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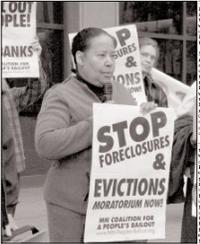
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U.S. in Longest Recession Since the 1930s
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¡LUCHA Y RESISTE!
 Noticias y Perspectivas de la Lucha del Pueblo
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On the student movement in the U.S.

An analysis of the student movement in the U.S. presented at the 18th International Communist Seminar that took place in Brussels, Belgium on May 17-19, 2009.



Photo: Student protest against US war in Iraq at UNC-Chapel Hill, March 2008

Freedom Road

Socialist Organization

www.frso.org

Notes

1. In the 1960s and 1970s many Filipino student organizations adopted the term “Pilipino” in rejection of colonialism and in solidarity with the growing national democratic movement in the Philippines.
2. See FRISO’s pamphlet *Some Points on the Mass Line*. www.frso.org/about/docs/frsomassline.htm
3. *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*, p. 290
4. For more discussion of this, see Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist*. Chicago, Liberator Press: 1978
5. On May 4th, 1919, a wave of student protests shook China. “The ‘literary’ revolution became a nationwide complex of manifestos, demonstrations and militant action. New political terms were coined and stirred awareness of the new literature. Satirical essays constructed a new style. Repression could do little against this radicalization... Student societies (among them the New People’s Study Society founded by Mao Tsetung) organized centers for the production and dissemination of Marxist literature.” (Han Suyin, *The Morning Deluge: Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Revolution 1893-1954*. Boston, Little Brown, 1972. p. 68.)
6. Though IVAW is made up exclusively of post-9/11 veterans, it is mainly an organization of students and youth, so for that reason it is included here.
7. www.frso.org/about/statements/2007/antiwartasks2007.htm
8. www.frso.org/about/statements/2008/sds-study-struggle-unite-fight.htm
9. Many nationality specific formations of the 1960s and 1970s like the Black Panther Party, the Chicano groups like the August 29th Movement and the Brown Berets, or Asian American groups like I Wor Kuen or the Red Guards were made up almost entirely of young people but generally did more work in their communities than on campuses. Other nationality specific student groups, like the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC), a major African American organization of the 1960s, also did considerable work organizing in their communities and with non-students.
10. www.fightbacknews.org/2009/03/wave-of-protests-against-cuts-to-education.htm
11. *The Orientation of the Youth Movement* (May 4, 1939), Selected Works, Vol. II, (FLP English Edition: 1965) p.246.

struggle for college access. Working class and oppressed nationality demands need to be at the forefront of the struggles against budget cuts and tuition hikes on campuses. It is the programs that were won through struggle by past generations that will be first cut. As public universities move to increase tuition in the current economic crisis, it is oppressed nationality students who will feel the effects most drastically as the doors to higher education are systematically closed to them.

Conclusion

The central task of Marxist-Leninists in the United States today is to build a new Communist Party on a Marxist-Leninist basis. Without a Party guided by the most advanced revolutionary theory it is impossible for the working class to take power and build socialism, which is so desperately needed. Like so many students before them, we want students who join Freedom Road Socialist Organization to transform themselves and eventually to go into the working class and the masses of the oppressed nationalities to help lead the class struggle. Mao Zedong once asked, “How should we judge whether a youth is a revolutionary? How can we tell? There can be only one criterion, namely, whether or not he is willing to integrate himself with the broad masses of workers and peasants and does so in practice. If he is willing do so and actually does so, he is revolutionary.”(11) This was true when Mao Zedong said it in 1939 and it is true today. While they are in school, students and youth must become anti-imperialists, and take up the struggles of the multinational working class and oppressed nationalities and put those demands in the forefront, working to advance the interests of the people and land blows against the ruling class and their cronies. When their time organizing on campus is up, they must transform themselves, go into the working class and the masses of oppressed nationalities, and take up wholeheartedly the class struggle.

Josh Sykes is a member of the National Executive Committee and co-chair of the Student Commission of the Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

On the Student Movement in the U.S.

By Josh Sykes, Freedom Road Socialist Organization

Freedom Road Socialist Organization has a rich history of work among youth and students. Many of the veteran cadres of our organization were active with the youth of the Black Panther Party, Brown Berets and the Students for a Democratic Society of the 1960s, the Revolutionary Student Brigades in the 1970s, or the Progressive Student Network in the 1980s. Others worked on campuses to organize against South African Apartheid, in the historic Jesse Jackson campaign, or in solidarity with the Central American revolutionary movements. Many also organized Asian American and Pilipino (1) students, or worked in mostly oppressed nationality student formations like the Student Liberation Action Movement (SLAM) in New York. Today, students and youth in Freedom Road continue to do mass student organizing, mainly in the new Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) formed in 2006.

Why should Marxist-Leninists do work among students?

Our line on student work has its roots in the New Communist Movement. Much has changed since then, and we as an organization have learned a lot and gained a lot of experience, but the basic principles remain. As we see it, communists should work among students for three main reasons: 1) in and of themselves, the student movement can strike blows against the U.S. ruling class, 2) the activity of the student movement can spread advanced ideas to society as a whole, and 3) advanced students can take up Marxism-Leninism and join the struggles of the working class.

Furthermore, in our student work FRSO upholds the *mass line*, the view that the masses of the people are the makers of history, and that people learn primarily through experience in cycles of practice-theory-practice. This means that we work in mass organizations, and follow the principle of “from the masses, to the masses,” in work to raise people’s consciousness and understanding.(2) We also understand clearly that, as Mao Zedong said, “The young people are the most active and vital force in society. They are the most

eager to learn and the least conservative in their thinking.”(3)

Historical development of the student movement in the U.S.

The student movement in the United States has some characteristics that result from its particular historical development in a large imperialist country. First, since the final turn towards revisionism (Marxism in words and opportunism in deeds) by the Communist Party USA in the mid-1950s, there is no genuine Marxist-Leninist Communist Party in the United States.(4)

But this leadership vacuum was soon filled by revolutionary minded students and youth, who were won to Marxism-Leninism and began a process of building Marxist-Leninist organizations and integrating with workers and oppressed nationalities. Just as many members of the Chinese Communist Party emerged out of the May 4th Movement,(5) so did many members of the New Communist Movement emerge from the struggles of students and youth.

However these new Marxist-Leninist organizations did commit both "left" and right errors. The liquidation or retreat into sects by the largest New Communist organization and the failure to build a new Communist Party resulted in many setbacks in the 1980s and 1990s. Today's progressive and revolutionary forces are small and scattered as a result. The same goes for the student movement as whole.

There are no powerful Red youth groups, though a plethora of small, Trotskyite youth formations exist. Their practice follows from their theory, however, and so the Trotskyite student formations tend to be sectarian and commandist in their style of work and approach to the masses. Most student activists work in mass organizations alongside anarchists, social democrats, and other radicals. Two of the largest and most significant mass formations today are the Students for a Democratic Society and the Iraq Veterans Against the War.(6)

Students for a Democratic Society

The FRSO currently does most of its student work in a multi-issue, mass student organization, the Students for a Democratic Society. SDS, though majority white, is multinational such that most chapters reflect the composition of the campuses on which they exist. Furthermore, SDS is one of the largest and most active student

supposed to be free when it opened up, and tuition has been increasing ever since” (*Washington Square News*, 3/6/09). Hundreds of students from New York University also participated in the rally.

In Arizona, responding to over \$300 million in cuts to higher education for 2009, over 2000 students from universities across the state marched on Phoenix in early February. On March 18, over 1000 students gathered in Jacksonville, Florida, to protest hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to the state's education system. And in Sacramento, California, thousands of teachers and students from across the state descended on the capital last week to protest massive layoffs and cuts to education.

At Middle Tennessee State University, the university's steering committee proposed eliminating 44 majors, dissolving some departments, closing the women's center and day care center, laying off 70 faculty and outsourcing custodial services. The Coalition to Save Our Schools at Middle Tennessee State University has been leading a huge effort with repeated demonstrations of hundreds of students to stop the cuts, including a 'funeral for higher education' on Feb. 9 that coincided with the governor's state of the state address.

In some instances, even student government associations are organizing protests, like at Binghamton University in New York, where over 50 students protested tuition hikes and held signs last week that said, "I chose SUNY 'cuz it used to be CHEAP" and "Public education must be affordable" (*Press Connects*, 3/25/09). And at Penn State University in February, the student government organized hundreds of students to protest the governor's budget proposal that cut \$20.3 million from Penn State's budget while also excluding the university from the Pennsylvania Tuition Relief Act. This move would block many low-income students, and especially oppressed nationality youth, from access to higher education (*The Daily Collegian*, 2/10/09). (10)

It is important to note that the struggles for immigrant rights and for national liberation overlap in significant ways with the broader

tended towards organizing themselves into nationally specific formations.(9) These organizations today include the Black Student Unions (BSUs), MEChAs (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán – Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán), and Asian Student Unions. These organizations began as militant political organizations in the 1960s and 1970s, although most have more recently become mainly social, cultural, and service oriented.

There are a significant amount of oppressed nationality struggles in the U.S. right now, particularly in the immigrant rights movement (which is connected to the Chicano national question in the Southwest). Similarly, in the Black Belt South, where African Americans make up an oppressed nation, there has been significant motion around the case of the Jena Six and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In all of these cases, the majority white sections of the student movement have done some coalition building work and organized to fight back against racism and national oppression.

Students and the economic crisis

Since the further development of the economic crisis, members of Freedom Road have begun to look more closely at ways to fight back against budget cuts and tuition hikes on campuses. As working and poor people lead the fight-back, demanding that the rich pay for their crisis, likewise students are demanding that budgets not be balanced at the expense of accessible education, raising the slogan that “education is a right!”

There is already spontaneous movement amongst students as a wave of protests against cuts to education sweeps the country, including the militant student occupations of New School University and New York University. A recent article in *Fight Back!* *Newspaper* highlights some of this motion:

Hundreds of students from City University of New York (CUNY) walked out of class on March 5 to protest Governor Paterson’s proposal to cut funding to education. Jackelyn Mariano, a protester from Hunter College said, “CUNY is made up of working-class students and students of color who really can’t afford to go anywhere else. It was

organizations in the country, with well over a hundred active chapters all over the U.S.

Founded as a national organization in 2006 by students representing a variety of Leftist ideologies, from Marxists to anarchists and radical social-democrats, today’s SDS is named after one of the outstanding student organizations of the 1960s, out of which much of the New Communist Movement of the 1970s was born. The SDS of the 1960s organized in solidarity with working class and oppressed nationality struggles and against the Vietnam war. The new SDS stands in that same tradition.

Since its founding, most of SDS’s work has been in the anti-war movement. SDS has also done important solidarity work with African Americans struggling against national oppression. SDS has worked in the immigrant rights movement, protesting fascist, anti-immigrant speakers on campuses and leading some walkouts for immigrant rights. Revolutionaries in SDS work to build coalitions with oppressed nationality students and youth. SDS also organizes for women’s liberation and for the democratic rights of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people.

Likewise, SDS also organizes solidarity with working class struggles. When workers at Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago occupied their factory in December 2008, SDSers from throughout the Midwest went to the factory to show support.

Anti-imperialism and the anti-war movement

Freedom Road Socialist Organization members in the student movement work to oppose imperialist war and occupation. Since 2003, most of FRSO’s anti-war organizing has been in opposition to the U.S. war against the people of Iraq, with the main goal of keeping the demand for “troops out now” at the forefront of the movement. Secondarily, we have sought to raise an anti-imperialist pole in the movement (including building support for the Iraqi resistance among the advanced) and to raise the social costs of the war, raising the level of militancy.(7) As the FRSO Student Commission said in a statement in September 2008, highlighting some of our work in SDS,

Members of FRSO have been working in SDS since the

first National Convention in Chicago back in 2006. What have we been doing? We have organized militant local chapters. We organized against the war in Iraq, for immigrants' rights, labor solidarity, in defense of the Jena Six, and more. We are all involved in a lot of local work, and while doing that, we worked hard to build national campaigns. In 2007 and 2008 members of Freedom Road were in the lead of SDS's work around opposition to the 4th and 5th anniversaries of the U.S. war against Iraq. This led to actions on more than 80 campuses in 2007 and on 90 campuses in 2008, many of which were not associated with SDS before. Through this and other work we've brought many new activists and student groups to radical politics and into SDS. We helped organize student contingents in major national marches and we also helped to organize the 2007 and 2008 National Conventions in Detroit and Maryland, and the 2008 SDS Action Camp in Asheville.(8)

Like other social movement in U.S. society, the ebb and flow of the student movement is determined by objective conditions. The election of President Obama, and the developing economic crisis had an overall negative impact on student anti-war organizing, releasing some built up pressure and diverting the attention of some of the intermediate. In our analysis, however, the principle factor in the declining role of the anti-war movement among students and in society as a whole has been due to the relatively lower level of activity of the armed Iraqi national resistance. Simply put, less fighting on the ground in Iraq means less struggle here in the U.S.

As the criminal U.S./Israeli attacks on the Palestinian people in Gaza began last year, students on campuses around the United States held actions in support of the Palestinian people's struggle and to demand an end to U.S. aid to Israel. Students on campus have played a particularly important role in the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement, by fighting to have their colleges and universities divest from Israel.

Likewise, anti-imperialist students have played a big role in solidarity with Colombian workers, who suffer from brutal exploitation under the U.S.'s Plan Colombia. Colombian Trade Unionists

are murdered in the hundreds by death squads funded by U.S. corporations like Coca-Cola, Drummond Coal, and Chiquita Banana. Students have long been in the forefront of the campaign to get Killer Coke off of campuses, and tour Colombian workers around the country to speak about U.S. military intervention in their country. Understanding this as a question of self-determination, students doing Colombia solidarity work oppose Plan Colombia and "Free Trade". Students also make up an important part of the annual protests to shut down the School of the Americas, a "counter-insurgency" and death squad training school in the state of Georgia.

Students in SDS have also worked hard on the campaign to free Ricardo Palmera, a leading negotiator of the FARC-EP, now a political prisoner of the U.S. empire as the result of neo-colonial extradition policy.

As public opinion becomes more and more opposed to the war in Afghanistan, the student movement will respond by leading more actions against this war. Already students are leading educational events and protests exposing the ruling class's interests in subjugating the Afghani people and in propping up a criminal, puppet government there.

The student movement and oppressed nationalities

Throughout the 20th century, the student movement has been and remains today largely divided on national lines. This is the result of continuing oppression of whole nations of people within the United States, including in particular the history of the segregation of the U.S. educational system. Until the historic African American liberation struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, university campuses were virtually all white. As a result of the struggle of African Americans along with Chicanos, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans, the doors to colleges and universities were opened and programs such as Ethnic Studies began to teach about the history of racism and national oppression in the United States. One example was the united front of oppressed nationality students of the Third World Liberation Front, which led the historic San Francisco State Strike in 1968 and 1969.

As a result of this history, African American, Chicano, Latino, Asian, Native American and other oppressed nationality students