

ON THE LINE

Volume 2,
Number 4

Nov. - Dec. 1979

AN ANARCHO - SYNDICALIST NEWSLETTER

FOR WORKER - STUDENT CONTROL

PUBLISHED BY THE LIBERTARIAN WORKERS GROUP

SPECIAL ISSUE ON EDUCATION

ARMS, LEGS, and BRAINS FOR SALE

What we would like to do in this essay is to examine the role and function of schools, especially colleges, in our society. We would like, as well, to look at the place of the student in these educational institutions and his or her expectations of what the latter will or can do to advance the individual. The last thing we would like to look at is the

student as an actual part of society's work force: during summer vacations; to beef up in-adequate grant or stipend money received from any particular educational institution; to earn money for next semester's tuition, books and living expenses.

The beginning of this century saw an increasing centralization and concentration of the capitalist system. Also, new technologies and the striving for increased profits allowed the capitalist to generate a huge quantity of goods and services. But this very productivity created 2 problems: How and where to get rid of the surplus, and what to do with those whose work was no longer needed in the productive process. In other words, there were more goods produced with less human labor, which meant that there were less people able to buy those goods and less people needed to produce more, or the same amount of goods.

The post-World War I period in this country witnessed an even more intensive shift to these labor-saving, capital intensive technologies. More than ever, greater and greater numbers of working people and their young were no longer needed to run and maintain the productive apparatus of the capitalist system. One response by the ruling class to

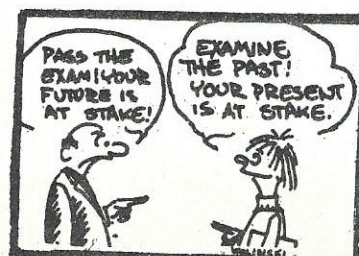
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this problem was to create a vast national market to absorb the surplus of goods. Another response was to turn to the educational system as a tool for social manipulation and control.

The overall educational system was used to facilitate the creation of this consumption market in several ways: By educating the young with a "consume-consume" mentality; by training the young to accept the capitalist order of production, with all its' inequalities, hierarchies and mindless materialism; by educating a certain number of people in certain skills and roles that would allow them to act as managers and overseers, and coordinators of consumption; physically and ideologically over the working class.

The education institution was also used as a jail/day-care center for working class youth, i.e. a series of physical institutions that channeled and restrained the surplus young who were no longer necessary for a shrinking job market. The educational system, then, was shaped to create a mass of endlessly consuming workers, and, to restrain those who lacked purchasing power, from making demands. It taught the youth to suck up capitalisms random productivity, and generated a host of overseers and admen to orchestrate and give form to this consumption and daytime jail/brainwashing network.



(cont. next page)

After World War II, education in institutions of higher learning took on a totally new purpose. Formerly, the education obtained in colleges and universities served as a training ground for future members of the ruling classes and/or a process to create a so called full, well-rounded, total individual. But with the further growth of capitalist productivity and the subsequently greater need for faster consumption and curbing a growingly restless post-war working class, the ruling class began to reshape institutions of higher education. College took on the task of refining the earlier socialization into consumerism,

begun in the lower grades. The task became to refine the earlier process of getting men and women in capitalist society to accept increasing powerlessness, routinization of the work process and continued rip-off of the product of their labor.

In addition, the college took on the task of training and turning out a certain body of wage workers whose function would be to manage, supervise and socialize the other sectors of the working class: Teachers for the lower grades to restrain and tame restless youth, a variety of social service workers, e.g. Welfare employees to create and implement programs to buy off the potential, social explosiveness of capitalism's cast-offs--the unemployed and racially oppressed; technicians and scientists for government and private industry to directly oversee and control other workers and work teams (for example-time-motion study.)

Colleges also provided and apprenticeship program for what would become an army of commercial artists, advertising agents, consultants whose task was to create and manage mass consumer appetites. What in essence most colleges created were new varieties of stratified and fragmented layers of working population--selling, like more traditional workers, their labor power for a wage--who exercised, to a varying degree, managerial and/or ideological control over workers more directly involved in the production of goods and services.

But college education has served still, another function besides that of training people for entry into the "New Working Class." To perpetuate the illusion of upward mobility in our society. Students, especially those from traditional working class or lower middle class backgrounds, have been encouraged all through their early years to look to higher education as a way out of the grueling, often boring existence of working class/lower middle class life. Higher education has been pushed as the road to more money, more status

and more meaning in one's job and in one's life.

But what, in fact, are the economic realities of life? Is a college education the road to success? How are college kids' expectations related to the real economic world they are entering into in the 70's and 80's?

We passed out questionnaires in a number of social science classes at Stoney Brook College, a part of the State University of New York system. We got back 82 completed questionnaires: Of those 82 students, 44 were male, 40 female. 63 of the students were white, 15 black, and there was one Asiatic. 3 did not answer our question of race.



Other than questions of sex, race and class background, we inquired as to why they were going to college, what their career expectations were, how they felt college would play a role in reaching those expectations and what their perspective job markets offered for their employment. Of the 82 people, the career breakdown was as follows:

- 29-Lawyers
 - 8 -Doctors
 - 9 -Business school or business related fields
 - 7 -Science/technicians
 - 3 -Teacher/Social Worker
 - 3 -Nursing or nursing related fields
 - 4 -Social Service Administration
- The rest had rather vague plans beyond going to graduate school. because they were studying highly academic subjects like History or Literature. Only 4 had no plans at all.

FOR WHOM THE SCHOOL BELLS TOLL

As school bells tolled this fall, nearly one million students found their classrooms empty, assuming that they ventured to cross their teachers' picket lines. From Vermont to Alaska, some 50,000 teachers struck in over 100 school districts in 14 states. They struck in order to protect their job security and conditions and to fight attacks on their living standards.

Like other workers in recent years, teachers have been on the defensive in order to protect themselves (and indirectly their students) from austerity plans schemed up by local, state, and federal governments. They have also had to protect themselves from the vicious tactics that have been used to try to break their strikes.

It should come as no surprise that media coverage of the strikes has been less than satisfactory from the teachers' point of view. Instead of placing the blame for the crisis in education in the laps of the local, state and federal governments (where it belongs) the media has chosen to blame the teachers for 'disrupting' the educational process.

The media has also blamed the striking teachers for the 'inconvenience' they have caused working parents by illegal strikes. As if the media really cared about working people in the first place.

Adding insult to injury to all working people, the media has also injected a heavy anti-union bias to their strike coverage. For example, a recent Newsweek article that asserted that "...although teacher unions have raised salaries, their existence has introduced a sour atmosphere into a job once considered a special calling." In other cases press coverage has been either limited or tainted with anti-teacher rhetoric.

Even while school administrators tried to escort non-striking teachers across picket lines, other workers, both within the school systems and outside them, have shown a great deal of solidarity, as have also many of the students. (These non-striking teachers are usually unemployed certified teachers or substitute teachers.)

In Louisiana, there was spontaneous strike support by some 350 bus drivers who refused to cross picket lines. These same bus drivers are presently trying to organize a union for themselves. In Oklahoma

City--virtually a non-union town--hundreds of students rallied to support their teachers and by calling a boycott of classes. At the same time telephone and postal workers refused to provide service to the schools. In San Francisco, teachers vowed to remain on strike until 1200 of their fellow workers who were laid off that spring were rehired.

School boards have not only tried to break strikes by using scabs, but have also resorted to using laws against strikes by public workers, and have used the courts and the police to enforce them. In Paterson, NJ, the 7 member negotiating team was jailed for defying a back-to-work court order. In Woodbridge, NJ 21 striking teachers were jailed for defying a court order against picketing. The Robinson, IL school board fired 85 teachers for picketing. In short, teachers have been put in jail for using the most important weapon available for winning their demands.



Even though the strikes are over, with the teachers having won some and lost others, the fact still remains that there is a general crisis in the educational system. This crisis did not originate with students or the teachers, but is, in our view, intrinsic to a hierarchical capitalist-run society.

Since the current crisis is not limited to the field of education, the present trend is for both capitalists and local, state and federal governments to demand that workers in almost all organized sectors 'give back' many hard won gains. In education we are now seeing school boards and administrators demanding that teachers sacrifice wages and working conditions to accommodate drastic cuts in government funding. According to one striking teacher, "Teachers feel

School Bells (cont.)

they have been made the scapegoats of the budget cutters."

As a result for many teachers the issue was no longer just wage increases to offset inflation. For many the issues also included opposition to ongoing trends towards larger class sizes, longer work weeks, elimination of teacher preparation periods, layoffs, and forced transfers due to school closings and cutbacks in special programs. While teachers in many places have been militant in opposing these 'give-backs', school administrators have been heavy-handed in their use of strike breaking tactics.

Thus, what we see now is teachers reacting to the general crisis of capitalism. Unlike years earlier, when teachers were led to believe that their interests were different from other workers, due to their 'professional status', teachers are now finding that like other workers, their control over their jobs, their wages and working conditions can also be besieged.

As conditions get worse in education, as state cut-backs continue, all educational workers will have to recognize the necessity of solidarity among all working people. The need for this kind of solidarity extends beyond the struggle for immediate material gains. For only by adding community-worker control of education to their demands, will teachers, along with students and parents, be able to create an educational system that reflects the needs and desires of all.

-- M.M.



Graduate Students (cont.)

While the administration did not recognize the G.S.E.U. as the TAs' bargaining agent, the strike and other union activities has forced the administration to back off on some of its planned cutbacks. TAs in some departments were given raises, but this was often at the expense of others, and now the administration is trying to quietly sneak cuts into some departments. It is apparent that whatever gains were made were not a result of the good will of the University, but an attempt to divide the TAs and portray the union as only being concerned for the welfare of its own members and a small portion of the entire TA workforce.



"Just one more question -- can you run a school without money?"

To counter the attempted backlash the fall strategy of G.S.E.U. has been to build militant committees in its weakest departments, as well as to organize previously unorganized workers. The struggle will be long and hard because of the already existing divisions, as well as the transitory nature of students.

Even more important for the union is to bypass the M.L.R.C. and to rely on direct action in order to win its demands. It was only by doing so that G.S.E.U. won any of its demands in May, and only in this manner will it be able to force the University to bargain directly to solve the problems, both immediate and long-term, of graduate student employees.

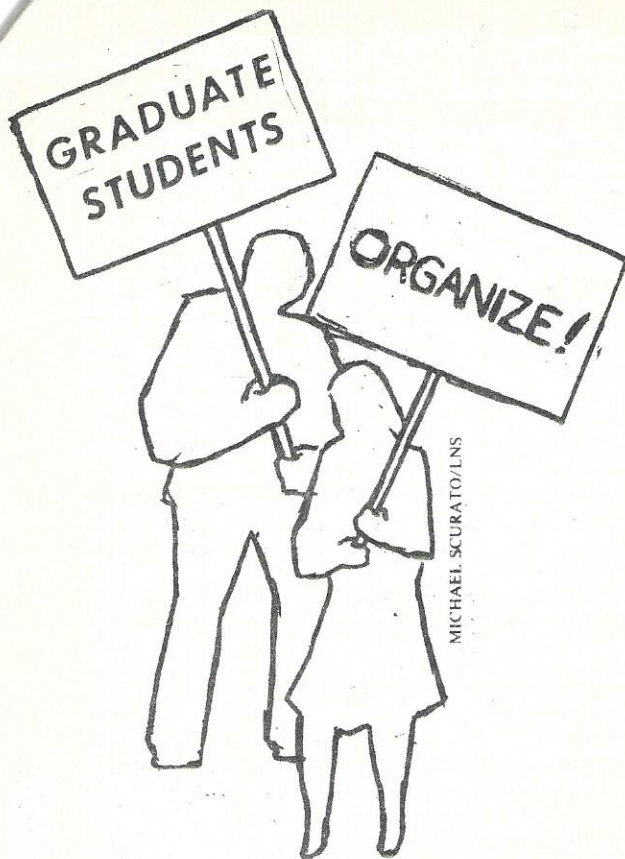
If you're thinking about organizing on your campus and want more info contact either:

G.S.E.U.
c/o G.S.S.
919 Campus Center
Univ. of Mass.
Amherst, MA 01003

or

Graduate Student Organization/A.F.T.
514 E. Willam St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

-- T.A.Small



1975 was a year of fiscal crisis not only for New York City but for the state of Massachusetts as well. As was the case in N.Y.C., Mass. public workers felt the full brunt of the crisis, with many being fired outright or laid-off "temporarily". While the crisis was not as severe in Mass., as in N.Y.C. it was a crisis of great proportions, and like in N.Y.C. public higher education was to take a beating.

During the height of this crisis an organizing committee of graduate students employed at the University of Mass. at Amherst began the slow process of organizing themselves into a union, the Graduate Students Employees Union (GSEU). The purpose of the GSEU was to not only halt the cuts in Teaching Associates (T.A.) positions, but to demand wage increases and job control as well.

The G.S.E.U. soon began an organizing drive in which more than 600 graduate students signed union authorization cards. Throughout the 1976-77 school year the Mass. Labor Relations Commission held hearing to determine if G.S.E.U. could legally function as a union of graduate student employees. Finally, in April, 1979, the Commission ruled that although T.A.'s did important work for the University, that they were still merely students and had no right to bargain collectively.

Throughout this 2 year period the G.S.E.U. began to consolidate its organization in many departments

and successfully created autonomous departmental committees, which attempted to bring about 'unofficial' job control. The G.S.E.U. also pushed the University to recognize the problems of T.A.'s.

While recognizing that each department has its own distinct problems--from hiring procedures to the T.A.'s workload--the federated committees all agreed to a set of common demands:

- 1) Union recognition
- 2) No cutbacks in the number of T.A.'s.
- 3) A substantial raise--the last raise having been in 1973 when T.A.s were given \$3600 per year. (Part-timers receive only \$1000 or even less, depending on their department.)

In order for T.A.'s to be restored to their 1973 level of purchasing power, given the present rate of inflation, they would have to be earning around \$6250/year. Currently, other universities on the same level as U.-Mass. are paying T.A.s from \$5000 to \$5500. This is particularly important in light of the fact that for many graduate students their T.A. salary is their only source of income. Thus \$3600 is virtually starvation wages, especially for those with families.

On top of all this, the workload for those T.A.'s whose positions survived the 1975 cut-back has increased greatly. Not only are T.A.s having a hard time making ends meet, but crowded classrooms are making it difficult for undergraduates to learn.

1979 has been another year of cut-backs for the U.-Mass. system. There have been even further reductions in the number of T.A. positions. In response to this, despite its apparent weakness in major departments, and despite the fact that many T.A.'s continued to think of themselves as 'professionals' instead of low-paid wage earners, the G.S.E.U. stepped up its organizing drive and expanded the number of departments it had fully or partially organized.

With a renewed sense of strength and confidence, (though not entirely apparent at the time) the membership voted to hold a two day selective strike in 5 departments on May 1, the international workers day. The strike was unexpectedly successful, even though the M.L.R.C. ruled against the union the day before the strike. Both teachers and students refused to cross the picket line, and in some cases teachers held their classes in other buildings. Other graduate students either cancelled their classes or rescheduled them in solidarity with the strikers.

(cont. p. 4)

Arms, Legs and Brains (cont. from pg.2)

Breakdown by class or race indicated no persistent trends except the following:

The black students tended to choose careers in the health fields, both in the nursing category, the Social Service Administration category. They made up a healthy percentage of doctors, as well. The only field in which

blacks totally excluded themselves was the science/technician category.

The nursing and teacher/social worker categories were totally excluded by men. Also, of those who had vague career plans, none were from traditional working class backgrounds.

This information indicates that, while the fields which have been traditionally male dominated are presently being pursued by women; the fields that have been traditionally female dominated are not being pursued by men. Also indicated is that only the students from financially comfortable backgrounds felt that college was a luxury and could be used for exploration of non-career oriented subjects.

Most important of all the data was that the largest number of students were pursuing careers in higher paying fields. Also, while there were a number of students who said they were in college to learn, there were few who failed to add to this that they saw college as a means toward a better job opportunity. With the exception of one or two students, none saw their education as training, but rather, saw the acquisition of their degree as a "ticket of passage."

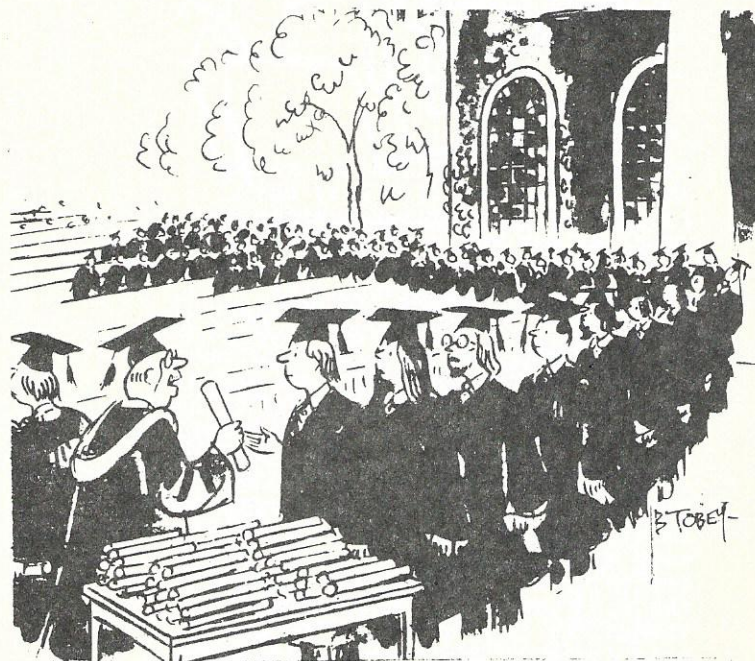
Those who re-entered college after working in unskilled jobs for a few years expressed the sentiment that they experienced their work as drudgery and as "unfulfilling." Only one student said that he wanted to go back to being a laborer. The rest saw college as an escape from unskilled labor. It also must be noted that at present, labor in non-professional, non-managerial fields is not, as was the case in the 60's, skilled, blue-collar work. Most of the skilled trades are saturated, due to the ever increasing technologies of production and further concen-

tration of industry, labor directly involved in production is more and more unskilled and low paying.

According to the US Department of Labor, the outlook for the worker without a college degree is grim, most of the jobs being those unskilled, low-paying, more and more intensely managed jobs.

We can see that the students approach to career choice is not unrealistic. What we must examine is the idea of college as a means toward escaping the drudgery of unskilled labor. It is obvious that with our students this attitude was the case more than the exception. College is the clearing house for degree/tickets into higher paying and "more rewarding" fields. But this approach, or, strategy is bound up in a circular logic.

There is another approach to labor and education which was not voiced by these students; to organize into a strong body in order to change the nature of such work.

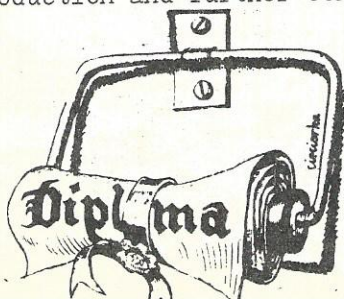


"Congratulations, keep moving, please. Congratulations, keep moving, please."

"Congratulations..."

Those who do not go to college are by contrast, seen as undeserving of the rewards of college graduates.

They are not as specifically trained and they do not perform as specialized a function. Those college graduates who take their place within the ranks of the "New Working Class," because they perform a taskmaster-type function for the capitalists, are perceived as more important to the capitalist who pays them a healthy wage. However, this importance is internalized by those who perform the function, and by those who must work under these taskmasters, as an importance extending over the entire society. Thus, the worker is subordinate, feeling duly punished for not having gone to college to prepare for such an important position.



These workers then have no hope of ever bettering their work, or their lives thus, passing on the "college strategy" to their children; sublimating their own misery, and do not organize for the betterment of their own lives. College is the only escape; the only escape is to go to college and get a job which is more fulfilling, more "rewarding." If one does not go to college, one feels deservant of nothing better, and one is willing to be controlled by those who do go to college.

Many students must work during the summer vacation or during the school year to pad inadequate grants or stipends or pay their whole tuition and upkeep. As a result, many bosses, including the universities themselves, have exploited students' desperate situation, using the latter as a source of cheap, pliable labor. Rather than employ a full time worker for full time wages, certain fringe benefits and maybe even some sort of union protection, schools and private entrepreneurs have chosen to employ hard-up students. Such students will allow themselves to be speeded up in part time work. Such students do not demand to be given health plans, vacation and sick pay. Such students are self-disciplined and intelligent workers. Does school not teach them the virtues of order, regularity, thinking systematically, obedience to "those who know more," "those higher up?" Such workers will not squeal when pinched or pushed or prodded or hassled. They know that there are thousands of others, ready to take their place. Who among you in the course of your college life has not had the experience of working for a knuckle-head of a boss for well under minimum wage?

Under U.S. Labor Law, as interpreted by a number of states, work-study students employed by a university are not entitled to organize their own labor union. This means they have no way of opposing wages that do not meet any kind of adequate living standard. Such students may be used as strike breakers. Such students may make no demands, they have no rights. The average union clerical or food service worker employed by a university will rights.

A student, employed by a university gets approximately minimum wage (\$290/Hr.) and receive no sick or vacation time. The average union clerical or food service worker makes 2 to 3 times as much, plus up to 2 weeks vacation and 3 weeks

sick time; plus up to full medical and hospitalization coverage, paid by the employer (the University.)

Those in private commerce who employ students pay the lowest wages and give little, if any, benefits. Why do students put up with this?

The other day I was in a university book store. I passed a comment to the cashier (a student) that the price of books is exorbitant and that "you have to be a millionaire to complete college." Her response, "maybe you'll become a millionaire when you finish college." This sentiment, along with the value placed on the unskilled worker, seem to be the only explanation for the willing servitude of the college worker.

The first step for college students is to understand that they are workers-in training and/or actual participants in the work force (as work-study workers.) We therefore deserve the wages and fringe benefits that other workers receive. We must organize and unionize (in existing unions or, if necessary, College Workers Unions,) to secure our rights. But more than this, we must organize to fight for our right to control the very education policies and decision making processes of the university we are part of. Rather than fleeing from alienating, boring, low paying work, into a college education that promises a middle-class existence with short-lived, illusory privileges; we must fight for a new system that alters the values of all work--from whatever work-place or community we are in RIGHT NOW!

Full development for the individual should take priority over a system of production whose highest value is to consume and digest, endlessly, pointlessly.

-- A.Reis and G.Merovych

"If I would be a young man again and had to decide how to make my living, I would not try to become a scientist or a scholar or a teacher. I would rather choose to be a plumber or a peddler in the hope to find that modest degree of independence still available under present circumstances."

--- Albert Einstein
Nov. 10, 1954

WHO WE ARE

We call ourselves "anarchist-syndicalists" and we have named our group the Libertarian Workers Group. We are a committee of working people and students who live in the N.Y. metropolitan area. We publish ON THE LINE because we feel that the news and experiences which come from many small battles between exploiters and exploited, powerful and powerless, must be shared if the workers are someday to win.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe that the capitalist class is unnecessary and that government (the political state and all its bureaus) is inherently oppressive. The state and the capitalist class, while not seeing eye-to-eye on everything, are built on exploitation and domination. By "stealing" from the real producers--the workers--and then selling to consumers--most of whom are workers too--the capitalist is able to make profits and keep power. Landlords and the utility companies steal from workers in a similar way. The government insures that business goes on as usual and even runs some industries. Education is bought and sold like a commodity, and students are trained for further exploitation in factories and offices. The decisions and what will be produced, how much will be charged and how goods and services will be distributed are made in a "top-down" way in political centers by bureaucrats and capitalists.

People are taught to play a passive role in society, to take uninteresting and low-paying jobs, to vote for candidates that really have nothing to offer, to experience life through television and movies and to accept racial and sexual oppression as normal. Meanwhile, thousands of people are going to jail, becoming addicts or committing suicide.

WHAT WE WANT

It is not enough, we think, to try to reform society. The exploiter-exploited relationship, protected as it is the world over by all of the governments and social institutions (churches, philanthropies, schools, etc.), must be done away with. The capitalist system, in which one person works for another's profit and then lives only to work in that framework, is full of contradictions and shortcomings. The decisions on what will be produced and distributed, on how housing and community problems will be solved, and on how natural resources will be allocated must be made by the working class on a local level through democratic organizations controlled by the rank-and-file.

Education must be democratic and non-hierarchical and must be available to all. Racial and sexual barriers must be abolished. In short, the working class must emancipate itself. We think that it can only do so by building organizations in which all workers and students can participate, and from which all will benefit. The center of the organizations must be the workplace, the school, and the community.

The tactics we think are most useful are the general strike and the takeover of workplaces, schools and communities for rank-and-file control and for necessary immediate gains. Revolutionary unions and councils must be created to fight for decentralized economic planning and generalized self-management. Anarchist-syndicalism is the sum total of these objectives and offers the means by which to obtain them.

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