

The Student Movement and the Second Wave: Maoists and the RSSF experience

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Introduction

Britain in the late 1960s saw a brief explosion of student radicalism that provided the impetus for the growth of left activism and generated a few nostalgic myths in its wake. Subsequent investigation provides different considerations about the nature of the student movement that will be explored, however, it is true that it was a formative period for radical politics, the seedbed for a generation of activists – some with a lifelong commitment – that saw mobilisation around the war in Vietnam boost membership of Far Left organisations.

In focusing on one trend within that broader experience, it is hoped to highlight the attitude of the nascent anti-revisionist groups towards the student movement and assess its actions in relation to that understanding. Clearly the numbers of anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninists were reinforced by students joining their ranks. London activists formerly in the Young Communist League were active in groups like Camden Communist Group mixing with other students in campaigns around, most prominently, the war in Vietnam in which the Revolutionary Marxist Leninist League was instrumental in forming the Britain Vietnam Solidarity Front.¹

Within the emerging radical student movement the focus was on the Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation [RSSF], an attempt, outside of the existing student structures, to harness the protest power and activism of students. Previous organisations were onslaughts against the bureaucracy of student organisations. During this time student radicals of all persuasions attempt to develop an independent organisational vehicle to channel political action.

¹ See: 1968, Grosvenor Square – that's where the protest should be made.
<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.secondwave/grosvenor-square.pdf>

There were attempts within the Labour Party, already host to Trotskyist entrants, through the National Association of Labour Student Organisations (NALSO). Within the existing National Union of Students student activists attempted to organise in the Radical Student Alliance (RSA) and through The Liaison Committee for the Defence of Student Unions (LCDSU).

The Radical Student Alliance (RSA) was launched in October 1966. It was an attempt, initiated by the Communist Party students, to bring together two tendencies in the student community - the student organizations of the Labour, Liberal and Communist Parties and independent militant activists in student unions - and to forge them into a force aimed at transforming the National Union of Students (NUS).

The Liaison Committee for the Defence of Student Unions (LCDSU) was an alliance between the International Marxist Group (IMG), the International Socialists (IS) and independent marxist student activists inside the National Union of Students against the "broad left" and Communist executive.

Undoubtedly there was an escalation in student protest in the late sixties, the attention it received presented students as a new social force of significance. The formidable growth in student numbers marked the end of the university as the training ground of a small and privileged elite and the beginning of the era of mass higher education.' Vibrant student radicalism offered an opportunity for activists to develop political skills and mobilise fellow students in support of a campaign. In the context of the day, it was still a minority of student activists challenging the status quo but the energy and self-belief enlarged and electrified the protest scene in the latter half of the 1960s.

Abandoning the existing student organisation, in 1967 the Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation (RSSF) was founded to establish a socialist student movement.² A mass political student milieu had been created around the VSC - Vietnam Solidarity Campaign 1966/69. Radical students wondered whether this politicization over one issue could be converted into other issues as well, and into the creation of a non-sectarian mass socialist youth movement.

Then sit-ins were prevalent among universities like LSE, Birmingham, and Leeds. Protests at Regency Street and Hornsey Art College also drew the media attention. However, there were also street demonstrations with a variety of themes, such as nuclear weapons, Enoch Powell and Biafra, South Africa and, the Vietnam War had an obvious resonances in mobilising the students. There was the emergence of the counter-culture - lyrics to Street Fighting Man were published in the radical paper Black Dwarf under the editorship of Tariq Ali. Many of the reasons for protesting inspired artists like the Beatles' song 'Commonwealth' which targeted former Conservative Party shadow defence spokesman, Enoch Powell, notorious for his so-called "Rivers of Blood" speech of April 20th 1968.

Celia Hughes was not alone in her observations of 1960s activism:

"From 1966 onwards, IS and the IMG expanded steadily in alignment with the VSC. These two groups began increasingly to displace the Labour Party as the left organisations of choice for students disappointed by the moral and political betrayals of Harold Wilson's Labour government. Public spending cuts, wage restraint forced by the Prices and Income Board, immigration and race, the Industrial Relations Bill of 1969 and the overseas problems of Rhodesia, all added impetus to the increasing radicalisation of young activists."³

² There was also the Schools Action Union based on students aged under 18s. See: School Action Union, *The Marxist*, No. 10, April 1969.

³ Celia Hughes, "Narratives of radical lives: the roots of 1960s activism and the making of the British Left" in Smith & Worley, *Against the Grain: the British far left from 1956* (Manchester University Press 2017) p76

However, British students participating in protests were accused of representing only a minority, and that they were strongly influenced by demonstrations that were taking place in other countries such as Germany, France, and the USA.⁴ The major anti-war protests coordinated in the Ad Hoc Committees sponsored by the VSC were in response to calls from American activists. Even if that was the case, though, this signified that the protests were not isolated events, but rather part a broader phenomenon. In May '68 the events in France created a big wave of enthusiasm among many students in Britain. Sit-ins and other solidarity actions were taken in many universities. An international seminar with many then famous student leaders took place at the LSE and was filmed by the BBC.

The idea that British students were merely imitating the examples made in countries such as France meant that the authorities could treat less seriously the real issues raised. Practical support and solidarity shown to the anti-Vietnam War campaign is better remembered when, subsequent research showed that in reality, students were largely campaigning on student issues, as at the well-publicised occupation at the London School of Economics. Student representation was the prime motive behind student protest and the subsequent autonomy of Student Unions indicative of the reforms achieved. About one third of demonstrations in 1967 and 1968 were concerned with student demands for participation within campus government. The remainder were equally split between matters of curriculum reform, student discipline and guest speakers.⁵

THE APPEAL OF YOUTH

The attraction of student radicals were clear: Young people have the potential to be more revolutionary simply because they do not yet occupy a stable position in society. While participation in education was an avenue for advancement in future careers, opening up possibilities as young people seek to find work, pursue an education, and explore their own talents, they come up against the limitations of a hierarchical capitalist society, in the late 1960s a society culturally in transition, rising militancy in all sectors and a system engaged in practices home and aboard that were abhorrent. These conditions, and awareness of the anti-colonial struggles of the age, constantly push the youth towards revolutionary conclusions.

It is not surprising that there was a favourable attitude towards the student movement for young radicals and the small far left groups in Britain. The appeal of radical youth came not only from mutual identification within the cohort – the activists were of a similar age after all – and a shared desire for change. There was an ideological identification with youth in protest throughout the industrialised countries that identified one's actions as part of an international wave. That internationalist solidarity was deepened with an identification with the mass youth movement unleashed from 1966 in China's Cultural Revolution.

From news seeping out of China, young activists were encouraged to be bold and that it was "right to rebel". They were flattered by the Chairman's words:

⁴ The *Guardian* patronised the protests in suggesting that Britain was mimicking the examples set by students in other countries and described it as '*me-tooism*.' June 10th 1968 p8.

⁵ Drawing principally upon the research of Blackstone, T & Hadley, R. 'Student protest in a British University: Some Comparisons with American Research', *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1. (Feb, 1971), pp. 1-19 and, Thomas, N. 'Challenging the Myths of the 1960s: The Case of Student Protest in Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2002, pp. 277-297.

“The world is yours, as well as ours, but in the last analysis, it is yours. You young people, full of vigor and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed on you. The world belongs to you.”⁶

There was a strong ideological justification for the participation of youth in social change. The Maoist appeal contained attractive propositions for young radicals. These propositions reinforced the commitment and identification with the need to apply Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought for the revolutionary potential of the radicalised youth to move beyond an undirected and spontaneous possibility to a coordinated and disciplined movement to dismantle capitalism and imperialism.

It addresses what was (and remains evident) dissatisfaction with capitalism, a desire to understand society as it exists, the contradictions inherent within it, and a desire to improve it. It countered the stale routines of the “old Left”, its accommodationist attitudes towards the existing order and rejected the flawed practices of the Soviet dominated examples of socialism. Those who looked to the communist tradition saw in the Sino-Soviet dispute of the early 1960s that the domestic supporters of the Soviet Union argument – the Communist Party of Great Britain – as part of the problem. Proponents of Mao Tsetung Thought offered anti-revisionist answers and proposed a strategy to actualize that potential of radicalised youth in a truly revolutionary direction by engaging in class struggle and collective study.

This was the advice from Chairman Mao⁷

“The young people — whether or not they be members of the Communist Party — who join the ranks of the revolutionary movement, bringing new blood and enthusiasm, are all very precious. Without them, the ranks of the revolution could not develop and the revolution could not triumph. But lack of experience is the natural failing of our young comrades. Now revolutionary experience comes from personal participation in revolutionary struggle. If one begins working at the grass roots, if, for several years, one does work that is genuine, not false, then experience will come to those who do not have it.”

The emphasis on political line and revolutionary education in the fight against revisionism meant that students, attuned to argumentation in their studies, could understand what determines whether or not a specific struggle was a working class struggle. What determines that is not whether the struggle goes according to the majority of workers in an area say it must go, but rather whether the struggle is guided by the revolutionary proletarian line, then identified as Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. The exact right thing for youthful intellectuals to do was to go among the working class and engage in the process of the construction of a revolutionary communist party out of the working-class masses.

Mao made the differentiation between class position and class stand, so the petty-bourgeois student could be part of the working class struggle through its identification with and active solidarity in

⁶ Mao, Talk at a meeting with Chinese students and trainees in Moscow (November 17, 1957) in Schram, Stuart (1974) Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed: talks and letters, 1956-71 Pelican pp407-408.

⁷ Youth Needs Experience, October 5, 1939 https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-6/mswv6_34.htm

struggle. Furthermore was the underlining message that the participation, leadership, and support of revolutionary sections of the youth was a necessity for making revolution. Mao's position was taken to be that the communist movement can and should include whoever is a genuine communist at the moment, regardless of their class background, to spread communism to the working class. This "class suicide" (as Cabral described it) by graduated students saw in the 1970s many activists take working class occupations in an attempt to integrate a largely petty bourgeois cadre force within working class environments.

The question of the role of youth in that revolutionary struggle had some pedigree in the experience of the Chinese Revolution which was studied and analysis drawn upon by the young anti-revisionist marxist leninist movement. Just as the Bolshevik's, and principally Lenin's party-building experience was to impact the approach of all groups, the "May 4th Movement", as analyses by Mao, provided an explanation for the role of students in the context of Britain. In Mao's article "Orientation of the Youth Movement," where Mao has the audacity to say that "in a way" Chinese youth began to play a vanguard role, which he defines as "taking the lead and marching in the forefront of the revolutionary ranks."⁸

This was not to argue that students were the vanguard. Mao regarded the role of the students in China as mainly an initiating one. He fully recognized the dynamic role of youth but also their weaknesses—especially their tendencies toward anarchism, ultra-"leftism," but also toward conservatism at times—and their problems in uniting the revolutionary ranks to carry the struggle through to victory.

"Intellectuals have always been quick in altering their perception of things, but, because of the limitations of their instincts, and because they lack a thorough revolutionary character, they are sometimes opportunistic."⁹

Overseas admirers could see that Mao, at the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, rely heavily on the initiative and the daring of the youth and the students—not as a substitute for the working class, but to help awaken and mobilize the working class. He told an Albanian Military delegation that,

"Although it was the intellectuals and the broad masses of young students who launched the criticism of the bourgeois reactionary line, it was, nonetheless, incumbent upon the masters of the time, the broad masses of workers, peasants and soldiers, to serve as the main force in carrying the revolution through to completion."¹⁰

Mao noted that "In the Chinese democratic revolutionary movement, it was the intellectuals who were the first to awaken. . . . But the intellectuals will accomplish nothing if they fail to integrate themselves with the workers and peasants." Here Mao is making clear the relationship between the fact that the intellectuals, particularly the students, are often the first force in a given revolutionary movement to rise in struggle—and play a vital role in helping to "mobilize and organize" the masses of people—and the fact that it is only by integrating with the workers and peasants that the intellectuals can make a real contribution to the revolutionary process. And, as he points out repeatedly in his writings, it is only by doing so that the youth can be transformed in their world outlook and become genuine Marxists.

⁸ The Orientation of the Youth Movement [May 4, 1939]. This speech was delivered at a mass meeting of youth in Yanan to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the May 4th Movement.

https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_14.htm

⁹ Speech To The Albanian Military Delegation [May 1, 1967]

https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_74.htm

¹⁰ Speech To The Albanian Military Delegation [May 1, 1967]

https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_74.htm

For the Leninist-schooled student radicals there must be the “leadership of the working class” and this means the leadership of the working class party and of the working class line, a revolutionary proletarian line, however for some elements, most clearly expressed in the CPB (ML), it seems that the youth should be led trail passively at the rear of the working class, and failure to utilise the opportunities that the youth might themselves may have a leading role to play in mobilizing and organizing as in the protests around the war in Vietnam.

The future direction of the student movement role was clear: in Mao’s words, a conclusion from an earlier age,

“Our young intellectuals and students must go among the workers and peasants, who make up 90% of the population, and mobilize and organize them. Without this main force of workers and peasants, we cannot win the fight against imperialism and feudalism, we cannot win it by relying only on the contingent of young intellectuals and students. Therefore, the young intellectuals and students throughout the country must unite with the broad masses of workers and peasants and become one with them, and only then can a mighty force be created.”

The student-worker alliance was promoted for a time as a similar route for student radicals. It did not mean ignoring or trying to eliminate the contradictions between, and hence the different contradictory roles of, different sections of the working population, but recognizing and utilizing these contradictions to push the revolution forward. In the context of Britain that meant rebuilding the party of the working class and when that opportunity came along, sections of radical students embraced it.

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The context of student struggles were always going to be curtailed by the circumstances that recognised that students as a social category could add numbers to an event but questioned how effective could ‘campus revolutionaries’ prove to be. The Student movement, like the single-issue campaigns, were never going to be a stable environment to build a cadre force. In composition the student movement was transient and continually changing each year; there was a high churn rate of activists. At that time only a minority of 18 years old went on to Higher Education and the overwhelming majority of English university students come from petty-bourgeois or bourgeois homes.

class position of students

At a conference organized on the ‘Problems of the Worker-Student Alliance’ in February, 1969, Sam Mauger of the Joint Committee of Communists spoke on the confused assessments made of the class position of students and thus their relationship with the working class. The Joint Committee of Communists (JCC) was formed in April 1967 centred round comrades engaged in anti-revisionist struggle within and outside the YCL. Its major political statement ‘Origins and Perspectives’ was first published in summer 1969 as a prelude to the organisation being reconstituted as the CFB (ML) in September that year.

His assessment drew upon what Marx called the “intermediate strata” and references to Mao Zedong’s “Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society” which places students with the petty-bourgeoisie. Mauger noted that:

“It is one of the features of the paucity of the Marxist tradition in Britain that there is no such class analysis which we can take hold of but it is undeniable that students both by their background and

their destination have the characteristics that Mao ascribes to intellectuals. They “often tend to be subjective and individualistic, impractical in their thinking and irresolute in their action until they have thrown themselves heart and soul into mass revolutionary struggles.” Because of their intermediate nature they can either become servants of the bourgeoisie or with Mao’s qualifications and provisos true allies of the proletariat.”¹¹

Late March, Easter 1967, the British Marxist-Leninist Organisation (a year later, the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) (CPB (M-L)) was formed. It did not show any interest in students at that time. The attitude of the BMLO was expressed by its successor organisation, the CPB (ML) in a pamphlet directed at students from 1971, *Students Into Class Struggle*:

In the early years of student history, many students were concerned with anti-imperialist issues, especially the war in Vietnam. But some, misunderstanding the nature of real class politics, used this very genuine internationalist aspiration to declare that students were the “revolutionary vanguard” because they were interested in these “political” problems, while workers were still fighting merely “economic” battles. Having no understanding of the situation and the fighting history of the British working class, they tried to use people’s interest in such struggles abroad to dismiss those at home as being reformist and economic. However, this was a sign of the infancy of student politics, and the mass of students quickly moved away from this erroneous idea. It soon became clear that the best way students could genuinely support such struggles was by fighting the same enemy at home, where they could actually have an effect. For students to have gone through the purely “anti-imperialist” stage in their political development is no shame. What was inexcusable, however, was the refusal of the doctrinaire “leftists” to advance beyond this immature stage. As the mass of students advanced, the “leftists” became isolated and they retreated into “revolutionary socialist” student organisations to debate each with one another, which seemed to be an easier option. And others went to the factories to teach the workers politics, and became offended when they were told where to go.”¹²

The CFB (ML)’s National Secretary Sam Mauger voiced a more sympathetic nuanced analysis and argued in a brief outline what “our attitude to the student movement should be “as students are in their prospects in terms of work and income still a privileged strata separate from the working class “and as such are, in general, in a contradiction. Many can see the crisis of imperialism and monopoly capitalism threatening their security and their liberal “freedoms,” and may well intellectually understand the need for socialism. The difficulties then of choosing the proletarian revolutionary road while a student are considerable.”

We cannot rely on a crisis developing like that of last May in France and must realise those contradictions which hinder the development of a proletarian ideology. We must not limit the policies we fight for to those which will be acceptable to the mass of students.

Their political consciousness can be raised in confrontations with the authorities in higher education but only by linking these struggles with the wider anti-imperialist and anti-monopoly capitalist issues. On no account must we pander to petty-bourgeois illusions of an above-class “freedom,” “science,” and “education.”

In the course of these struggles we must realise that students need experience of working class struggles and must not be allowed to isolate themselves in self-proclaimed “red bases”. We must

¹¹ Mauger, Sam (1969) A Critique of the New Left Review and International Socialism: Assessments of the Present Student Movement. **Towards A Student-Worker Alliance**. Documents from the Joint Committee of Communists’ Conference on the Student Movement

¹² CPB (ML) 1971. *Students Into Class Struggle*

stress that all struggles in Britain take place in a world where the dominant fight is against imperialism and is being led by the national liberation movements. The fact that the "countryside is surrounding the cities" is the dominant aspect does not of course devalue struggles in the metropolitan areas. We must stress that power can only be taken from the capitalist class by imposing a dictatorship of the proletariat led by a disciplined democratic centralist party. Middle-class or petty-bourgeois elements will only play a positive role in this process by integrating themselves fully in the working class under the leadership of such a party."¹³

The RSSF experience

The Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation - RSSF's founding conference occurred in June 1967 at the London School of Economics. At the time of RSSF's foundation, the maoists involved in it were not affiliated to a party. However the period of RSSF's existence was for the maoists a time when many tiny groups were edging towards the establishment of a unified party in Britain. Within a year, many came closer to or joined the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) (CPB (M-L)).

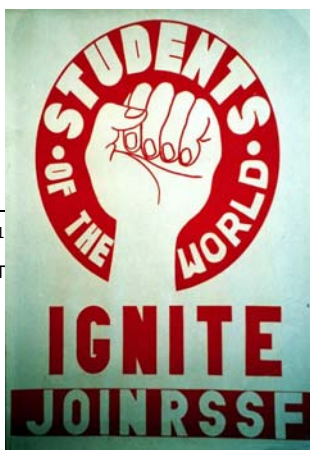
The atmosphere at RSSF's founding conference was festive. Participation was large, between 1,500 and 2,000; people came from all over Britain and with continental observers. There were representatives from most leftist organizations, with the exception of SLL. IS was the largest and most organized political group, but no one political group had anything near a majority. The unaffiliated were the most numerous.

RSSF was in turn was dominated by two trotskyst tendencies (IS and IMG), by some maoist groups (RMLL and JCC), the New Left Review circle and by assorted libertarians.

The first day's discussion was quite unstructured and dominated by lengthy declarations to a captive audience about the prospects of revolution, trends of capitalism, student power and so on. The debate was sectarian with much name calling, mutual accusation and self-congratulation.

The political heterodoxy of the student composition was laid out in Avishai Ehrlich thesis that provides a comprehensive coverage of the divergent views within the RSSF.

.....The most heated debate was about the aims of the organization, and it was clear that here there were irreconcilable views. Members from Sussex who belonged to the "Militant" (RSL) trotskyst tendency within the Labour Party wanted to concentrate on activism within the Labour Party, as the only party of the working class. The Communists reiterated their belief that students should fight for change within the NUS. The IS believed that student struggles showed a high political consciousness in contrast to workers at that time, but that the prospects of success in universities were limited. The aim in universities should be to raise students' understanding of the limits of liberalism, and when this was reached RSSF should draw students into struggles outside the university.



Another, more "new leftist" view rejected the IS aspiration to lead students as quickly as possible into workers' struggles. They agreed that the final aim was a proletarian revolution, but argued that at present the workers did not manifest revolutionary consciousness while students were, in most western countries, the most volatile

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he New Left Review and International Socialism: Assessments of the Present Student Movement.
Documents from the Joint Committee of Communists' Conference on the Student Movement

group. The task of RSSF should be the political mobilization of this "weakest link" section and its conversion to marxism. Compared with students on -the continent, British students were by and large still hostile to the left and ignorant of marxism. Judging from the French and German movements, to change this situation would take years. .The aim of RSSF should be to create a "student power" consciousness as a means for creating revolutionary consciousness. One should start with any local or specific issue that crops up, and aim at attacking the ideological content of education.

The maoist position was influenced by tactical considerations of how to prevent other groups from controlling RSSF and using it to increase their influence. It is, however, important to distinguish between the concept of RSSF that the maoists aspired to and the position of compromise that they adopted because of their inability to implement it.

There was a Leninist recognition on the conceptual level: they stood for a strong centre with powers of direction and decision making but settled for "an RSSF ...with a vague programme, no analysis of society and a coordinating committee limited to coordination as such - just the transfer of information and exchange of experience - and, very little else."¹⁴

The essence of the maoist proposals on the political programme for RSSF was summarized by activist John Ritson as follows:

The M-Lists (marxist-leninists) were proposing a manifesto which outlined the reasons for the present upsurge of student activity in terms of the whole world situation, with the victories of the national liberation movements, with the increasing crisis of imperialism and of monopoly capitalism. This presented the student movement not in isolation from the working class movement, but stressed that it was necessary for workers, students and teachers to unite to achieve their ends.¹⁵

The maoists were actually calling for a concept of RSSF which did not differ in its scope of membership and actions from that of a party. Put differently, the maoists saw in RSSF the nucleus of the revolutionary party. As "the party", RSSF needed the "correct", i.e. maoist, interpretation of marxism-leninism. Others were offering their interpretation of the revolutionary proletarian line: The "Internationalists" had started in Trinity College, Dublin and, from August 1967, also developed in London. The group was very loosely organized until October 1969, when they reorganized themselves as the "English Communist Movement (M-L)" and the "English Student Movement". The latter emerged in January 1969 from a split among Sussex University marxist-leninists (SCC (M-L)) on the question of the analysis of students. The Internationalists plough their own furrow outside of the student or anti-revisionist movement

¹⁴ J. Ritson, Vanguard, January 1969

¹⁵ J. Ritson, Vanguard, January 1969

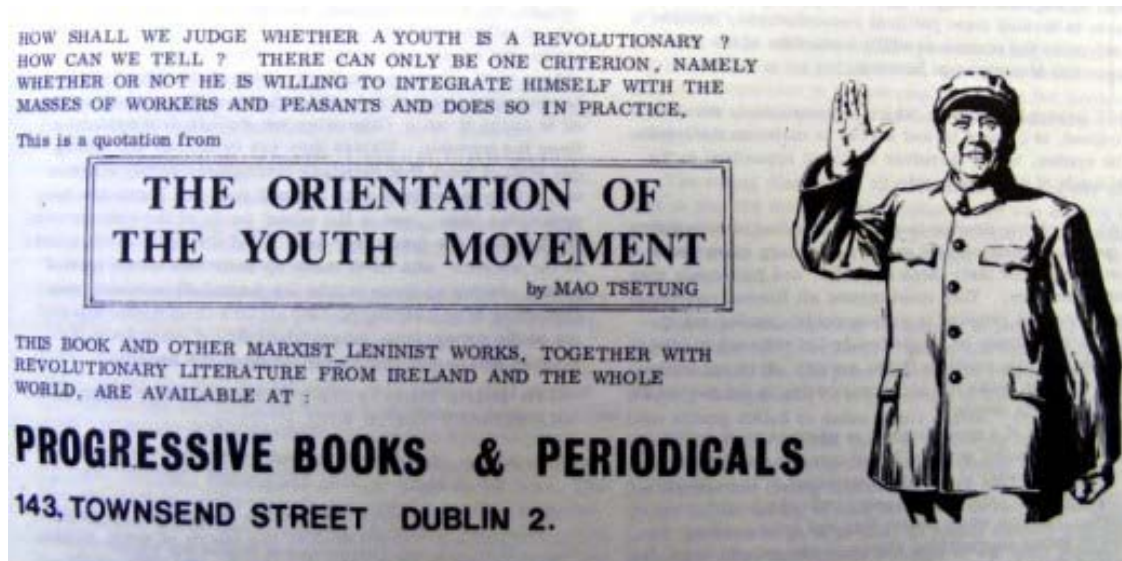
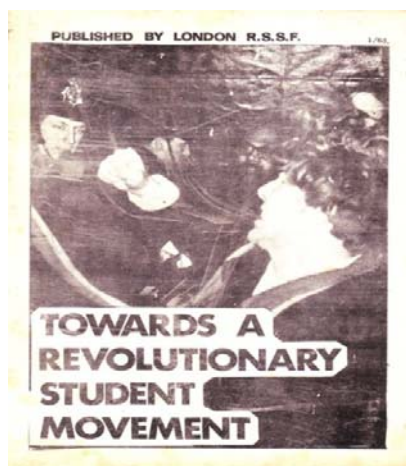


Figure 1 Advertisement carried by the Irish component of the Internationalist trend.

Those within **the Sussex Communist Caucus (ML)** argued that at this time.

“We must maintain a correct perspective. At present the proletarian forces in England are still weak. This is the stage of cadre and party-building.....Student political activity must, in its own area, be integrated with and brought into correct relation to the developing struggle of the working class, under proletarian leadership and discipline. There is a great difference between conducting intense anti-imperialist political struggles or exposing bourgeois culture or fighting for certain reforms, and giving the utopian impression that the class enemies can be defeated within an institution (university) that exists within imperialist society.”¹⁶

Ehrlich¹⁷ describes how on December 7th 1967 a meeting was called, to which about 60 people came. They set themselves up as RSSF’s national coordinating committee and elected officers. The maoists, New Left Review, some independents and several RSL and Communists attended. Most IS members absented themselves



January 1968 the London RSSF was created. Through the London RSSF, IS tried to pass political decisions which they had not been able to do through the head office. They antagonized themselves with the others in the London RSSF. By the second RSSF conference in November, the conflict between the maoists and IS had intensified and eventually IS withdrew from it. The maoists had meanwhile established a stronghold in the London RSSF. Here they introduced the manifesto and

nt: The Class Nature of Students. A Contribution from the Sussex Communist Caucus (ML)

ls/marxist/marxist-10.pdf

¹⁷ The Leninist Organisations in Britain and the Student Movement 1966-1972 - University of London, (1981)

constitution which they had proposed in the November Roundhouse conference for the national organization.

The Roundhouse conference was even more chaotic and sectarian than the previous one. It was considerably smaller; between 200 and 400 members from 80 institutions attended different sessions. The timing of this conference had been another cause for disagreement: IS argued for it to coincide with the Vietnam demonstration planned for the last week in October; they were out-voted by new left and Maoists. The argument for a serious working conference that was necessary meant it was held on 8-9 November 1968 at the Roundhouse in London. The press were excluded from its proceedings. With anarchists, Trotskyists, new leftists, situationists, old leftist all attending with contending maoist groups it is not surprising that a libertarian paper described the experience as a fiasco:

“One and a half days were devoted to empty theoretical debate in an atmosphere of violent sectarianism - often literally violent; the conference actually degenerated into a punch-up twice. The sectarianism was so absurd that the Maoists, already divided and subdivided, finally incurred another incurable split between those who call Mao "Chairman" and those who call him "comrade". Resolution after resolution, having neither meaning nor relevance to the practical political problems facing us today, was voted on solely according to the group which had proposed it.”¹⁸

“At the end of the conference, anarchists started to interrupt IS speakers, and then suddenly rushed to the platform. They overturned the chairman's table with a cry of "freedom", and fighting broke out on the platform and behind it. The chaos of the final half hour of the conference was a fitting ending.”¹⁹

The RSSF Manifesto, adopted by the Second RSSF Conference - London, 10 November 1968²⁰ was a compromise document that satisfied no one. The anarchists had proposed that there should be no manifesto. Three alternative manifestos had been suggested, each reflecting the political priorities of its sponsor: one by the RSL, another by the maoists and a third one which was an agreed compromise between the independents, IS and the NLR.

Ehrlich²¹ notes that “the basic compromise in the manifesto was between marxist-leninist notions and "new left" marcusian concepts. IS and other marxists demanded that RSSF should recognize "that the only social class in industrial countries capable of making the revolution is the working class". In return they conceded to the notion of the increasing integration of manual and mental labour which implied that students more and more resembled workers. Another concession was to the notion of "red bases", which was raised by the NLR and became the focus of debate in the next conference. The Communists, who backed the coalition against the maoists and the RSL, disagreed with the manifesto because it rejected parliamentary means to achieve its aims, and also because it stipulated that "existing political parties and trade unions cannot either structurally or politically sustain revolutionary socialist programmes". This excluded the Communists as a revolutionary organization, and was against their strategy of working within the trade unions and the NUS.”

¹⁸ The Shilling Paper, Cambridge, 15.11.1968 quoted in Ehrlich *The Leninist Organisations in Britain and the Student Movement 1966-1972* University of London, (1981)

¹⁹ J. Ritson, in *Vanguard* vol.6, no.1, 1969

²⁰ Published in the *New Left Review* 1/53, January-February 1969

²¹ *The Leninist Organisations in Britain and the Student Movement 1966-1972* - University of London (1981)

The maoists wanted RSSF to have a centralist, Leninist, Party like organization with a national council, executive committee and a general secretary. This saw RSSF as a revolutionary party, and was in accordance with the demands to have a wider programme and to include workers along with students. However the notion of the RSSF as the nucleus of the revolutionary party did not last long. A split occurred within the London RSSF executive committee, and the two factions expelled each other. "London RSSF" became two organizations, "London and Home Counties RSSF" and "London RSSF". Neither organization had more than a handful of members, and both were completely cut off from events in the universities. While the "London and Home Counties RSSF" disintegrated immediately, "London RSSF" sustained its existence. Its last major appearance was in November 1969, when seven hundred students and black people led by the London RSSF and Black Panther movement marched on the Department of Education and Science and then onto the American Embassy in protest at the increase charges placed on foreign students in the UK and in condemnation of the three year sentence given to Bobby Seale for contempt of court in Chicago.

Events elsewhere had also undermine participation in the RSSF. During Easter 1967 the forerunner of Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) (CPB (M-L)) was founded. Maoists who did not join the new party were grouped in another organization, the Joint Committee of Communists (JCC), which had student members in London and Sussex. Another active semi-maoist organization was the British Vietnam Solidarity Front (BVSF) led by Manchanda, leading figure of the Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist League (RM-LL). The RMLL also had a short existence in the federative organised JCC and was initially involved in the BMLO's preparatory work to the founding of the CPB (ML). The RMLL had recruited within the London RSSF including the convener, Edward Davoren, although when most of the London RSSF student activists joined the CPB (M-L) this brought an end to organized maoist intervention in the RSSF. The CPB (ML) was proving to be a pole of attraction for a coalescing movement marked by the proliferation of groups. The CPB (M-L) attracted many members from various other maoist groups; Camden Communist Movement members (Nick Bateson, dismissed from the LSE, Valerie Bateson and Iraqi-born Fawzi Ibrahim, later in the leadership of NATFHE, the lecturer's union formed the short-lived London Communist Group before joining in the spring of 1969, the CPB (ML). With its membership was a couple of hundreds, and it began to be the most significant ML group in the country.

At its June 1969 conference, its secretary attacked the student movement for its rejection of an organization. It is also necessary to combat the idea of no organization, that everybody will just "do their own thing" without any "bureaucratic" leadership, and that faced with this the whole international imperialist system will collapse like the walls of Jericho....

The anarchist concept of organization, apart *from* providing opportunities for petty despotism, unchallengeable because no official leadership exists, is no use whatsoever, unless it is faced with an anarchist police, army, government etc., as one of the key strengths of modern government is organization, the ability to rush police or troops to where they are needed, the ability to distort the facts by control of communications etc. etc. This can only be fought by a stronger organized force, that of the organized working class.

The maoists by this time had come to identify the revolutionary party with the CPB (M-L), and no longer with RSSF. They also rejected independent student work outside the party. If possible Marxist-Leninist students should set up M-L groups in their universities and colleges and they should conduct appropriate activity in their own right. These vanguard organizations will contain CPB (M-L) student members; however, no university branch as such should be constituted, for such an organization would have an inbuilt tendency toward reflecting the contradictions of its base Like the other groups, once the maoist student activists settled within what they regarded as their

revolutionary party, they changed their perspective of work within the student sector. Once the revolutionary party was in existence, there was no need to gain control of a one issue campaign (like the BVSF) or a sectoral organization and regard them as a party vehicle. The party was there and the problem was to bring people to it - to recruit.

As a leading CPB (ML) member emphasised, "I would like to stress the urgent task that confronts us all, workers and students alike - the development of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)."²²

RED BASES???

There was only a limited scope to what socialist students could do within the university. There was an ongoing debate between the New Left, IS and others on the Marxist Left about the revolutionary role of students. An idea developed of students and academics creating as "red base areas", utilising an inappropriate analogy from the Chinese Revolution, whereby campus revolutionaries could secure a base to support struggles in wider society or international solidarity campaigns and protests.

IS did not object to the term "red base", but they interpreted it to mean large and active socialist societies. A position which indicated strong influences of the academic Marcuse questioned whether workers were still the revolutionary class (opportunistically drawing upon some workers' support for Powell).

Those reading the writings of Gramsci, saw domination of the ruling classes in Britain in terms not only of force and naked repression, but of dissemination of culture and world view. They extended the meaning of political struggle and emphasized the need to fight bourgeois culture in all its manifestations. The universities were seen as the centres of transmission of this culture, and thus had a particular importance for the revolutionary struggle.

Some on the New Left argued that the Universities could be developed. The anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninist organisations were quick to point out the incoherent and often contradictory analysis of their ideological rivals in the student movement - I. S. and NLR.²³

The inappropriate analogy of "red bases", described as merely a flight of rhetoric:

"Red Bases in China were created by a few cadres led by Mao Tse-Tung when it had become clear that an urban revolution was not possible. The Bases were situated amongst the mass of the Chinese people, the peasants, were flexible in area and indeed location, were held militarily and were the basis of ideological work amongst the people. They were in time able to expand and link with others in order to surround the cities and thus complete the revolutionary overthrow of the Kuomintang regime. None of these factors obtain in Britain if the concept is applied to higher education. Furthermore the wild comparison of geographical inaccessibility of the Chinese bases from their ruling class and the sociological inaccessibility of the student movement from ours presumably pleased the author so much that he felt no need to defend it."

²² J. Hannington, "Integrate with the working class", *Revolution*, London RSSF, February 1970.

²³ Mauger, Sam (1969), *A Critique of the New Left Review and International Socialism: Assessments of the Present Student Movement. Towards A Student-Worker Alliance. Documents from the Joint Committee of Communists' Conference on the Student Movement*

There were institutional limitations to how far such secure bastions could be created and the focus and mobilisation of issues that students would respond to.

The "red base" debate did not lead anywhere except to expose the irreparable cleavage between the new left libertarian views and the marxist-leninists. In a report on the conference the national office group (close to the NLR-IMG) commented on the debate:

The longest session of the conference, on Red Bases, abstractly discussed the perspective to take on the student struggle in general. Far from developing theory it became clear that basic Marxist concepts such as "relative autonomy" and "structure/superstructure" were completely misunderstood and that many comrades hadn't started to realize that they even needed to understand them. The rhetoric rarely rose to the level of an exchange of ideas, the Manchardites (maoists) constantly restating the need for a "worker student alliance" without applying this concept, and the comrades from LSE denouncing each other for being petit bourgeois or adventurist.²⁴

A false dichotomy: Party Building vs Anti-Imperialism

Those limitations informed the analysis of the British anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninists. There was a strong subjective contribution to the differing approaches evident in the second wave of the movement. The internationalist and anti-imperialist sentiment expressed in campaigns involving the war in Vietnam and other struggles in the Global South (then described as the developing world) challenged the social democratic chauvinism of the Left. Solidarity with militant struggle and causes on the streets of London were frequent and they drew a minority radical commitment. The turnout for the Vietnam marches of 1967 and 1968 were not replicated for the mobilisation around Biafra struggle in Nigeria, or protests at the military coup in Greece.

The single issue protest cannot continue indefinitely mobilising people on issues without giving them a political perspective and linking them to the social forces that can make their aspirations reality. Otherwise, no matter how large, militant or imaginative, they will drift away.

As discussed in relation to the two organisations in solidarity with the Vietnamese, Vietnam Solidarity Campaign and the Maoist-led Britain-Vietnam Solidarity Front²⁵, the Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist League attempted to promote a strategy built solely around the issues of the national liberation struggle in Vietnam. Fellow activists criticised the RMLL for confusing about what constituted a broad front organisation of solidarity and the single issue campaign with the wider strategic task of building a revolutionary party. This was evident in the policy statement of the Britain-Vietnam Solidarity Front, which pledged the organisation to fight for the 'unity of the whole working class in defence of their living standards and democratic rights and in their struggle for social advance'. Such an approach was seen repeated again as with the Irish National Liberation Solidarity Front, North London Alliance and other occasions as the movement learnt how to work more appropriately and effectively in the broad movement and amongst the working class.

The emergence of the CPB (ML) illustrated the second subjective motivation that drove the development of the movement and coloured its attitude to the student movement. There was the

²⁴ "Fleet Street RSSF report on the RSSF conference in March", quoted in Erlich (1981)

²⁵ 1968, Grosvenor Square – that's where the protest should be made
<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.secondwave/grosvenor-square.pdf>

strong desire to build the Party. This deflected work towards the founding congress of the communist party, and a singular focus on that was raised when the argument for building on the activities of the Britain-Vietnam Solidarity Front were raised within the CPB (ML).

The recognition of the need to build up links with the working class and develop the internal contradiction between Labour and Capital on which the proletarian revolution in Britain will be based was wrongly placed in opposing contrast in the criticism adopted by the emerging leading force in the anti-revisionist Marxist Leninist trend, the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist).



CPB (ML), STUDENTS & THE CLASS WAR

The context of working in and towards the student movement was complicated when the attention and energy of activists was drawn towards the Provisional Committee of the British Marxist-Leninist Organisation established at the Conway Hall meeting of September 17, 1967. Coinciding with this development, was the ongoing campaigning activities and demands such as the Britain-Vietnam Solidarity Front.²⁶

For BVSF leader Manchanda active in the BMLO, that heavy involvement in Vietnam solidarity work was not

reciprocated or appreciated as an area
Within the BMLO there was a

"Students are apprentices too." of mass work.
reluctance to

engage in, or build upon that activism came from the top: the leading figure of trade union leader Reg Birch was dismissive of the student radicalism, quoted by Manchanda as arguing that Marxist-Leninists had a singular focus, and that, "Working on Vietnam is not all that important for the building of the Party. Anyway, the British working class has not been involved in the various activities organised by the students"²⁷

The attempt to organise a public BVSF meeting prior to the Easter Congress was vetoed by the BMLO leadership. Furthermore, "When it was pointed out that we should initiate involving the workers in the Vietnam solidarity movement and to start with the A.E.U. [Amalgamated Engineering Union] comrades, and raise the struggle from the economic to political level, there was a lot of resistance from comrades Ted Roycroft and Terry Thomas. I was told that I did not understand the situation in the A.E.U." Manchanda's political orientation would not flourish in the new organisation, nor did he stay long in the organisation after raising criticism of its core support group.

That necessity for students to be integrated with working class struggles was the explicit core of the analysis publicised by the CPB (ML). Its student members positively sung the virtue of the organisation:

²⁶ Another factor for those communists, like Manchanda, with dual membership of organisations who were "facing a serious situation in the Association of Indian Communists which got split as a result of the influence and direct interference of the revisionist leadership of the Communist Party of India." <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.secondwave/68-memorandum.pdf>

²⁷ <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.secondwave/68-memorandum.pdf>

“we are confident that we as students with the leadership of the Party can play our part in the struggle of our class to smash capitalism and build socialism.”²⁸

The 1975 introduction to the pamphlet stated,

“Without a clear understanding of basic questions – where do students stand in today’s society, what contributions can they make, how should they strive to develop their struggle and with what sort of perspective? – we will hesitate and flounder in confusion. And the capitalist class will gain and keep the initiative, forcing us into a passive situation.”

“.....students must have a clear understanding of their position in Britain, examine their contradiction as a force with the ruling class and capitalism, understand the need for the leadership and organisation of the true Marxist-Leninist Party involved in this student struggle, and how this fight is to be developed so that students see it as a component part of the fight of the entire working class, the force that alone can destroy capitalism.”

The CPB (ML) analysis reduced the argument to a key proposition that students on leaving college will have to sell their labour power on the labour market.

The attitude towards students was more traditional of the Left than, and not as flattering as, the “New Left” regarding students as a new vanguard. Students were seen as part of the productive capacity that capitalism seeks to isolate from the working class. The skills developed in higher education would be taken and regenerate the whole intellectual strength of the working class by placing it at the service of the class and the advancement of knowledge. It was less a worker-student alliance than a reabsorption into the class struggle.

“Students and graduates are NOT privileged in any sense, whether by money or by social class. As for being privileged by having “received an education”, education is an investment for the ruling class, no more, no less. They make money out of having educationally skilled wage slaves in exactly the same way as having technically skilled engineers, printers etc. This is the only reason a section of the working class is given these skills.”²⁹

“The fruits of political work among students does not stop within the college; it is carried into the many areas of the working class that students pass into. Correct political work in the colleges can help prepare many for a continuation of the class struggle and be a valuable contribution to building our revolutionary Party. We are not playing at a game and being revolutionaries for three years. Students will learn if they haven’t already that education is not a privilege, but that they are in training for employment as wage-slaves. Our task is to develop this particularly force ideologically and so contribute to the revolutionary awakening of the working class as a whole.”³⁰

That conclusion from the 1st edition of “*Students into Class Struggle*” still reflected the emphasis on students integrating with the working class, and some indications of the sentiment that,

“Students should welcome that they are becoming part of the working class, the force for revolution, which in Britain has had a long experience of struggle. Not to accept it would be an evil.”³¹

²⁸ CPB (ML) 1971. *Students Into Class Struggle*

²⁹ CPB(ML)*Grants Autonomy* n.d. 1975? p3

³⁰ CPB(ML), *Students into Class Struggle* 1971, p 10

³¹ CPB (ML), *Students into Class Struggle* 1971, p 4

What was to become almost a manta in the speeches and publications of the CPB (ML) was that "Britain has the oldest and the most experienced proletariat in the world. When the proletariat flexes its muscles, capital quakes."³²

With the apocalypse analysis of "the absolute decline of capitalism in Britain - a decline brought about by the strength of our working class",³³ education was seen as part of the struggle for the future, "essential for the dignity and advance of the working class"³⁴

"The destruction of skill and industry necessary to cow the class, to sap its ability to resist, is one and the same as the destruction of the class; it is an onslaught on people on workers, for therein lies our skill and industry. Thus education is for the ruling class an aspect of that dignity which is the antithesis of that they seek to create.

It must be destroyed. Hence the cuts.... This strategy is nothing less than counter revolution to forestall revolution."³⁵

"the beginning of the Renaissance of the working class, began with the birth of the Communist party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). It began with the line of guerrilla struggle"³⁶ Such a struggle could not be accomplished without "our Party", without scientific theory.

Higher education, it was acknowledged, was also a centre of bourgeois ideology: "This is not to say that knowledge itself is ideology, but rather to say that all knowledge must be used ideologically."³⁷

Adopted at the Second Congress of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) April, 1971, the Party programme, *The British Working Class and its Party*, stated:

"The working class lives in a state of perpetual guerrilla conflict with the employers..... To say students must go into the factories to integrate with the workers is patronising. Equally, to define white-collar and professional workers as petty bourgeois is adolescent and reactionary. In this, the oldest and most proletarianised of capitalist countries, all the intermediate classes left over by feudalism have been absorbed into the proletariat, as the peasantry. There are more and more white collar workers in industry and latterly there has been a growing trade union development among teachers, draughtsmen, scientific workers and others. They have fought against classification as bosses men and for equality gradings with industrial workers..... It follows that we must recruit from these skilled class warriors and that the party must be made up in cadre force overwhelmingly of these leaders, follows also that we have the task of assisting them in strategy and tactics, in the analyses that will create such action, for there is no such thing as a hand-picked natural Marxist."³⁸

³² CPB (ML) *Students into Class Struggle* 1974. 2nd ed. p19

³³ CPB (ML) *Higher Education* n.d. 1975?

³⁴ CPB (ML) *Education* n.d. 1974? p8

³⁵ CPB (ML) *Higher Education* n.d. 1975? p7

³⁶ CPB (ML) *Higher Education* n.d. 1975? p15

³⁷ CPB (ML) *Higher Education* n.d. 1975? p9

³⁸ CPB (ML) *The British Working Class and its Party* 1971



Commenting on the forced closure of the London School of Economics, *The Worker*, observed,

“As long as the universities are controlled and financed by the capitalist class, backed by the state power of their police, courts, laws, grants, committee, etc, they will be reactionary, will serve imperialism, will teach self-interest and careerism, will deny higher education to the working class, will perpetuate bourgeois ideology and culture, will divorce education from class struggle and the needs of the working people.”³⁹

Reference to student militancy; “Since October 1968, a number of LSE students and staff, with several Marxist-Leninists in the vanguard, have conducted a campaign to expose LSE’s ties with British imperialism....”an anti-imperialist struggle was waged against Walter Adams, who was imported from Rhodesia to take up the post of Director of LSE.”⁴⁰

Still the vulnerability of their positions as students and staff was demonstrated in the sacking of Lecturers, Nicholas Bateson (who went onto join the CPB (ML)) and New Left thinker, Robin Blackburn.

May 1969 produced the Draft Analysis of the Student Movement in the Universities as the main discussion paper for a study session involving militant student leaders from Sussex, Oxford, LSE. They met with industrial workers and trade union officials and agreed that while the student movement was progressive, it could only become revolutionary when united with the working masses. A report, carried in **The Worker July 1969**, described “the principal current task of Marxist-Leninists in the student movement was the recruitment of a limited number of cadres to act as a vanguard.” It explained the absence of “a mass revolutionary student movement” due to a lack of “any intense history of struggle in the British universities over the past decade, and a higher proportion of students of petty-bourgeois origin”.⁴¹

Dismissive of seemingly revolutionary phrases like ‘student power’ and ‘university red bases’ as eventually leading to collaboration with the ruling authorities, the session concluded,

“Pure student demands for an ideal academically free university (even when they are couched in pseudo-revolutionary terms, such as university red bases) should be resolutely opposed, since their

³⁹ *The Worker* March 1969 p4

⁴⁰ *The Worker* March 1969 p4

⁴¹ *The Worker* July 1969

aim is to consolidate the position of students as a petty-bourgeoisie elite....In this context the role of revisionists and trotskyites as misleaders of the student movement was examined."⁴²

Basically the role of students must be understood in relation to the class forces in action and the objective position of the students themselves. Students are not a class and whatever the particular class origins of students may be, they are trained to take a particular role in bourgeois society.

Students should "identify their future interest with that of the proletariat. This means placing their movement within that of the vanguard of the revolutionary working class, with its party."

"The party is the only political and organisational form that can link together all revolutionary struggles in order to smash the monopoly capitalist state."

Leading CPB (ML) member, John Hannington – shop stewards convener, AEF – told a conference of the London Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation, that "there is no such thing as a student/worker alliance".⁴³ Describing it as a half-baked theory and hollow slogan, he called for worker/student integration, stating: "Our party, the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) has set itself the task of building a revolutionary party embracing workers and students." It was as party members that students were said to be able to fulfil a revolutionary role. It was not the social category of student that was relevant, it was the political identification and commitment to the working class as embodied in its party that was the deciding factor.

There was a direct appeal for students to join the CPB (ML) on *The Worker's* front-page editorial in September 1970 entitled: *Youth, the World Is Yours*.

"Already students are beginning to realise that it is not just the education system that is wrong but the profit-grubbing society it reflects, and that society can only be changed by the working class."

"What we have to offer is Marxism-Leninism the thought of Mao Tsetung, that is to say scientific socialism, which must be applied to the concrete conditions in Britain so that here, too, the profit system can be smashed and socialism established. We ask you to join us now in the great social adventure of that application."

The bulk of London RSSF members did go on to join the CPB (ML)

"One thing you can be sure of – the British working class will not be led by students" – John Hannington, *The Worker* April 1970. That sentiment challenged any "New Left" notion of the students as a vanguard force and took issue with the idea of a 'worker-student alliance'. Instead the CPB (ML), true to its social base, argued that,

"we must dispense with notions that have wreaked much confusion, the notions that students are middle class or indeed classless. The supporting argument to these notions is that students are privileged because they are getting education and also because of the opportunities it opens up in the way of employment and job."

This position, an application of the line of the Party embodied in its Programme "*The British Working Class and Its Party*", asked,

"What is the actual position of students in this the oldest and most proletarianised of capitalist countries, Britain? Britain has only two classes – those who sell their labour power and those who exploit the labour of others. All those intermediate classes, such as the peasantry, that were left

⁴² *The Worker* July 1969

⁴³ *The Worker* April 1970 p4

over from feudalism have been absorbed into the proletariat. Students do not own the means of production and are not going to exploit the labour of others.”

This idea of a salaried proletariat was based on an economistic reductionism that underplayed the class role of – to them the , non-existent intermediate strata that students were more likely to enter once graduated. The CPB (ML) blinkered analysis insisted,

“After finishing their education students are going to be wage slaves of capitalism, generally in the white-collar and professional areas where recently a growing trade union development has occurred, among draughtsmen, technicians, scientific workers, teachers to name but a few. Many students are already seeing that they will be wage earners pure and simple, and often badly paid at that.”⁴⁴

Indeed, even contradictory analysis point out that “capitalism had need of it, it needed skilled workers, scientific and research workers, and people to be cogs in the ever growing bureaucracy and administration and for the professional ranks” however an understanding of the role within society cannot be reduced to a simple equation that “students do not own the means of production and are not going to exploit the labour of others” is contradicted in the lived experiences and practices of those who “entered the arena of class politics”. What is missing is any consideration about social relations: class isn’t just economic: it is social, political and cultural, and it forms your outlook on life. There was a strong element of wishful thinking in the distorted analysis of the CPB (ML) that failed to address the many contradictions and influences at work in capitalist society. It was a politics of dogmatic certainties:

“There are only two classes in Britain. If further proof is needed, tomorrow will furnish it. Workers, be they ‘white’ or ‘blue’ collar, because they are workers and cannot survive except by selling their labouring power, because the governing class must attack us in order to ensure its own continuation, must and will come to understand this.”⁴⁵

Outside of the CPB(ML) there emerged trenchant critiques of its politics, and that what it offered student and worker alike was “that in reality the CPB (ML) proposes nothing more than militant trade unionism.”⁴⁶

The newly emergent second wave of anti-revisionist marxist-leninists may have been rooted in the student radicalism of the late 1960s but they never consolidated a presence within the student movement. There was the occasional office holder (as with undeclared CPB(ML) supporters at Regent Street polytechnic in the 1970s) and prowling activists from the Workers’ Institute at Student Unions advertising their meetings, but after the initial rush, the various groups did not have a sustain recruitment of students to replenish their ranks. That neglect had negative long-term consequence for the movement. The occasional student recruit would find their way to groups now firmly engaged in an attempt to be relevant and proletarian, orientated to integration with the working class. The Seventies, for the majority of student revolutionaries who stayed the course,

⁴⁴ As later internal critics were to suggest, an apt description of its own membership; see CWM. The “CPB (ML)” and the “two class” line (Part two) *Party Line* No.2 1980

⁴⁵ CPB (ML) White Collar – a myth destroyed, a class made stronger (1973?)

⁴⁶ Communist Unity Association (Marxist-Leninist), [Economism or Revolution? A Critique of the Communist Party of Britain \(M-L\)](#) August 1973.

came to be characterised by the idea of industrial base-building in all its varieties, and varying degrees of success.