THE YOUTH QUESTION IN BIG FLAME

(1) THE TERMS OF THE DEBATE

There are two distinct political lines on the question of youth and education in BF. It is not youth versus teachers as both "sides" have their older and younger supporters. The age of the poeple is a red herring. Some have attacked the youth group because of its relatively elderly advisers. The ripe old age of 24 or whatever does not determine correctness, neither contrary to what some in BF think floes practice (even with quotes from Mao) - what determines it is correct political analysis, tested ultimately in struggle. This document will try to show that the Youth Group' as they call themselves (in particular BP of BBF and TH of Leeds) has an entierly misatken political analysis which is harming BF's ability to understand the questions and therefore construct a good practice. The existence of two lines is particularly serious in this case as they directly clash in practice (ie. over the cuts and strategies to deal with the current educational crisis) and could prove seriously embarrassing. The Youth Caups political missiskes can be characterised as:

(a) Moralism: There is not attempt to provide a concrete, scientific meterialist analysis of youthn or education, only moral exhortations about oppression. 44.1

The consequence is:

(b) Ideologism: The political line is abstract and not connected to actual current events in this historical conjuncture (the cuts, crisis in education etc). kmFor instance there is not attempt to explain why there is no widespread pupils movement either historically or at the moment.

(c) Ultra-Leftism: Not only in relation to the possibilities of action with teachers, but they don't even understand where radical school-students are at. This means that when some of us have criticised the Youth Group's (YG) notion of autonomy, that it can't be reduced as some do, to the youthfullness of the analysis and experimentation alone.

A final point. The teachers have been accused of ignoring the debate and been unconcerned with the needs of youth. Instead we have been conentrating on our pamphlet, which breaks from Left tradition precisely in that it centres much of the analysis on the position and needs of school-students. While the pamphlet does not deal with the whole position of youth, we stand by it completly on its analysis of youth and education and we ask comrades to readthe pamphlet in the light of some of the accusations by the YG. I'd just like to mention a few of the things that we say in relation to school-students. We have been accused of ignoring the power of teachers over students. On page 6 we refer to the "hierarchical relationships between teachers and pupils. We say "Early on kids learn that teachers have power, and to get on you have to please the teacher and take orders. There is more on Page 7. We don't see easy alliances - On page 13 we say - "it would be wrong to see teachers simply as workers, automatically on the same side as pupils.... the teacher plays a partly repressive role in passing an the ideology which binds this class divided society together, and in terms of their authoritarian role in the land the class-room." We have a whole section (Page 16-17) on The effect of the crisis on the pupils, there we satuate papil rebellion in its historical and materialist context; rather than in a simple unchanging reaction to authority as the YG does. Neither do we call as we have also been accused, showing that our work has simply not been read) for 'more education' as the solution to the crisis. In factive make the point that such a persprective cannot be a made to the point that such a persprective cannot be a made to the point that such a persprective cannot be a made to the point that such a persprective cannot be a made to the point that such a persprective cannot be a made to the point that such a persprective cannot be a persprecion of the point that such a perspective cannot be a perspective to the point that such a perspective cannot be a perspective to the point that such a perspective that the point that such a perspective that the point that the point that the perspective that the point that the perspective that the perspecti possibly mobilise pupils who are "so fed up with the experience of school" that they don't give too much thought to the bad conditions, " (P. 27). We are however in favour of fighting for change and reforms in education, which b the YG appear to reject.... a point we return to later. The state of t

dok s<u>ek, karija gita dita</u> a "kaka si si <u>KALEMAKKA KAKKAKAKA KEARA KEULAH KAMENAKAKAKAKAKAKAKAKAKA KEBAKAKA KEULAKAKA</u>

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to consideration of the second of In the following material we will be referring to the the YG articles:-(i)"An anti-report on the education commission report." (BP/BBF)

(ii)"Some last minute notes on the youth question." (TH/Leeds BF)

(iii) "A Reply to Leeds! reachers criticisms," (BP/BBF). It has the

(iv) "The power of youth, or when is a revolutionary not alrevolutionary?" (Theeds) ្រាំមេស៊ីស្តែក សា ខណ្ឌាំស្ត្រាស្ត្

The YG have compared the relationships between teachers and pupils to forement and workers, men and women, black and white, homosexual ad hetero-sexual and even the Brtish army and the Catholic masses in Northen Ireland. This has been done to justify the essentail correctness of any struggle of youth, to confirm the oppressive role of the teacher and to write off any activity among teachers, even to the point of comparing xxx the appearance of a conference resolution from the Liverpood Teachers Group to one from a supposed BF Halewood Foremand Group (see YG document ii.).

Companisons of this kind can make clever points and certainly establishes the g∞d guys and the bad guys; a necessary procedure in BF to win the emotional support even the most politically untenable position can generate if it makes the right noises. Unfortunately the comparisons are usually waxful useless and harmful, precisely because they fail to xxxxx pinpoint the specific conditions in which social relations arise (including the oppressive role teachers play). It is xxxxxxxxx remarkable that the YG has totally failed to give any analysis and definition not only of the educational crisis, but even of the general role of education in capitalist society. Instead they have relied on the foreman analogy. This analogy implies that the teacher like the foreman is caught between class forces and is forced to take an authoritarian role. But the situation is qualitatively different. The foremen does not have a contradictory class position; he is unambiguously the final chain in the capitalist command, whose function is to guarantee the continuity of production. He may face counter-pressure from the shop floor, but there is no ambiguity, he is the bosses! man. The teacher is not in such a position. The function of education is not production, but re-production of the conditions of production. That is to re-produce the class hierarchy in society and to socialise the future workforce to the degree required for their future positions. But the whole point about this is that it is a contradictory process. Like all elements of the super-structure, the education system is relatively autonomous from the capitalist economy. Unlike production, re-production cannot be directly controlled, partially because it has a strong ideological component. That education is not simply a straight capitalist process of child-minding and brainwashing can be seen by the recent state and right-wing attacks of progressive education, comprehensives and radical teachers. Teachers are one of the means by which the function of education in a capitalist society is carried out. This undoubtedly involves social relations of authority and ideology that are anti-working class. But it would be wrong to over-exaggerate this. The recent conflicts in education (Typedale etc) show the considerable degree of space there is for radical and progressive teachers to both - work against authoritarian relationships with pupils and to present a counter-ideology. While not pretending this is easy, it can be done and it is our job to se it generalised and systematised. There is a socialist strategy for teachers, there is none for foreman - the difference lies inthe distinction between production and re-production. All strategies based on the analogies between schools and factories are wrong. The YG is merely an ultraleft face of a long running error. The IS group base their teachers work on a shop-floor analogy, only here teachers are the unambiguous good guys workers, fighting a trade union struggle. Consequently they ignore the oppressive relations and ideological role the teacher plays. Their are many other variations; their common feature is an under-estimation of the ideological function of eduction. Hence they all under-estimate the real space and basis for much redical action by teachers. The YG by using the factory-foreman analogy concentrate solely on authority relations, which although one aspect of education, results in them not grasping the basic function of education in captalism and therefore failing to produce a correct strategy. They put a lot of stress on teachers not being able to support kids because of the fear of losing their jobs. There is obviously some truth: in this, but again should hat be over-emphasised. The teacher works within the space available and all radical teachers take risks to support necessary action. Like all militants in any situaion the radical teacher must judge the circumstances before taking action, but in our pamphlet (page 30) we outline a number of practical means of help that socialist teachers can give pupils who are organising.

As for all the other parallels (men and women etc) similar cases could be made out showing that the social relations that arise derive from totally different conditions and therefore political perspectives are of qualitatively distinctive nature. Parallels are the refuge of a poverty-strickeh analysis, they function as a substitute for the actual concrete conditions being analysed and act as a cheap 'vote-catching' exercises. Lacking a concrete analysis the YG can only substitute moralishic advice to teachers on not being oppressive, giving up their jobs and waiting pat ently to being over-run by the revolutionary hordes.

(3)BIG FLAME FOLITICS IS NOT BUILT ROUND THE "MOST OPPRESSED."

To justify torking solely round youth/pupils and ignring teachers the YG states that "our orientation where there are divisions in the class are always to the most oppressed." (YG Document ii) This statement is wrong on two counts. First the relations between xx pupils amd teachers are not primarily"divisions in the class." The YG follow the olds East London BF group, Power of Women etc in being obsessed with conflicts within the class, not between the classes. Hence in all their documents they blithely ignore the cuts and the current crises in education, which is the current manifestation of class conflict in education Secondly the concept of structuring political practice around. the 'most oppressed' is unscientific and anti-makix marxist. Oppression is a notoriously difficult thing to define, but even if it could be it would not be the main yardstick for intervention. EF would have some very strange practices if this was our method; again the concept is moralistic. Even if pupils or anyone else could be shown to be the most opportsed of a local given sector if the class contradictions were not expressing themselves in struggles of pupils, but rather by ancillary workers or teachers - then that is where the revolutionary organisation must be. We cannot enter into interventions on a solely voluntaistic basis and create struggles from nothing. Although of course there is a case for slow and patient, long-term work to build up the potential of an important sector. But the revolutionary criticria for intervention is first of all where the class contradictions are expressing themselves, recognising that they usually follow a long term pattern. This is why we work with car workers - the location of industry within the economy, the advanced rature of the work process and methods of exploitation, the composition of the workforce - these ensure that they are a potential vanguand at the and that they will always be somewhere around the centre of class struggle. They are not the most oppressed industrial workers, it's a lousy job, but nothing in comparison with workers in small sweatshops and factories of certain kinds, for example.

In their enthusiasm for being the 'most oppressed' the YG lose sight of reality. In document in TH states that "school students have nothing to lose but their chains in the fight against bourgeois education." Populist rhetorical rubbish. If this is so why isn't there a widespread pupils movement? Just because you are oppressed doesn't mean you have automatic potential for instant struggle. Every group, even these right on the bottom have things to lose by struggling. Rome revolutionaries might not think so, but then they have been substituting their desires for reality for a long time. School-students are no exception. For instance any pupil knows that exams are the meal ticket to future success and rising up the educational ladder (after all TH got to university somehow). Even if the ladder and the future job market is rejected and hated, raise page pupils, especially radical ones are faced with real concrexte choices, and difficulties about struggling. Like all of us the pupil faces the mk problems of choosing the ground to struggle at minimum cost to them and their sanity. Let's forget who se the "most oppressed" and get down to studying the actual problems of intervention in education and youth.

(4) ALLIANCES BETWEEN PUPILS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS ARE POSSIBLE AND NECESSARY

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The first problem of intervention is what to struggle about and how. To start with it's necessary to have a realistic assessment of the balance of forces, to see who can be united against the enemy. But who is the enemy. The YG make the xxx typical ultra-left xxxxx error of identifying the enemy as

the 'agents' of capiatlist oppression. So the YG document iv states that I was the the fight back of blacks, women, my gays and youths in must "inevitably be win directed against their immediate agents of oppression." So the targets are whites, men, hetero-sexuals and adults (including teachers). This is dangerous nonsense. It is for socialist within these xerximu sectors to analyse the basis of exploitation and oppression by capitalism and the state and how it manifestsx itself in daily life and to draw up strategies it to gight it and advance their independent needs. The target and enemy must always be the real origin of oppression. Of course any struggle of this sort mext will come up against and if necessary fight against people who are long term allies, but short term agents of oppression. But this must be done in a context of findi recognising that they are non-antagonastic contradictions and that points of unity can still be found

But the YG are blind to this and are against any unity. Their second document state's "there is no possibilities of any sort of alliance between parents, teachers and pupils. Why because "abstract calls for unity fail to recognise the power of adults over kids." But this falls precisely because we are not making abstract calls for unity. It would obviously be wrong and fails to recognise power divisions to call for a permanent alliance between these three sectors. But it is not wrong to try and identify issues which providex points of unification and a process of unity in struggle. There are certain struggles in which it is correct to advance the slogan, black and white unite and fight (as BF has done) while recognising that it is an inadequate general perspective. So for pupils, teachers and parents - there mare issues which united action can take place on eg. the closure of a school, the sacking of a teacher, the Victimiation of pupils and general cuts and orisis issues. The obvious case is the joint action that was taken to get rid of an NF teacher in a big London school by pupils, parents and teachers. Such concretes the at unity in action is the perspective of the NUSS (National Union of School-Students) and of the Black Parents and Black Students Movements, who work in close co-operation. It has been said that involving pupils in cuts committees is utupian. We do not think so. Of course the pupils would have to be organised in some kind of action group or NUSS branch. Representation already exists on this basis in some areas. It is presumably our policy to encourage some type of formal organisation of pupils or do we think only apontaneous action is ideologically correct? Refusal in advance, of alliquous on principle, as the YG does is abdicating any responsibility for certain aspects of the struggle TS AT and is a sectarian blindalley.

(5) WE HAVE TO START FROM WHERE YOUTH IS AT

Also part of making a realistic assessment to start interventions is understanding at what level of consciousness, action and organisation youth and in the this case pupils are at. Xxx We are in favour of developing the power of youth, but you cannot do it by over-estimating your strengths as the YG does. They have stated that "students are already the vanguard of this struggle" (against schooling) and have refferred to the "amazing potential" of the struggle by pupils. Unfortunately the evidence is not so convincing. The examples given by the YG document iti include - truency, anti-recruitment leaflets; repression of OZ and the Little Red Schoolbook and "increasing attempts of arson on schoolbuildings." This hotch-potch has at its heart a miner confusion of spontaneous action, usually of dosprganised and individualistic nature, with conscious and organised activity . that which often results from a schools movement. Such spontanoues action is part of the rebellion of youth and is the raw material on which something organised and conscious can be built on, but it is not a substitute for it, or for an analysis of why there isn't a real schools movement. An interesting difference emerged when DC (who is a teacher and supporter of the politics of the youth group) wrote in a draft of part of the education pamphlet - "A lot of the power has to be taken from us, it is for the schoolstudents to declare we are on their side." We rejected this because it was abstract and didn't deal with how power and the could be taken - it could lead to teachers making absurd tactical errors on altering power relations. We changed it to read "We welcome the fact that those students, when organised, will demand that we mas teachers, give up our power to them."

A vanguard has to be conscious and organised, as some of it is through NUSS The politics of the YG will make it difficult to construct a youth vanguard in education. Not only because they over-estimate the consciousness and organisat. ion of pupils but also because they mis-interpret it badly. They say (Docii) that "The struggle of youth is not for a good education, not for a socialist education, not for lefty teachers, it is a struggle against education." Document i states "reforms like campaigning for money only prop up a rotten system." This is likely to alienate them from schools' activists and potential activists who want to fight for change and a better education. It is only likely to appeal to the unorganisable, whose occaisonal anarchistic combatativity can often be misleading. This seems a deliberate intent of the YG who state (Doc ii) that the means of developing the power of school-students is "in the short-term, playing the hop from school, pissing teachers (especially lefties) around, not listening etc. kuraxiyaxkinxtaarikwanaxayaxkinkaarakkx even when the teacher is a good socialist." This pathetic anti-education insist of foisting on us in their propaganda. They misuse the already inadequet "More money less work" concept to define their perspective as "More money and independance - less school"

Do shool-rtudents really want less school and education? If so they join with the government, the state and the ruling class. As usual anarchism and where the course is a litra-leftism converges with the courgeoise. We are convinced that most school-students want to transform educatin and want the kind of kowledge tht will help them control their lives. This perspective is ... absolutely necessary when the state and the ruling class are trying to restructure the content of education to make it directly serve the needs of capital - thus reducing the little power, choice and control pupils and teachers have at the moment. As we say in our pamphlet:-

A structured and disciplined approach to learning, incorporating pupil self-discovery is necessary to those who will have to

fight exploitation and oppression at work and at home, they need the

skills and knowlege to understand that situation.

We believe that socialist teachers have a role to play in that and other positive strategies for and change in education. We do not believe as the YG does (Doc i, page 2) that progressivism is the limit of what teachers can do. Our task, together with pupis is as Chris Searle (ironically a teacher of TH)

to crate within education a branch of the apparatus of liberation for the oppressed of the world.

Paul T. (Liverpool BF)

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