

NO CLASS TODAY NO RULING CLASS TOMORROW



LESSONS OF THE STUDENT STRIKE

ROOT & BRANCH
A new magazine and Pamphlet Series

ROOT & BRANCH is written by and for participants in the movement for a new society. It will publish material on the development of contemporary society and the problems thus posed to the movement; on social movements here and abroad; on past movements and the lessons to be drawn from them.

All material will be informed by four perspectives:

- 1) Every social movement is a response of its members to their conditions within present day society. Socialism can only come about as a result of their understanding that their needs can be met only by their collectively taking control of their own activity.*
- 2) Every social movement reveals evidence of this process. It is such elements - forshadowing the complete self-determination of a socialist society - which we hope to aid.*
- 3) The objective of the radical movement is the direct control of social institutions by those in whose activities they consist. The effort of any organization to substitute its control of society for this is a distortion of the movement.*
- 4) The movement is only weakened by attempts to impose intellectual orthodoxy, fixed ideas, and slogans without clear meaning upon it.*

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NO CLASS TODAY NO RULING CLASS TOMORROW

The student upheaval of May, 1970 marks a decisive change in the development of American social forces. It is essential to understand what happened, so that when the movement opens up again, tens of thousands of people will know how to push it still further.

The May movement was no mere protest against the invasion of Cambodia. The Cambodian action was the pre-text for action because it embodies everything that the students have learned to hate: the making of life-and-death decisions by a handful of men at the top; deceit; imperialism; racism; violence. The students' instinctive reaction was to seize the only locus of power available to them, their universities, and to fight - with force if necessary - against the police, National Guard, and other instruments of state violence which tried to break them.

JUST OUT

ROOT & BRANCH Pamphlet 1

WORKERS COUNCILS

by Anton Pannekoek

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In the midst of the strike, a U.S. Congressman said that there must be a conspiracy behind the student actions, for how else could hundreds of thousands of students conduct the same kinds of struggle around the same basic demands on hundreds of different campuses?

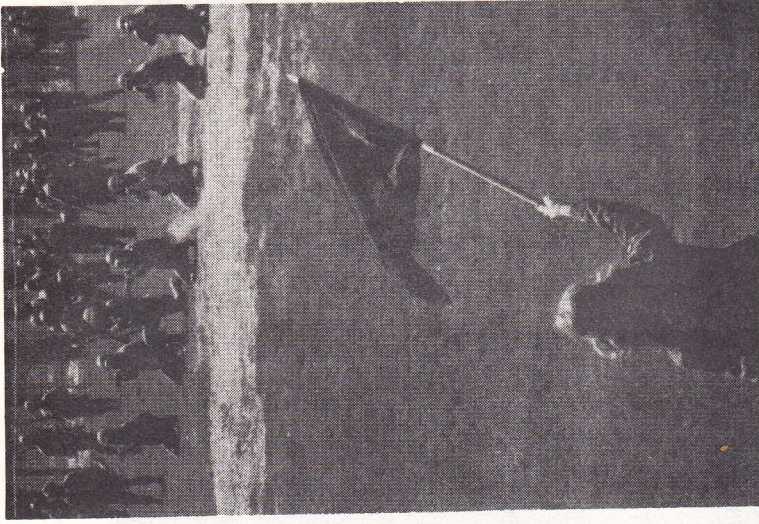
Of course, everyone who participated in the May movement knows there was no conspiracy behind it, not even a centralized leadership; rather, the strike was a spontaneous and elemental response to contemporary American life, as embodied in the war (the Cambodian invasion) and oppression (the Panther trials). Yet the nature of the student strike will

be difficult to understand, not only for those in power who believe that when the masses act there must be a conspiracy behind them, but also by those on the left who believe that only a centralized organization can lead mass struggles.

Who were the real leaders of the May strike? They were the Yale students who struck and occupied their campuses for several weeks before the strike became national. They were the Kent State students who out-fought the police, and then out-fought the National Guard until the latter resorted to murder. They were the tens of thousands of students on hundreds of campuses who took the initiative and struck, in response to the invasion of Cambodia, the Panther trial, and the killings at Kent State. Their leadership created a movement a hundred times more significant than anything that could have been done by a 'vanguard' party or by those who put themselves forward as 'leaders and spokesmen.'

The student strike represents a type of struggle which has not been seen in the US for more than thirty years. The most important thing about it was that it was 'out of control'; there were no leaders who controlled it - which is to say, the people who acted themselves controlled the strike. Of course, the school administrations, self-appointed spokesmen, and the like come eventually to re-establish control of the students, but for virtually a week the students collectively controlled their own activity and their own campuses.

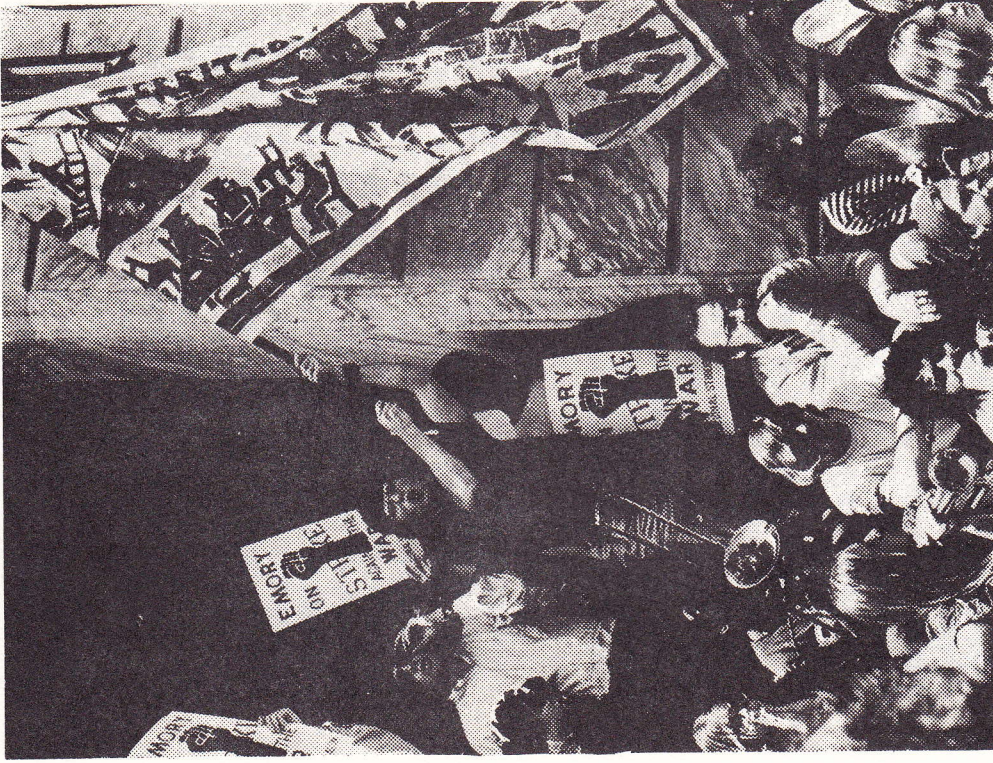
Virtually all organizations that existed before May proved irrelevant to the strike at best, and often were actually retarding and disorganizing forces. At New Haven, some energy was fruitlessly put into pressuring the Trotskyist-controlled Student Mobilization Committee to stop refusing to call a student strike. (This tiny example shows how the as-



sumption that masses must wait for organized 'vanguard' groups to lead them serves to retard mass initiative.) Fortunately, the students at New Haven realized that they could act on their own, and proceeded to create and spread the strike call. The SMC tried to recoup by calling a meeting in Washington to coordinate the strike nationally. The meeting collapsed from a combination of contentiousness and irrelevance to the struggle, though the organization has continued to attempt to exploit the strike for its own ends.

The National Student Association immediately put itself forward as spokesman for the student strike, and was accepted as such by much of the press. They played down what was most significant in the strike, and portrayed it as a sort of super-moratorium protest. Meanwhile, they tried to channel it back to 'relevance' to the political system, with such harebrained programs as the demand that Congressmen be forced to stay in Washington until they 'did something' about the war - at the very point when the death of Congress as a political force was most apparent.

The New Mobe called for a march on Washington in response to the Cambodian invasion before the student strike was under way. The original intention was to march near the White House without permission, thus presumably forcing mass arrests. Nixon foxed the New Mobe by granting permission at the last minute, hiding troops away inside of buildings, and giving strict instructions to the police to avoid provoking the crowd until nightfall. The march was thus transformed into a super-picnic, and formed an important conduit for the reintegration of the strike movement into protest politics. Most Mobe leaders had sincerely hoped for a more militant challenge, but the legal and marshall apparatus, combined with the expectation of the crowd that the word on militant action would come down from above prevented such action from occurring. It is clear that from here on in the New Mobe



can only be a drag on the level of struggle.

The main issue here is not so much the specific limitations of the New Move, as the unsuitability for development of radical activity inherent in a 'mass movement' in which the connection between the individuals making up the mass exists only through their shared relation to a central direction. The important contrast is not that between 'bad' and 'good' ('liberal' and 'radical') central leadership, but that between a movement organized and assigned actions and targets by a central group, and a movement which creates forms of organization necessary to collectively taking decisions and carrying them out. In the first case, the 'center' is not even really a center (of an organic whole) but an apparatus external to the movement itself. In the second - realized to some extent in the student strike - the organizational principle is not the concentration of decision-making but the fostering of the development of initiative throughout the totality of the people involved.

The two main issue orientations within the left that preceeded the strike also proved to be disorganizing forces. One of them - expounded by Trotskyists and liberals - is that peace in Vietnam is the only issue around which a majority can potentially be mobilized, and therefore other issues should not be raised. This argument is used - in the name of unity - to try to split off the radical leftwing of the movement. On the other hand, there is an important segment of the left which has tried to make support of the Black Panther Party the primary issue for the left. Again in the name of unity (this time with the blacks), they aim to split off the right wing of the movement by demanding priority for the Panther issue. Although both groups fought out this issue everywhere, large numbers of the strikers supported all three demands from the beginning, and understood that they are closely related. As political consciousness spread, more and more peo-

ple moved in this direction. The objective of radicals should have been to broaden the goals of the strike to reflect the interests of even wider groups (especially white workers), not to try to narrow them.

If the old organizations and forms proved irrelevant, what forms of organization emerged from the strike itself?

The strike call came out of an informally-called meeting at the New Haven rally, to which about 1,000 people came. They drew up the demands, then broke up into regional groups to fan out and spread word of the strike around the country. The strike idea was approved by the cheers of the New Haven crowd.

Here already we see the most important principle of the strike: people taking responsibility for executing action that they realize is necessary. This taking of responsibility likewise marked the spread of the strike. Strike committees formed spontaneously on hundreds of campuses and simply began organizing the strike, in response to Cambodia, the New Haven strike call, and the action of students elsewhere. Their principle was not to wait for a majority before calling a strike, but through action to win a majority for the strike.

As the strike took shape, elected strike committees began to replace the original ones. This process was not completed generally, however, and in this lay a serious limitation of the strike. As often in such phenomena, the radical content of the action was far in advance of the students' understanding of what they were doing. This in turn limited the full realization of perspectives which had been opened up. For instance, students who had in effect gone beyond dependence on authorities to take direct control of their own workplaces spent their time urging people to 'pressure' political

authorities or canvassing for 'peace' politicians. (In some leaflets distributed to workers in Cambridge, Mass. the contradiction was developed to a surrealistic height, with the coupling of a call for a general strike with appeals for telegrams to congressmen!) In the same way, students allowed the reproduction within the strike of the very forms of social organization of which the strike was a negation, in the emergence (in the shape of strike committees) of a special body of administrators. Nonetheless, at the same time, thousands of students began to take responsibility for the various tasks required by the strike - provisioning, canvassing the community, picket lines, dorm committees, liaison, and the like.

Worth noting was the relationship to the strike of groups engaged in strictly illegal activities. They kept in touch with the strike steering committees, but did their work privately and on their own responsibility. This provides an experience and a model that will be useful if and when the movement is forced to develop illegal and underground forms of organization.

The students did not turn to the old organizational networks - N.S.A., Y.S.A., P.L., etc. - for coordination. Brandeis students created a strike communications center whose legitimacy was accepted everywhere - except by certain sectarian groups - because it took the non-sectarian principle of spreading the strike as its objective, and communicated all information pertaining to that goal. Any communications operation based on a narrower principle would have been ignored and considered illegitimate by the strikers. City-wide and regional coordinating committees developed spontaneously. The strike became better coordinated as information flowed so that exemplary action in one place was quickly learned of and applied elsewhere. It is this real coordination in action which counts, not formal organization.

Of course, the students by themselves could not maintain a sustained break with the legal and orderly processes of everyday life. As long as business-as-usual continued

for the rest of society, the pressures to get credit for the year's schoolwork, to avoid arrests and jail sentences, not to mention injury and death at the hands of state power - these pressures were bound to be irresistible for the majority of students.

It is at this point - when the strike disintegrates - that the leftwing sects and the liberals move in to compete for the remainder. The sects now appear again as vanguards, since the masses formerly ahead of them are disappearing. Discouragement with the limitations of the strike leads particularly to a return to liberal protest - electoral campaigns and the rest. Liberal college administrations do everything possible to encourage this route.

Tactically, radicals should aim to make the holding of university turf - even when this is unacceptable to public officials - a part of the program for student protest during the period of ebbing radicalism. But we should keep in mind that only the exercise of real social power by students and workers can seriously shake the system, and this can only occur when the crisis reopens. That recurrence, however, is now inevitable.

The political and military stability of the Saigon regime will again become doubtful if more and more US troops are withdrawn. Pressures for a final solution in Vietnam mount - making resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam, use of tactical nuclear weapons, and provocation of war with China ever more likely. The economy will continue to decline at home, turning more and more sectors of the population against Nixon, the war, and the status quo. And Nixon's political isolation - already comparable to Lyndon Johnson's in 1968 - will continue to grow. The Cambodian invasion has undermined public faith that Nixon is ending the war. The massive protest against it destroys Nixon's claim to be reestablishing national unity. Given his constantly narrowing base of social support, Nixon will be forced more and

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more into military and police solutions at home. When the crisis reopens, people everywhere must take responsibility and act.

Can the strike spread? The press seized with glee upon an incident in New York City, where about 400 construction workers broke through police lines at City Hall and attacked student militants. They were not so vocal about the two unidentified men in business suits who led the attackers, nor about the fact that the workers' hostility was directed as much toward Mayor Lindsay's regime as toward the students. The press attempted to make this attack appear the typical working-class response to the student strike, without indicating either that the construction trades have been a relatively privileged fraction of the working class, or that this position is now in great danger of being undermined, a situation which if anything has reinforced their traditional bigotedness.

In fact, reports from around the country indicate that the May events marked a sea-change in the attitudes of American workers, especially young workers. Student canvassers were well received at factory gates in the Cambridge, Mass. area, despite traditional town-gown resentment, and the same seems to have been the case elsewhere. The toughness of the student action, far from arousing law-and-order sentiment among workers, seems to have made the students credible as something more than spoiled brats. In Washington, D.C., V-signs, clenched fists, smiles, and words of encouragement were given to strikers repeatedly by truck and taxi drivers, parking lot attendants, and the like. Many more white and blue-collar workers took part in local marches around the country than ever before.

Reports came from all over of workers who wanted to go out in support of the strike. A group of auto work-

ers in Framingham, Mass. called for a sick-out against the war, and similar attempts were widespread. A number of wildcats were reprinted from Long Island, N.Y. and Providence, Mass. Before May, even the idea that workers would come out in support of a student action would have seemed ridiculous; what is surprising is not that they failed to do so this time, but that in so many places they even talked about doing so. A ferment has been started which will continue to deepen as long as the present crisis continues.

The strike has also created a much better basis for student support of workers - if the students will use it. It is disturbing, for instance, that there has been little support evident for the wildcat teamster and postal strikes. Now, however, students should be able to understand the importance of supporting such actions. It would be of great value if informal student task forces were formed in each university or city to aid local striking workers, including both mobilizing student support and, when useful, engaging in direct action of various kinds. In addition, the contacts between students and workers that have emerged from the strike should be kept up through discussions, personal contacts, opening campus housing to young workers, etc.

There are several levels on which the student movement and developments among workers will tend to converge.

1) The immediate economic burden of the war on the working class grows heavier and heavier. Real wages have been declining since the escalation of the war in 1965. Now unemployment zooms while prices continue to soar. The fact that war spending now hurts rather than helps the economy undermines the working class's integration into the military system. In the past, workers like businessmen have happily supported rising war orders as an antidote to rising unemployment; now war production is clearly no solution. As the economy continues to decline, workers will find their immediate

economic interests uniting them with the students in opposition to the war.

Unemployment will especially affect youth. Older workers with seniority will have considerable job security unless a real depression develops, while younger workers will be laid off and unable to find jobs. Unemployment may also radicalize the hippie communities, which are dependent for support on marginal jobs for which competition will increase as they become more scarce. Even students leaving college with advanced degrees are having a hard time getting jobs this Spring.

2) The labor movement as a whole is breaking out of its conservative integration into the American status quo and becoming more militant. Meanwhile the trade unions' protected position is under attack - even a liberal business publication like *Business Week* is calling for repeal of the Wagner Act, with its protection of collective bargaining. 1970 may be shaping up as the greatest strike wave since 1946.

3) There are many signs that general fed-upness and rebelliousness is spreading beyond the campus, particularly to working class youth. The most striking indication of this is the series of high school revolts which have swept around the country over the past year, culminating in many high school strikes in May. Another is the widespread impatience of young workers with 'orderly collective bargaining' reported by trade union leaders, and the rising wave of wildcats sparked by young workers. Actions like the May student strike help surface and crystallize this spirit; rebellion is infectious.

4) The student strike and the independent actions of the workers share the same rejection of bureaucratic leaders and express the same idea of keeping control of the struggle in the hands of the strikers themselves. Only this kind of struggle can overcome the cynical view that everybody is just out for himself, that political struggle is useless because it will



just install new corrupt leaders in place of the old ones.

5) As long as the student movement remained on the level of protest politics, it could make no sense to the great majority of working-class Americans who understand without the help of any radical organizers that the real decisions are made by the big men, and that attempts to influence them by ordinary people are pointless. The student strike, on the other hand, represents an effort to use students' real social power - just the way workers do when they strike. For that reason, it gives an example to workers of the form their action can take when they are ready to intervene in political affairs.

The movement will continue, at some level, through the Summer and into the reopening of the schools in the Fall. When it will open up again on the scale of May cannot be foretold.

That it will, seems certain. The problem is *not*, to have an organization prepared for action at that point - the strikers will have to create their own organizations when they are ready to move, and they will be able to do so just as they did in May. What is needed is an understanding among all of those who will compose the movement of what is necessary, of what they want to happen. The following points are offered as a basis for discussion by all looking towards future action:

1) Bases of operations such as universities, schools, public buildings, TV and radio stations, factories, and offices must be occupied at the start of the movement and defended through mass action and control of hostage equipment.

2) The slogan should be, 'This time everybody's going to strike.' Only a general strike has the power to stop the war and oppression machine. Student strikes should not be seen simply as an end in themselves, but as a way of creating a basis for others to act. We must argue that 'Everybody knows that the war and the madmen in Washington must be stopped. People cannot let the students stand up and get shot down unaided for taking up a responsibility everyone should share.'

3) Control of the action should be kept in the hands of the strikers themselves. Issues of the strike should be debated and decided by all the strikers. Groups engaged in various activities should meet regularly for collective discussion of their work and its political basis. Mass meetings, so long used either as forums for competing sects or for exercises in an empty 'parliamentary democracy', should be used for reports to all the strikers of the work of the smaller groups (including traditional political groups as well as task-oriented action committees), political discussion of the strike, invitations to participate in specific actions, etc.

Strike coordinating committees for colleges, schools, factories, offices, etc. should be elected by the various groups of strikers, subject to instant recall by them, with new elections every few days as long as the strike continues, to keep them representative of current sentiment. City or regional coordinating councils should represent these elected strike committees for purposes of information exchange over a broader area. Only such a structure will prohibit the emergence of a strike bureaucracy. This is an evil not simply in itself, but because it destroys the collective taking of responsibility and control which is the heart and energy-source of the strike.

4) On the campus, and as far beyond as the strike spreads, the strikers and their organs should act consciously as legitimate authority in conflict with the authority-system of the politicians and administrators who will oppose them. The strike derives its legitimacy not from recognition by representatives of the old order, but from the participation of the strikers in the creation of a new order.

5) The goals and demands of the strike should be universalized. That is to say, different groups should be encouraged to join the strike in order to press their own demands. The seeds of this process could already be seen in May; for example, Women's Liberation in Washington, D.C. put out a call for working women to strike against the constant indignities of their daily work, as well as in support of the students' demands.

The three demands of the May strike reflected the now obvious interrelatedness between the issues of the war, campus war-work, and repression of dissenters. As the deepening crisis widens the basis of the movement, the extent to which all major issues affecting different sectors of the population are related, as facets of the same system, will become clearer. It is exactly this grasping of the total nature

of the change that is necessary that will bring this change about. As the demands of the strike become wider, the impossibility of achieving them within the existing framework of society becomes more evident - and the possibility of achieving them through the united action of broader and broader masses of people becomes apparent.

**IF STUDENTS STRIKE ...
THERE IS NO SCHOOL.
IF WORKERS STRIKE ...
THERE IS NO WAR.**