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A FUTURE TO WIN

The Student Movement and the 1980's

A publication of the
U.S. League of Revolutionary
Struggle (Marxist-Leninist)

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Introduction

The League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist) is a nationwide, multinational organization. We are made up of workers, students and professionals. The LRS publishes UNITY *newspaper. We are actively organizing in the work places, in our communities and on the campuses. Our experience in the student movement goes back almost 20 years, when many of our members participated in the anti-Viet Nam War movement, the Third World student strikes and many other campus struggles. Among our members are founders of MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán), Youth Organization for Black Unity, Asian Student Unions, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and many other important student organizations.*

Today we are active on campuses across the country, helping to build the student movement, and promote Marxism-Leninism and socialism. We sponsor study groups where people can learn about Marxism-Leninism and discuss how to apply it to today's conditions. We also organize forums discussing a variety of topics from a communist perspective.

If you are interested in learning about socialism or joining a study group, write to us for more information, or contact a local UNITY *distributor.*

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A. Past and Present:

Students and the 1980's

Thousands protest U.S. intervention on campuses across America.

The Jesse Jackson campaign sparks into existence Rainbow Coalitions bringing together students of all nationalities.

Countless new students get involved for the first time in the fall 1984 campaign to defeat Ronald Reagan.

Are these the signs of a new student movement? And if so, where is it heading?

The student movement — what's it about? During our college years, who we are, what we believe in, and where we're going are all shaped. Part of this process of discovery involves figuring out how we can contribute to society. Together we begin to explore ways to change the injustice we see around us. And in this ongoing dynamic, the student movement is rejuvenated and moves forward.

On campuses across the country, students are forming organizations, holding rallies and sponsoring conferences. Many new, young students are getting involved and expanding their political awareness. This pamphlet will take a look at today's student movement. We'll look at some of the questions we face and the potential for rebuilding the student movement as a powerful force for social change.

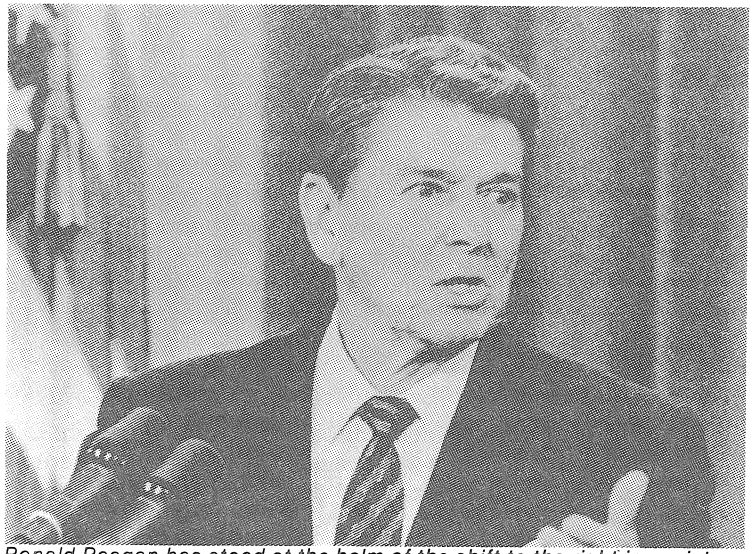
* * *

As part of a new generation, about to take our place in the world, what we do can help to shape the society we inherit. We have our hopes and dreams, and desires for a peaceful and just society.

Yet these hopes stand in sharp contrast to what we see

UNITY PHOTO: BEN FERRIS

The anti-Reagan campaign of 1984 charged up thousands of new students to come forward and take a stand, pushing forward the student movement of the 1980's.



Ronald Reagan has stood at the helm of the shift to the right in society.

around us. In the richest country in the world, where people like the Rockefellers live amidst extravagance and waste, millions go without food and shelter. Nearly 8 million people are without jobs, and over 35 million are living below the poverty level. The "land of the free" remains one of the most racist societies on earth, where Third World people face superexploitation, degradation and repression every day.

Around the world we find the U.S. embroiled in aggression and interference. The U.S. under Reagan has escalated attacks on liberation struggles from South Africa to Central America. The 1983 invasion of Grenada marked the first direct military intervention by the U.S. since the Viet Nam War, a signal for even more dangerous times ahead. And constantly looming overhead is the threat of nuclear war and global confrontation between the U.S. and the other imperialist superpower, the U.S.S.R.

How can we make sense out of this state of affairs?

These aren't simply isolated acts of ignorance, nor are they just "human nature." They are the inevitable products of the system of capitalism. Capitalism's drive for maximum profits and world domination can only stand in contradiction to the progress of humanity. And this fundamental contradiction can only grow more acute until the system itself is finally overthrown and replaced with the more just and equitable system of socialism. But how do we get from here to there? And how can the student movement fit in?

The legacy of the student movement

As a part of the movement for social change, the student movement has always been a progressive force with revolutionary potential. The 1960's were a time of tremendous social upheaval throughout society, and students played a vital role in movements that literally shook this country to its foundations.

Students stood up in outrage over the brutal U.S. aggression in Viet Nam and Southeast Asia. The Civil Rights and Black Liberation movements were in upsurge, sending shock waves through the campuses. Students grew increasingly angry at the elitist, all-white character of higher education. Momentum gathered to open the doors of the universities to Third World youth and make education more relevant to their needs. In 1969–71, Third World student strikes shut down campus after campus. Students refused to return to school unless programs that helped to recruit and retain Third World students were established, and the history and culture of minority people were

taught. Out of these struggles came special admissions, Ethnic Studies, women's studies, and other programs we have today.

As conditions changed during the 1970's, so did the student movement. Battles continued to maintain the programs that were won as universities tried to chip away at them. Some of the key issues of the day were taken up by students on campuses. Students mobilized against the infamous Bakke Decision of 1977–78, the racist Supreme Court ruling that charged affirmative action programs with "reverse discrimination" against whites. Major campaigns were waged to demand that universities withdraw investments from South Africa.

Just as in the past, today's situation is shaping what the student movement is about. We need to redefine it for *our* generation and the 1980's. We want peace and social justice, but our desires must be given form, expression and direction in order to become a powerful force with tangible impact. The ruling class and their mass media tell us the student movement is dead. Let's prove them wrong.

U.S. society today — the rightward shift

Over the past decade, the capitalist class has engineered a decisive shift to the right in U.S. society. It began to pick up under Jimmy Carter, accelerated and consolidated under the

Members of the Black Panther Party march along 42nd Street in New York. The Black Panthers were a leading revolutionary force in the early 1960's; their call for self-determination struck a chord among thousands of young Afro-Americans.

Reagan Administration.

What is the move to the right? We've seen it in the flag-waving nationalistic propaganda pumped up to the hilt during the 1984 Olympics; the aggressive and openly interventionist foreign policy in Grenada, southern Africa and Central America; the widespread rise of racist violence against Third World people; the re-emergence of backward ideas about the role of women.

Gains won by working people and minorities during the 1960's are today attacked as "unreasonable" and "un-American." We live in a climate where the Ku Klux Klan and the Moral Majority are allowed — even openly encouraged — to flourish. And meanwhile, Reagan's so-called "economic recovery" has meant only record corporate profits and the largest peacetime military budget ever.

What is the source of this new reactionary direction?

U.S. imperialism is in crisis — it is an empire in decline. Following World War II the U.S. emerged as the world's number one superpower, and incredible profits were squeezed from its areas of conquest. But the U.S. defeat in Viet Nam highlighted its historic downturn. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's, third world countries like Viet Nam, Iran, Zimbabwe and Nicaragua kicked out the U.S. corporations and military and demanded an end to the exploitation of their natural and human resources.

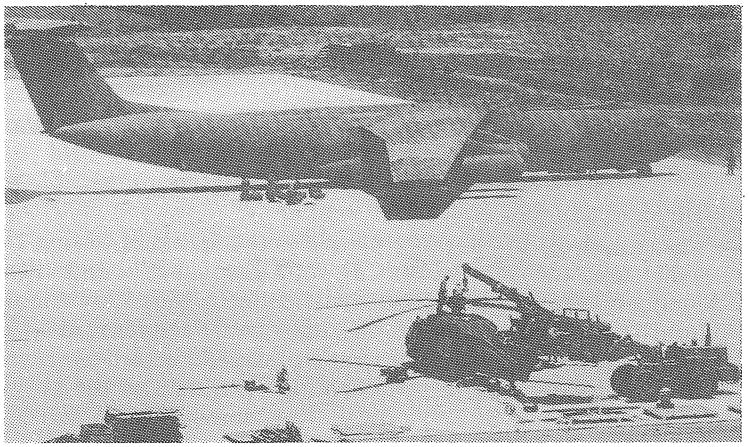
Japan and other European countries have challenged U.S. domination of international markets. A new superpower, the Soviet Union, abandoned socialism and arose as a competing imperialist aggressor.

All of these developments struck decisive blows to U.S. imperialism, cutting into its profit margin. Economic crisis after crisis marked the 1970's and 1980's, and the standard of living in the U.S. has actually declined steadily since 1973. Our generation is the first in decades that can expect to make less than what our parents did.

The rightward shift is the *strategy* of the capitalist class to stem this decline and regain the profit margins of days past. It is an attempt to make industry more profitable at the expense of the working class and minorities, and to channel people's frustrations into *open support* for making the U.S. "number one" in the world again.

The move to the right and higher education

This rightward shift has hit the educational system as



(Above) U.S. aircraft at Point Salines airport in Grenada. The invasion of Grenada was a blatant act of unwarranted aggression against a sovereign nation. (Right) Many universities invest in corporations doing business with the racist apartheid regime of South Africa. Students from Stanford to Princeton have historically fought for divestment from South Africa.

well. Reforms like financial aid, Ethnic Studies and affirmative action are today being taken away. The universities have become more strictly geared to the labor needs of the multinational corporations.

How does higher education fit into the capitalist system? Governing bodies of the major colleges read like a "Who's Who" of the Fortune 500. Through these boards, the ruling class directly supervises our education. We are coached in bourgeois ideology and trained for capitalism's technical, managerial and scientific needs. Because we live in a class society, education serves to maintain the divisions between classes and the position of the ruling class.

Trade, technical schools and community colleges are geared towards producing skilled workers, lower level management and technicians. Most working class and oppressed nationality youth who make it into college are channeled into this system. State colleges train middle to upper level management and professionals. The most elite sector of education — the state universities and private institutions — train the highest levels of professional fields and business, and reproduce the ruling class itself.

The move to the right has intensified this class stratification. Costs of attending college have skyrocketed: between 1980–84 fees rose at *twice* the rate of inflation. Under the guise of going "back to basics," more elitist admissions standards are eliminating all but a handful of Third World and working class students from the upper tiers of education.

Corporate and military influence in education are more widespread than ever. The 15th biggest Defense Department contractor is a renowned "institution of learning," the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. There are 13 universities among the top 100 contractors alone. At the University of California, students attend classes in the Stephen Bechtel building. Meanwhile, programs like Ethnic Studies and women's studies have come under attack as "frivolous." Over 50% of Ethnic Studies programs established a decade ago have since been eliminated. Even the traditional liberal arts have suffered funding cuts.

Organizing on the campuses today

Under the right-wing assault, student organizing today is difficult. Academic pressure is high, and students are uneasy about what awaits us in the "real world" after graduation. We're implicitly told in class, by advisers and by the mass media that social change isn't possible, that it's foolish even to try — so we should just concentrate on "looking out for number one."

Emboldened by the Reagan Administration, conservative

UNITY PHOTO

Racist violence is on the rise on the campuses. At UC Berkeley, Chicano students protest a racist beating by white fraternity members. Here, students picket the administration to protest its inaction on the incident.

warmongering we see around us — and we want to do something to change things. While we are often hampered by political inexperience and the denial of real political education, we are looking for a way to *analyze* and understand society, for *alternatives* to the decadence and inequality of capitalism, and for effective ways to *channel* desires for change. This is what the student movement is about. And it impresses upon us the necessity for clear political direction and revolutionary leadership to give full play to the potential that exists.

B. The Future:

Tasks facing the student movement

There are two major fronts of struggle facing the student movement today — two fronts which ultimately must be linked. Organizing for peace — opposing U.S. intervention in the third world and fighting the nuclear arms race — is one. The resurgent struggle of Third World people for equality and political power is the other. Both are in direct response to the rightward offensive of the ruling class.

Organizing for peace

The deployment of cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe, the invasion of Grenada in 1983, waging the not-so-covert war and mining of Nicaragua's harbors in 1984 — all this gives us a sense of *urgency*. They tell us that U.S. imperialism's goal is to regain world dominance by any means necessary.

Students have already organized themselves into peace groups, Central America solidarity groups, anti-draft centers and chapters of the bilateral Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign. This movement must go on to involve the broadest numbers of students in struggle, giving people concrete avenues to fight for peace — rallies, petition drives, confronting politicians, campus and local referendums and other mass actions.

Our goal must not only be to educate, but to actually influence and *change* U.S. policy. Any new escalation of U.S. interference and aggression — whether it is stepped-up intervention in the Middle East or a Central American invasion — should be met with an escalation of our own militance in opposing it. A clear signal must be sent to the ruling class: students will not stand for U.S. aggression. The student movement, as a key element of the overall peace movement in the country, can help to force the ruling class to curb its ambitions, helping to forestall

war itself at this critical juncture.

The organized peace and anti-intervention movement consists primarily of progressive whites at this time. But to strike more decisive blows at imperialist ambitions and, ultimately, to make more fundamental changes, it must unite with the movements of the oppressed nationalities — particularly the Black and Chicano movements. They represent the struggles of the oppressed African American Nation in the South and the Chicano Nation in the Southwest, upon which U.S. imperialism has been built. There is a bloody history here to be told — one of slavery, annexation, lynchings and the most brutal superexploitation — a history that for over a century has fueled a struggle for self-determination. It's no wonder that these movements have throughout U.S. history been a powerful force for revolutionary change.

Oppressed nationality students

Third World students today find themselves in a struggle to survive in the hostile and alienating atmosphere on the campuses. Racist attacks are commonplace, cutbacks in minority programs abound, and the odds are stacked against even graduating.

Sandinistas celebrate their 1979 victory over Somoza's brutal U.S.-backed dictatorship in Nicaragua. In recent years, broad student support for the liberation struggles in Central America has grown by leaps and bounds.

It is this kind of campus atmosphere that makes Third World student organizations so important — as places to build solidarity, to give expression to national consciousness and pride, and as a base from which to take up struggle. Like the student movement as a whole, Third World activists have been hampered by the conservative climate. Cuts in Ethnic Studies mean today's students know little about their history, and the pressure to deny one's identity is high. Simply maintaining the Black student organizations, the MEChAs, or the Asian Student Associations has often been a consuming struggle in itself.

But today, the oppressed nationality movements are on the move, as dramatized by the Jesse Jackson campaign. On the campuses, Third World students are a potential source of new militancy and revolutionary leadership. They've taken up key struggles in their communities — for political power and electoral representation; fighting racist legislation like the Simpson-Mazzoli immigration bill; demanding justice in the 1982 slaying of a young Chinese American named Vincent Chin by two whites in Detroit. And on the campuses it's the same issues — racist attacks and harassment, accessibility in education, and the struggle for political power and democracy on campus.

In what has become a key arena of struggle, Third World students have often led campaigns to wrest control of student governments away from right-wing forces. This is no accident, since they are the hardest hit by the move to the right on the campuses and the denial of student power.

But these struggles and those of the white progressive sector are usually unconnected. And as long as they remain disconnected, the full potential power of the student movement cannot be tapped.

Building multinational unity

How can multinational unity be built? First, racism even within the progressive movement must be overcome. White activists too often belittle the struggles of Third World students as "narrow," or see them as "side issues" of little consequence. Secondly, there must be a deeper political understanding of the relationship between the oppressed nationality movements and fundamental change. Jesse Jackson's campaign demonstrated

Conclusion

In the coming years, we will see an intensifying struggle for the hearts and minds of America's youth and students. The bourgeoisie, through its universities and mass media, demands that students support its policies of war and exploitation either with explicit enthusiasm or implicit silence. We must build a student movement that refuses to buy their line; a student movement which is more than a collection of single-issue concerns, one which challenges the rightward trend as a whole; a student movement which strives to articulate a vision of a new society, of a way forward out of oppression and cynicism. Challenging "the way it is" and daring to pursue alternatives is what has historically given the student movement its vigor and energy.

Revolutionary-minded students have the task of providing such an alternative as we take up the concrete struggles of the day. We must show *how* we can move towards a better society — one which allows working people to determine their own future; one which rejects exploitation, racism and war. To sustain and build long-term commitment, we need a positive vision of what we're fighting for.

Socialism can be that alternative; it is a concrete and realistic goal. Under socialism, working people would control the economy and direct resources to meet people's needs. Overthrowing the capitalist class and eliminating the profit motive would remove the basis for inequality and exploitation faced by minorities and women. Socialism would uphold the right to self-determination of the Black and Chicano nations. The talents and knowledge we acquire through education would not be exploited just to line the pockets of the rich or stoke the war machine. What we learn could help to serve people's needs and contribute to a better society. The working class in power would have no motive for invading other countries or intervening in the affairs of other nations. And full democracy and civil rights could not be constricted and distorted by powerful corporations.

Socialism is not some utopian dream or intellectual curiosity. In fact, the economic conditions for socialism have already been created by capitalism, where production is socialized but there is no social ownership. The contradictions produced by capitalism will inevitably intensify. But to achieve socialism it will take a revolutionary movement capable of overthrowing the capitalist system. How do we get there? Marxism-Leninism provides us with a scientific methodology and approach for both

UNITY PHOTO

Asian students have taken up important community struggles, such as redress and reparations for Japanese Americans interned in the WWII concentration camps.

fighting the immediate struggles and achieving socialism. It represents the accumulated experience of successful revolutionaries throughout the world.

The League of Revolutionary Struggle is working towards the goal of socialism. Taking on U.S. imperialism is no easy task; it will require organization and a deep grasp of the conditions we face in organizing. The League is working to build an organization which can embody this — a communist party which can provide the analysis, strategy and leadership necessary to make revolution and establish socialism.

There is a way forward. Learn about Marxism-Leninism. Working together, we can create a just and peaceful new society — we have only the future to win.

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