

Substruction in the Class/Room Struggle

Setting aside work and discipline, this spring students began to build the framework of a new mass movement. In the month of April alone over 100,000 students participated in pro-divestment actions at over 60 colleges and universities, including many of the largest in the country, with several thousand arrested.

Capital has fresh and painful memories of dancing to the tune set by students in the 1960's and is therefore attempting to limit and disarm student struggles wherever it can. Although the new student movement is still in its infancy, it is clear that already there is a lot at stake. Underscoring this is the fact that today over 12½ million students are enrolled in the factories of higher education--a 50% increase since 1970.

The fact that the potential power of students is recognized by both capital and the left, and that the student movement is still young, makes it imperative that we discuss *how to push the student movement forward, how we can adopt the most effective strategies, tactics and organizational forms.* Our brief look at the student movement will be limited to analyzing the student struggles themselves, their content, development, circulation and direction, as opposed to adopting a more complete analysis that would, for example, also look more closely at the relationship between students and other sectors of the working class or more at capital's plans for students. We have written this article based on our experiences as student activists at universities in the Northeast and our discussions with other activists across the U.S.

Many Unsung Roots

Over the past few years, students across the country have been engaged in diverse struggles, all of which have nourished this spring's resurgence of visible mass protest. The fact that these struggles have been obscured and concealed while the divestment struggle alone has been embraced by the media makes it imperative that we understand the recent historical context of this spring's struggles.

Anti-sexist struggles have fought violence against women, organized support for the demands by clerical, technical and service workers for pay equity, and demanded child care for students who are mothers. The "Take Back the Night" marches, the struggle of predominantly women workers at Yale University in the

Fall of '84 for "comparable worth," and the battles at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn (see Notes #7) and at U. Mass.-Boston for, among other things, child care programs, are but a few examples of the struggles of women at universities.

Black, Latino, and other non-White students have organized struggles to combat their declining enrollment due, in part, to racist admissions policies and to capital's attack on financial aid programs. At Brown University, for example, a coalition of Black, Hispanic and Asian students has organized building occupations and other demonstrations in support of demands for an increase in non-White faculty, more "minority" studies programs, more financial aid, and an end to racist attacks by campus police and chauvinist White students. Similar struggles countering racism have also been waged at other colleges around the country, from San Francisco state to Cornell University.

The relationship between these anti-racist struggles and the spring divestment movement, and the level of unity between them, has varied from campus to campus and changed over time. But it is important to recognize that *the experiences of people of color have circulated within the divestment movement and that students of color have initiated and provided leadership in the divestment struggles at many schools.*

Students have engaged in direct actions to prevent capital's international road show of G. Bush, H. Kissinger, J. Kirkpatrick, A. Haig and C. Weinberger, from appearing on many campuses across the country. Since the spring of 1984, these actions have generalized into actions against organizations, the most notable being the C.I.A., which has been booted off over 30 campuses.

At U. Colorado-Boulder, 478 arrests were made over three days as students and supporters battled to keep the Company off campus. At U. Wisconsin-Madison, cops made it clear who they were there "t protect and to serve" when they maced students trying to stop CIA recruitment. These actions also produced new tactics by students such as the "citizen's arrests", and they have been broadened to include corporate recruiters.

The militarization of the university since 1979 through programs and policies such as the Solomon Amendment (coercing draft registration), the expansion of ROTC programs, and direct military research and development con-

tracts, has also been met by fierce resistance. The burning down of the ROTC building at Berkeley this past year is the most dramatic example of this resistance.

The significance of the actions noted above is two-fold: First, they are based on the immediate and specific social reality of students, and so ultimately express the demand by students for greater control of the university. Second, they generally have taken the form of direct action that is autonomous both from national political organizations and from bureaucratic university channels.

It is precisely because of these features that even "liberal" newspapers such as the N.Y. Times, Boston Globe, Washington Post, etc., have consciously opposed the circulation of these experiences in their broadsheets. These very same newspapers which refuse to make mention of autonomous direct action, go a-courting the most reformist strands within the student divestment movement, in order to restrict students' imaginations to the processed images of acceptable protest. Even that "independent radical newsweekly" The Guardian (of NYC) wrote with unabashed enthusiasm on June 5, "Today's activists emphasize their predecessors' mistakes and differences in approach - such as *minimizing confrontation*," (emphasis added).

"April is the Cruellest Month"

The divestment campaigns that achieved such widespread attention this past April have been active for the better part of a decade. More precisely, most were engendered by the Soweto uprisings in 1976, and continued to be active for a number of years, often achieving important but limited victories such as pledges by university trustees to adhere to the Sullivan principles as well as divestment by a few colleges. Like this first wave, the divestment campaigns on the campuses this past spring were spurred by the daily insurrections in South Africa, as well as by the "arrest-fests" that were staged by TransAfrica and the Free South Africa Movement throughout the fall of '84 and spring of '85. In California, the divestment movement gained much of its strength from the actions of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) in San Francisco. In November of 1984, the ILWU refused to handle South African goods, and during the spring divestment campaign, they marched to Berkeley to support the students.

April 3 saw Boston area students and Boston cops squaring off against each other at a demo calling for, among other things, more student aid, an end to apartheid and self-determination for Central America. Columbia students began their action outside Hamilton Hall on

April 4. On April 10, Berkeley students started a similar sit-out. Rutgers began a sit-in at their student center on April 12, Cornell began major actions April 18, and from there the movement spread to universities such as U. Florida, U. Iowa, U. Kentucky, U. Wisconsin (occupied the rotunda of the state capitol for 15 days), and 50 other colleges and universities. The tactics employed varied greatly from school to school and within individual campuses. Besides the sit-outs and -ins, blockades and building occupations, there were also petitions, rallies, vigils, marches, hunger strikes, student strikes, mass civil disobedience and the construction of shantytowns.

Tactically speaking, a number of the actions were positive in that they integrated autonomous direct action with mass decision-making. Unfortunately, an equal number frequently verged on the absurd, as students often negotiated the terms of their arrest with the police (satirized even by "Doonesbury"), hired lawyers to negotiate with administrators and other judges, and organized their actions to meet the expectations and deadlines of the established media.

Pandering to the media, in particular, often became a goal in and of itself. In listening to some students who participated in the spring actions, it seemed as though they believed that "bad media" for the university would be a sufficient condition to force divestment, especially if that bastion of truth the NY Times covered the story. This belief in the media as being an independent and impartial "Fourth Estate" is somewhat extraordinary in light of the fact that university trustees are also often on the boards of the media corporations. The tendency to plan strategy around media coverage has dangerous repercussions, for it is a tactic that chains the movement to limited structures, as students police themselves both in the form and content of their actions.

These tactical mistakes, though, must be seen in the context of the movement's more positive and challenging actions. At Tuft's University in Massachusetts, for example, several hundred students voted at a teach-in to disarm the campus police - a vote and a result engendered by police infiltration of student organizations and by the cops' strong-arm approach during the spring struggles. At Cornell, similar proposals to disarm the campus police were made through the school newspaper, and again it was a result of continual student-police confrontation.

At U. Mass-Amherst, and other universities where arrests occurred, students often attempted to blockade the buses carrying their fellow students to jail. On occasion, such actions were criticized by "moderate" pro-divestors. On many campuses around the country, students erected shanty-towns and tent cities

on land surrounding "their" administration buildings, thereby following the tradition laid down by the Diggers 350 years ago and more recently by People's Park. At Cornell, the administration and police, following the tradition of their counterparts in South Africa, bulldozed the shantytown and surrounded the land with barbed wire.

At Berkeley, several hundred students abandoned the routine outside the administration building and marched through the downtown area, invading three banks, the courthouse and the local high school. They were, not surprisingly, denounced as "hotheads" by both the media and the social democrats. Banks doing business in South Africa were also a favorite target of students in Madison, Wisconsin, where students became so adept at protesting that they were able to shut down, albeit with a little trashing, a branch of the state bank with only a handful of demonstrators.

Attempts at the Subversion of Autonomy

One of the real measures of the strength of any struggle is the extent to which it embodies the image of the "future" society in the present. The political and social forms that were consciously developed in struggle over the spring, including mass decision-making and non-hierarchical organizational forms, certainly contained something of the "future in embryo." Perhaps most encouraging though, was that these actions, rooted in the particular circumstances of each individual campus, were largely spontaneous and did not have regional or national organizations superintending them. In fact, there are no national grassroots student organizations in existence, though the ones that are nominally national, such as the Progressive Student Network (PSN), a social-democratic organization based in the midwest, have become larger and more organized and are now jockeying for the position of "central committee."

The fact that the student risings this past year actually happened - and happened without any "orders from above" - has propelled the whole question of organizing nationally into considerable importance. Both the left and capital, each seeking to redirect the student movement into its own channels, recognize that, if they are to have some influence upon the shape and direction of the student movement, then national student organizational forms must be developed under their control.

The struggle that is being waged at this point in time within the movement itself, and which is primarily centered around the issue of national organizing, is basically a struggle over the autonomy of the student movement. While this struggle continues to take place

on individual campuses vis-a-vis administrative channels and "official" student organizations, it is on the national level that the struggle between autonomy and cooptation is today most important and its outcome will have a powerful effect on the direction of the movement.

Who are these forces of cooptation on the left and why are they a problem? On the one side are those whose agenda is the modern day equivalent of the united front - the boosting of the "Peace, Jobs, Justice" platform and the reinvigoration of the decimated ranks of the Democratic Party. Thus we see J. Jackson making his oratorical rounds in the yards and quadrangles of America's universities (note well, not in the streets). Jackson also pushed heavily for the April 24 national student anti-apartheid day which, co-incidentally, was coordinated from the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) national offices in New York - supposedly at the behest of Columbia University students. Even the United Nations is getting in on the act (The first time as tragedy...), with the U.N. Special Committee on Apartheid and the American Committee on Africa sponsoring a conference of student "leaders" from around the country on May 7 "to gain a better understanding of the student upsurge in the country." The U.N. is even threatening to sponsor an international student anti-apartheid conference in November (...the second time as farce?)

On the "other" side are all sorts of left groups, often former Maoists, old-style "communists" and open social democratic organizations, now entering the active ranks of divestment. Having made their basic peace with social democracy, they inevitably support precisely the same strategy and tactics as the 'left' of the Democratic Party (DSA, Jackson). Again a return, farcical engagement of the united front to support the "progressive" bourgeoisie. Their forms of action are use of the media, negotiations, and organizing "student" conferences to attempt to control the student movement by cultivating the "acceptable" wing of the movement and by using their resources to muscle in on the national student organizing.

These various attempts at the subversion of militant student autonomy are, however, running up against the student movement's existing organizational forms which act as antibodies to attempts at cooptation. A movement that has erupted "spontaneously," without any bona fide national organization, that is decentralized and which practices direct action and direct democracy, will not readily succumb to the efforts of various groups at limiting and controlling it. To be sure, the movement derives its very strength from *not being institutionalized* or hampered by some top-heavy, hierarchical, command and control center, with its own agenda.

This is not to say that students shouldn't organize nationally or internationally. On the contrary, more organizing on both levels needs to be done and is being done in a variety of ways - on the phone, through the recently formed student computer networks, and through circulating the experiences of struggle in person. However, the struggle must be waged between organizing nationally and a national, centralized organization, between autonomy from capital and the reformist left, and the distinct possibility of cooptation.

The need for autonomy rests not only in a long term perspective which opposes social democracy in its multiple guises, but because the strategies pushed (imposed when they can) weaken the movement even for the goals we can share with social democrats (e.g., divestment, an end to apartheid, and end to U.S. domination of Central America--though all this may be conceding too much to many social democrats who want a 'beneficent' U.S. imperialism). Our problem is not that they propose legal, peaceful, limited actions, but that they oppose expanding the boundaries of the struggle. Moreover, from our perspective as students, they are nothing more than parasites, interested only in leeching our strength while asking us to put aside our own specific struggles.

Holding back the struggle, allying with capital, is a tactic of capitulation: at best, liberal capital will only fight with other capital over the terms of exploitation. Such fights may be useful to us, but only if we can use them, which demands being autonomous from them. To even get reforms, inter-

nationally or in the U.S., we must push beyond reformism. That students have done this is clear. Counter to conciliation, some students have raised the tactic that to get divestment and other concessions, the universities must become ungovernable, as the people of South Africa have determined to make that nation ungovernable and unprofitable until apartheid dies.

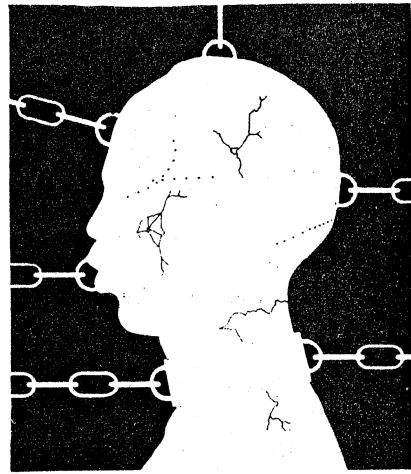
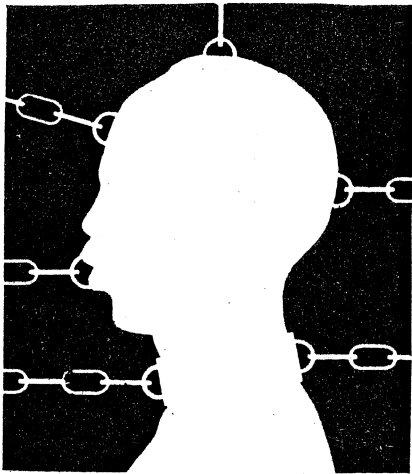
Excarceration or Education

It is difficult to predict exactly how the student movement will evolve, but it is clear that it is heading in a particular direction. On the organizational level, it seems likely that the movement will continue to retain a high degree of autonomy on both a local and regional basis. Students are already organizing on a regional basis, with West, Mid-West, South and Northeast operating largely in separate and distinct spheres, and at the local level are making demands that cannot be met through official channels.

Tactically, it is clear that certain elements within the movement will seek to repeat the tactics of the past spring on the basis that they have been successful in mobilizing large numbers of students. To the extent that some of these tactics were equally successful in getting large numbers of students arrested, it is imperative that the movement discuss the obvious shortcomings of this tactic of capitulation. Otherwise, not only will we simply continue to fill the state's coffers, but also we will exclude from the movement many more



South Africa? No - Cornell!!



students who daily lives of school, waged job, family, etc. often precludes days of sitting, going to jail, paying fines, etc.

It is precisely in the process of struggle that students are beginning to recognize their own interests as a particular social force, as well as their ties to others. In marches that are taking place from one school to another (engineering to liberal arts), and from one neighborhood to another, in struggles demanding an end to sexist and racist attacks and an end to attacks on the student wage designed to systematically purge the working class from "higher education," students are beginning to overcome the divisions capital has imposed on them in order to rule.

When, for example, students are forced to recognize that the legal fictions professed by the university's courts are only laws within laws, an additional disciplinary process on the terrain of academics designed to punish academically (suspension, expulsion) for participation in struggle, they are forced to understand how their struggle on campus helps the struggle against apartheid. And when students realize their specific role as unwaged

raw material in capital's social factory, it becomes clear why they must fight the university, the state and the South African regime. *It is only when students struggle for them-*

Students must now begin to move beyond divestment (but not stop that demand) and begin to act for themselves, conscious of the specific settings and circumstances that define them. The students are in motion, but do not yet realize the particular social reality in which they exist, their relation to capital and to other sectors of the working class (we can here exclude those who calculatedly seek to manage the rest of us for the purpose of ensuring accumulation). In this, students will have to overcome their own divisions as well, rather than be dominated by some sectors of students acting in the name of all sectors.

It is only when students struggle for themselves that they can begin to practice true solidarity with revolutionary movements in South Africa, Central America, etc., and in that solidarity the students own struggles reveal their importance in the attack on capital.

