

The Student Movement

A Workers Solidarity Movement Position Paper

Workers Solidarity Movement

2008

Contents

1. Make-up of student population	3
2. Student Unions	3
3. The National Movement	3
4. Student Movements	4
5. Students, Workers, and Academics.	4
6. Students As Workers	5
7. Commitment	5

1. Make-up of student population

- a. Students come from all social backgrounds and are in College for a wide variety of reasons. There is no underlying political or economic base that unites or could unite all students.
- b. Therefore any movement will be limited to a fraction of the Student population.

2. Student Unions

- a. Theoretically Students' Unions are constitutionally democratic, based on the principles of directly elected, mandatable and recallable delegates.
- b. However due to the college cycle, the only continuous force in a Student Union is ironically its entanglements with college bureaucracy, theoretically limited these links can strangle and impede the work of a union.
- c. The main thrust of our work should be in increasing direct participation in union direct democracy, while defending and increasing the existing autonomy of the organisation from college and state bureaucracy.
- d. On an ideological level, as in the trade union movement, Students Unions are rapidly moving toward a service providing model rather than a campaigning one.
- e. They seek to remedy the symptom rather than strike the root cause. The task ahead is to break the myth that Students' Unions are there to exist as apolitical service providers in 'partnership' with the college authorities. The service model serves only to further alienate the student body and reduce it to passive consumption of the union rather than directly taking part in it.
- f. Currently, Students' Unions are mainly concerned with student welfare and services within the College. Very little of what they do is political. There is, however, potential to use unions for political struggle, given the limitations of student movements. This largely depends on grass-roots work by political activists who may or may not be in college at the time.

3. The National Movement

- a. Once again the Union of Students' Ireland is in theory democratic and once again the thrust of our work is in reinforcing its democratic structure and in encouraging grassroots reclamation of its structure.
- b. However, Like all unions the political effectiveness of the national union is threatened by the services model, represented best by the Forum of University Students' Union (FUSU) which splits the student movement into University students and Institute of Technology students.

- c. Also, because of the diverse social composition of the student body and the fact that student life is temporary, it is implausible that 'student politics' can result in anything resembling a uniform level of consciousness nationally.

4. Student Movements

- a. Since students are from many social backgrounds, student political movements tend to use the shallowest politics possible to capture the largest amount of students.
- b. Movements based on single issue demands will eventually collapse due to the political, social and material differences that are inherent in the make up of such campaigns.
- c. Anarchists should encourage attempts to organise in tandem with similar movements on other campuses.
- d. Student movements by their nature are limited but are the place where students interested in actively producing political and social change will gravitate.
- e. Anarchist students should use student movements to argue their political and organisational line among this milieu as well as engaging in more agitational/theoretical anarchist propaganda. From this it will be possible to recruit any potential anarchists.
- f. By actively engaging in these movements rather than issuing theoretical edicts we will contribute to building a stronger libertarian movement by encouraging and developing self organisation, and implementing certain libertarian methods in practice.
- h. However it is possible to offer a lifeline to these progressive student movements by making attempts to co-ordinate with forces outside the campus, pricking the bubble world of the student radical and pulling them into more sustainable activity which has a long term project.

5. Students, Workers, and Academics.

- a. The campus does not just consist of students and academics, there are also technical and services workers.
- b. For there to be any progress in the creation of a libertarian mode of education in a free society, the movement towards it will have to consist of students, workers and academics.
- c. However, due to the pressures, foot loose nature and restraints of academia, academics are usually concerned with advancing career wise or carving out a niche for their own research. This often results in silence and a fear to 'rock the boat.'
- d. As anarchists, we view the working class as the agent best placed to create social change. It follows that as students, we argue for and strive for links with workers in and outside our campuses.
- e. These links should not be exploited solely for the benefit of student concerns as is often the case with the student movement.

6. Students As Workers

- a. With the reduction in state aid and increasing fees, a sizeable minority of students are increasingly forced to work through college.
- b. Despite the non-homogenous make up of the student body, a sizeable minority of students face the same problems as many workers (low pay, a lack of housing etc).
- c. As anarchists in the student movement we should advance demands and tactics transcending the campus and offering a potential continuity across a sizeable minority of working class students and the working class itself.

7. Commitment

- a. As Anarchists we believe that our politics are the most realistic ones being argued and so for the student movement to succeed it needs our ideas and tactics. Since at the moment we are the only people arguing our ideas, it is fair to say that the movement needs us.
- b. Within Student Unions and campus politics we will join progressive campaigns and argue our politics within them, while doing our fair share of the legwork. If it becomes obvious that nothing productive is going to come from a particular campaign we should withdraw from it. We are not interested in “gesture politics”.
- c. A proper class-struggle movement must be connected with the working-class. Therefore links with unions at a grass roots level must always be argued for.

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