will be no appeasement. There will be no amnesty, and there will be no divestment. Under Governor DeSantis, Florida will continue to lead by example.

– State University System Chancellor Ray Rodrigues⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Llanos, Jackie. "Amid Pro-Palestine Chants, DeSantis Disses Protests; Says 'There's Never Been a Palestinian State.'" *Florida Phoenix*, 8 May 2024.

The effects of such pressure on administration are immense, and cannot be overstated in the context of what purposes and tasks are actually left to individual university administrations (especially of the state-funded variety). They are not acting on their lonesome but within the context of their conditions. As the contradictions of capitalist development and the maintenance of empire continue, there is at least a small section of American society that will seek revolt. The current revolts are the product of human migration due to American hegemony and financial domination, the corresponding plunder and devastation in the peripheral regions, as well as the “bread and butter” economic and sociopolitical issues that constitute much of what the Left is genuinely invested in during any given epoch.

The same conditions that give rise to revolt ensure their demise. This generation of university administration were startled at the concept of student uprising, especially of the relation to the brick and mortar. This is especially ironic, given as we have discussed in prior sections the complete inefficacy and pointlessness of a park or lawn occupation. Regardless, it was enough for administration across the country to feel a vague loss of control. They set out to achieve domination physically and politically. Where encampments were allowed, they quickly became irrelevant due to the hapless and cyclical schedule of the university semester as well as the obscurity of the lawn/quad/park occupation. The end of the semester and poor planning meant a political victory of the administration, and they were very easily able to outmaneuver rather naive student populations.

Where encampments were not tolerated, political victories were not necessarily won in the short term. Rather, the administration chose, not out of their own volition, to swiftly and decisively collapse the student

demonstrations and bide their time until the press, white collar student population, and others were forced into an amnesia spawned out of their unwilling submission. Police descended on students across the country, including the NYPD's infamous raid at Columbia, leading to over 3,100 arrests in the span of a few weeks to a month.⁵⁶ This tactic could be seen across the country, and of course it was seen in outwardly reactionary states like Florida.

If administrators are to set such a precedent for violence in response to mild student dissent, it is increasingly obvious that the future will bear greater threats. Prior to the movement at our university, many student organizers were keen to be hand-in-hand with university officials. These relationships often brought special privileges to organizers, and staying in the good graces of officials meant that organizers could have free reign within a socially accepted window. Officials watched organizers closely before the movement took storm, and were able to prey on the naivety of teenagers to ensure there was no need for dissent. Even after October 7th, our officials championed free, peaceful speech, often meeting with student organizers to prepare events and provide “support” from our campus police department. While the movement was wrong to accept such help, this compromise of civility and order seemed sound to the students in charge. If the alternative is a beating, suspension, or lawsuit, very few were to debate this.

Stepping out of the box of civility and into the first brushes of chaos meant that the window of collaboration had been shattered. Administrators that appeared all too friendly prior to this escalation were the first to call for police

⁵⁶ “Where Protesters on U.S. Campuses Have Been Arrested or Detained.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 2 May 2024.

violence, and the first to justify the brutality in local media. If at the first loss of power, university officials are to take these actions, there is clearly no room for collaboration in times of civility either. These officials are not caring figures of guidance: They are agents of the State and the campus spectacle.

It would be irresponsible to suggest how students should engage with the State in the future, given each reaction will be specific to its own conditioning. However, there are general points which are alarmingly not accepted by the vast majority of the student (and Leftist) movement. This includes the protection of identities and membership from university administration, campus police, and county police. Half the damage of our Encampment had already been done prior, almost solely due to the fact that the administration knew who our leaders were and what organizations they made decisions for. With the aid of Zionist doxxing, they could pinpoint who was responsible for organizing almost any campus event no matter how tame.

This can't be entirely remedied, and I am not asking students to maintain ghost identities. They need to engage their local community with public facing actions and events, which is excellent, but there are still several steps that can be taken to protect membership. For instance, students should refrain from registering their organizations with administration, which provides the administration with a list of leading members who they could claim to be held responsible for any damages the organization causes. Students can also refrain from publicly sharing identities of membership on their social media pages, encourage proper individual precautions at escalatory events, and so on. Furthermore, simply distributing masks and coverings at the site of protest. The Florida Board of Governors, local police

departments, and university administration all frequented our pages both prior to and after the Encampment brutality. It is likely to assume administrations across the country do the same. All of this is necessary, and it is with great frustration that I would ask every student across the country to abide by these lines. The heinous crime is that even when confronted with these facts, many student leaders were unwilling to bend on the quality of their social media feed. SDS and the NGOs in particular were especially guilty of this, despite being asked numerous times to stop doxxing individuals and live-streaming sites where crimes had occurred..

Before closing this section, it is without a doubt critical to touch on the militarization of campuses. These nodes of youth are quickly becoming some of the most policed sites in the country. As early as 2012, 75% of college campuses nationwide utilized armed law enforcement, 92% of *public* universities were staffed with sworn officers, and 94% of sworn officers were licensed to own a firearm, chemical agent or spray. Furthermore, 86% of campus officers had arrest jurisdictions outside of their college campus, and 81% patrolled areas off university property. This was primarily due to the collaboration between campus and local police precincts: 70% had a written agreement to aid each other in law enforcement.⁵⁷ As universities become wealthier and employed to serve higher qualities of life, it is only natural that there are going to be further developments in this context. And as campus police have increased jurisdictions and funding, it is logical to assume the type of military equipment they are provided are only going to become more destructive and elaborate. Due to implementations such as the 1033 Program, over 124

⁵⁷ Reaves, Brian A. "Campus Law Enforcement, 2011–12." *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, January 2015.

campus police forces had military equipment transferred from the Department of Defense; This was over a decade ago!⁵⁸ Supporters of this program, including university administrators across the country, have argued this transfer only benefits communities due to the low cost of procurement. With this agreement, universities only have to pay for shipping fees, and you can't put a price on safety! It was met with some pushback, mostly due to what was perceived to be as escalatory weapons installments. The Department of Defense then claims that it is solely a means to transfer *non-lethal* equipment that is no longer useful to the world's most expensive military. The equipment is portrayed as office supplies, clothing, technology or medical supplies. Items that could be received from a Red Cross just as much as the US military. But soon it was revealed multiple campuses were purchasing grenade launchers and armed vehicles.⁵⁹ In other instances, Purdue University purchased 25 M-16 assault rifles, and Maryland 50 M-16s and an armored truck. As universities began to disclose their purchases, a tally of over 100 universities participating in the program were purchasing machine guns and other lethal equipment by 2020.⁶⁰ In a scramble to protect their capital and enforce the law, the administrators of the student experience have lost their minds. Or rather, they are fulfilling the very purposes they were tasked by the State to fulfill.

Under a State where escalating students were slaughtered by National Guard and local police (Kent State, Jackson State) 40 years before the 1033 program, the trajectory of our youth in future clashes is certainly

⁵⁸ Bauman, Dan. "Campus Police Acquire Military Weapons." *The New York Times*, 21 Sept. 2014.

⁵⁹ Bauman, Dan. "On Campus, Grenade Launchers, M-16s, and Armored Vehicles." *Chronicle*, 11 Sept. 2014.

⁶⁰ Weissman, Sara. "Over 100 Campus Police Departments Got Military Equipment Through This Federal Program." *Diverse Education*, 20 July 2020.

fraught.⁶¹ When it comes to the peaceful civil disobedience and the radical affront to capital, two realities the Encampments tried to embody at the same moment, future movements must carefully distinguish between the two. They cannot coexist in the same setting. When they were, we saw how unprepared students were in the clashes, and completely defenseless in many cases such as our own. The masses were led to believe there would be peace at such events while the organizers vaguely planned for dissent. It is not that the organizers were malicious, but rather that they did not understand or analyze the contradiction amidst their actions. Ultimately, the waiting in the “grey area” of uprising and civility only welcomed further violence from the State and normalized suffering at their hand. This is an unacceptable reality.

Furthermore, we also saw how civil disobedience was completely and utterly shunned by universities across the country. We learned the depths to which our administrations would entrench themselves in a genocide, how far they would go to distance themselves from any accountability. It is not just in relation to student livelihoods, but in regard to administrative decisions and reform. These modern universities are built as shells to withstand *any* outside pressure, *any* freedom of movement from the inside, and there is not a conducive lawful reform can be achieved. The Palestine Solidarity Movement itself was a reform movement aimed at expanding student capabilities and providing a “seat at the table”, and if that would be denied so blatantly, we can be certain other reform movements are likely to experience similar roadblocks. Likewise, students as we understand them today are not a conducive body to lead an uprising so unless material

⁶¹ Tipton, Aliyah C. “An Inside View of Jackson State’s May 1970 Shooting and Its Aftermath.” *Kent State University*, 2 May 2023.

conditions drastically deteriorate and significantly alter the social standing of the student, the student will not play a significant role in the process of revolution.

TASKS OF THE STUDENT

“Communists are not isolated from the proletariat. Their action is never an attempt to organize others, only to express their own subversive response to the world. Ultimately, revolutionary initiatives will interconnect. But our task is not primarily one of organisation: it is to convey (in a text or an action) an antagonistic relation to the world. However big or small it may be, such an act is an attack against the old world.” – Dauvé (1974)

In this climate then it may seem impossible to do anything of substance on campus. Reform is stuck in a molasses, and a revolutionary assault on social relations is out of the question. The challenge for students then is, in spite of such measures, to seek the self-abolition of their social position through a Communist mass movement. Whether on or off campus, the fate of their movements must be relegated to that of the proletariat. What does this look like? I do not intend to suggest anything as a national implication for every campus for we are addressing communities on an individual basis. It is the process of building a network of students, engaging with those who are ready to organize, and to take them off-campus and expose them to the wretched ills of capitalist society. It is the rejection of the internalizing forces of studenthood, to forcibly and radically proletarianize the student before they are actually proletarianized or confined to aristocracy. This cannot be successful psychologically if it is not done materially, hence the need to ground any work in the proletariat. It is important to build infrastructure, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem, to address these issues. For example, given many universities are in the *process* of gentrifying local neighborhoods, this offers an opportunity for students to betray their own social standing. Not to attempt to slowly inject such a group with their

ideology, but to actively learn from and participate in the conversation of the proletariat, a heartbeat they otherwise would not be exposed to for several years if at all. With the time students have, they may not be able to build the next great vanguard party, but they *can* avoid being reduced to the depraved spectacle of campus life. Many students across the country already participate in such networks, and the task is to continue to build as such. If it is based in the real situation of the proletariat, integration may be much more valuable than any theatrical escalation.

In the case of escalation, the contradiction between the campus activist lifestyle and direct action must be confronted. If students are to participate in the latter, they must take such a matter with ultimate precaution and not stray between the two lines. As with the Encampments, the failure to properly analyze the material distinction is the undoing of any activist. We opted for a safe unity which proved to be the most dangerous of all decisions. An assessment of whether a direct action is worth its risk must be taken. What is an action trying to express, and how is it doing so? Is it just a means of destruction and sabotage, or is there an audience for such a display? If so, who? It is all too easy to get carried away and seek retribution for retribution's sake. Oftentimes, this leads us nowhere, as any action in it of itself will not change social relations. Thus we must identify our targets with caution and an emphasis of expression. Consider a site of sabotage based on what you want to communicate that cannot be through reform, and tie it with the language of the proletarian movement rather than that of democratic rights. And timing is everything.

In everything we have seen and done, we have to hold some degree of perseverance where optimism dies. Students were woefully unprepared to

become the central force of a mass movement. We tripped over ourselves, incriminated ourselves, and made costly decisions which led to the defeat of a desperate plea for consumption reform. While it is easy to point fingers at X group or persons, and there are verifiably non-State elements we have covered that have severely weakened the student movement, this mass movement has shown a new reality in student organizing. Students are a valuable part of the established Marxist Left, but to such a degree that their social position is overemphasized. They are cradled to enter the next stage of the Left, a splintered, fragmented map of affinity groups and vanguardist hopefuls. These organizations need this new blood to survive, but the students do not need them. After an era of growing access to education, students are increasingly upper white collar proletariat, petit-bourgeois, or bourgeois themselves. Therefore any movement or group that stresses the need of such a sect of society is then bound not to *failure* per se, but to the material limits of such a group (reform). As the vast majority of these individuals seek access to capital, a forward-thinking career, or some variety of the two, it is not a sound foundation for revolutionary fervor. The same analysis applies to the organizations and parties: By putting such attention to student mass organizations, they are damning themselves to being eternally stranded from the working masses.

All of this is at risk of alienating the students that are sympathetic to Communism, but the negation of their potential *as students* does not mean they cannot play roles in aiding the proletariat. For the student sympathetic to Communism, they cannot manufacture the conditions of poverty and stress that the worker feels bearing down, save for the rare monastic oath of poverty or some unforeseen event that proletarianizes the student. The ultimate test is laid to each individual student, however. Does one dream of

labor, or consumption? Do they desire liberation? If they can successfully steer away from this spectacle of campus building, there is a seed of hope. I do not expect the student masses to take this route, but for the most dedicated of organizers, if they can give their youthful years away to the vanguard party apparatus, so too they can do something more fruitful.

Even then, it is not enough for the student to reject the campus in favor of the radical. They must resolutely reject the creeping aspirations of *management, power, and domination*, a history which has long been embedded in their off-campus organizing framework. The ultimate goal of the working class, contrary to what our Leninists believe, is not about *seizing* power but *abolishing* it. Class power must be abolished to abolish relations as they exist; If there is to be a crushing blow to the capitalist system, it does constitute the drive to *dominate* every living thing. There is no place for worshiping at the altar of a State. Radical students, born into such malaise, have been fed these ideas for as long as they have placed themselves within opposition to the bourgeoisie. Some feel they know better than the uneducated working man, even if they cannot do his job. The primary conflict here is not of proletarian and the bourgeoisie but the *bureaucratic* tendency to manifest itself at the expense of the masses of people. It is the bureaucrat and the bourgeoisie conflicting over the domination of people masked as the people stabbing at the bourgeoisie themselves. Self-abolition, again, is the answer.

“My points of view in this critique are even further from the capitalistic perception of economics than the perception Karl Marx worked out on the basis of his critique of the capitalist system. They are a critique of the present socialist system.” “The conflict which occurs today between state

socialism and free communism is concentrated around this point of how far a person should voluntarily relinquish this right to society or maintain it. Should he accept this surrender and thereby determine that his successors in the future should all live without this right? At any rate, I personally have never found an acceptable argument for giving up this right, which will really reduce Marxism to a worn-out shoe that can be thrown away.”⁶²

As such, the student Left has to overcome not only its own careerist nature and idealist pitfalls, but also the eager political factors which seek the reproduction of capital, the would-be managers, at the expense of an individual's emancipation from exploitation. Neither capitalist or socialist exploitation will do. This debate of course extends beyond students as it has been draped over the radical movement since its infancy. But due to the social position of students and especially student leaders, they are in an incredibly vulnerable position. They can radicalize themselves against management, *only* if they can enter proletarian environments as students of the community and not as entryist agents. The State is the primary tool of the capitalists for exploitation, and thus materialized in the university administration and police, is the students' primary enemy. But for the Palestine solidarity movement which has already fizzled, the future movements on campus, and for the fate of the working class, students will need to use their idealism and imagination to dream beyond class society. It has been done before, and it can be done again. In the wake of the repressed movement of the present, several more will spawn in the future for class antagonisms have not been soothed but violently exposed. This movement has called into question much of what the student holds dear. For many it

⁶² Jorn, Asger. "The Natural Order and Other Texts." Translated by Peter Shield, *Routledge*, 17 Mar. 2016.

has rejected the entire apparatus of capitalist hegemony, from the aid to a genocidal regime to the militarization of the brutal force bent on their destruction.

The students have been thoroughly beaten and crushed. Now is not the time to cower or turn away. Rather, it is an opportunity to explore new means of resistance and emancipation. It is a chance to ally oneself with the masses around the world and *materially* wreak havoc on the capitalist system. It is a chance to deepen the contradictions at hand and to illuminate the repressive forces. For the student, they can do all these things, and they are called to do them as such.

And it is imperative for those that have lost hope: Our real movement in history and time does not end when we are bruised, for the historical conflict will always be in motion. The significant defeats of the demonstrations, the Hunger Strikes, and the Encampments were not the deaths of something new but the revitalization of age-old contradictions.

The culmination of decades of Israeli aggression and most significantly of capital as a social relation.

This social relation, regardless of Israel's future actions or America's weapons supply, will continue to expose itself to us.

The vast swathes of the proletariat *must* react to this relation. American students are granted a *choice* of response.

In this privilege, the tasks of the students are to undermine their own social relation, just as one day we hope to abolish the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

To reach such a point, students must seek self-abolition. It is not enough to seek parity with the university: We must call to abolish it.

We must realize another world awaits, if only we can envision it. Yet to abolish capitalism, we must call to abolish the university.

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