

Campus Work

I. Theoretical Perspective

Students and Social Class

In general, students at a university campus (as opposed to a junior college, for example) are part of the petty bourgeoisie, because of their family background and the kinds of jobs they are being trained for. Lenin defines a class as a large group of men [and women] distinguished by, 1) the place they occupy in an historically given system of social production, 2) by the relations they have with the means of production, 3) by their role in the social organization of labor, and 4) consequently by the way in which they receive that part of the social property they possess and the quantity of it that they receive. [Lenin, *The Great Initiative*.]

The class background of most university students is either "classical" petty bourgeoisie--from families that own small industries or establishments--or "new" petty bourgeoisie--managers, engineers and others engaged in managing or organizing the labor process. We also include in this new petty bourgeoisie most of the intelligentsia--doctors, lawyers, professors, journalists, etc. These are the occupations that most university students are being trained for.

We do not deny the fact that many university students, because of the economic crisis, are headed for the working

class, and particularly the clerical sectors of the working class; we simply believe that their orientation and their aspirations are overwhelmingly petty bourgeois. This new petty bourgeoisie, though many of its members do not own their own means of production, is distinguished from clerical sectors of the working class by the degree of control over their own work and sometimes the work of others, by the larger (sometimes much larger) portion of the social product that they receive, and often by their direct role in administering bourgeois institutions or defending and spreading bourgeois ideology. The income level of the families of university students is very high, as demonstrated by a sample of 165 students at the UC-Irvine campus: 20% of their parents earn over \$50,000 per year; 50% earn over \$25,000, and only 5% earn less than \$10,000 per year.

Another aspect of the students' objective situation is the fact that they are temporarily divorced from production, that is, their situation is transitional (moving toward, but not actually *in* any given class.) This transitional situation allows them to develop some intellectual distance from the everyday world. This can be both a strength and a weakness. The strength lies in their potential to see and study the contradictions of imperialism and monopoly capitalism. Realizing

this potential depends on their own initiative, on the level of struggle in the area, and on their contact with revolutionaries and Marxist-Leninists, either students or professors on campus, or cadres off campus. At the present there are very few revolutionary professors or other cadres, and the level of struggle is very low. Thus, the majority of students receive a totally bourgeois education. This is precisely what the universities in a monopoly capitalist country are designed to do: students are taught bourgeois ideology and liberal social theory in dozens of unacknowledged forms, and they are sometimes taught extremely reactionary forms of practice for their careers--such as behavior modification.

This transitional situation is also a weakness. The principal contradiction of the students' situation is the conflict between their class base and their ideological potential. The class base--especially in the absence of a revolutionary party--gives the student movement an extremely unstable and vacillating character. At one moment, students can be very active and energetic, such as the nation-wide Cambodia strike of 1970, and at another moment, extremely cynical, self-absorbed and withdrawn from struggle. Withdrawal and cynicism have been the major tendency of the student movement since 1970. At this time, the class base is the principal aspect of the contradiction, and there is a renewal of "career" orientation and self-interest.

The Appeal of Petty Bourgeois "Marxism"

There is a further consequence of the transitional and isolated situation of students. The lack of contact with the working class leads many of the radicalized students--and professors--to adopt one of the many petty bourgeois distortions of Marxism--social democracy, anarchism, elitist dogmatism, intellectual Trotskyism, or various eclectic combinations of these. In the absence of a communist party that could link a student movement to the working class, it is extremely difficult to combat the influence of these trends--which have the advantage of appealing in various ways to the stud-

ents' class character: in general, they offer easier, safer, more comfortable, more congenial ideologies that appear to be intellectually "neater" to bourgeois "common sense" and have little to do with struggle.




The Student Movement

The widespread student discontent of the 1960s was not simply a reaction to external causes--the civil rights struggles in the South, or the Viet Nam war. Underlying the discontent was a recognition by many of the students that there were no meaningful jobs in their future. They began to see that a university education--promoted as a means to a "good job"--only trained people to be effective bourgeois managers or to do anti-human scientific research. Struggles such as the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in 1964 went beyond simple "student power." Where these spontaneous struggles against the arbitrary control of the university system were given good leadership, they became ideological struggles against an important aspect of the bourgeois superstructure--the educational system--with its many links to the ruling class.

In the future, with the deepening crisis of imperialism, which may manifest itself in any of a hundred ways on the campuses, the ideological potential of students may again come to the fore. It is impossible to predict precisely how crisis will come--education cutbacks, demands of minorities, local issues, or international questions. Most likely it will be a combination of issues--such as that link between the war, the draft, university complicity and increasing oppression that fueled the 1960s movement. Marxist-Leninists must not concentrate rigidly on a single possibility, but remain prepared to contest honestly for the lead of any developing struggle.

In this period, with the movement at a very low ebb and lacking a communist

party, the primary task of Marxist-Leninists on university campuses is winning people ideologically, and through small-scale struggles, to Marxism-Leninism and developing them as future cadres. This can be done by developing and working in united front radical student organizations, and by ideologically combatting petty bourgeois "Marxists" and other non-Marxist-Leninists. People on campus should also be encouraged to participate in community and workers' struggles wherever possible--community organizations, defense committees, picket lines and other support work. In this period of quiescence, this will prevent students from becoming totally cut off from the struggles of the working class and third world peoples. Our goal is to win independent radicals on the campus to Marxism-Leninism and to the SOC. 

II. History of the Campus Movement at UCI

The University of California at Irvine is one of eight UC campuses. The entire University, though "public," is in fact a corporation run by the Board of Regents, which has "full powers of organization and government." The Regents are appointed by the state governor and generally represent the highest levels of the California and national bourgeoisie. They hold the University in their corporate name (and invest more than half its funds in corporations which do substantial business in South Africa.) The University is also the largest nuclear weapons manufacturer in the U.S.; vast sums of government money are funneled into UC nuclear "research," almost all of which goes "secretly" to weapons manufacture at facilities administered by the University.

The Irvine campus in Orange County was founded in 1965 and grew from 1,500 students to 9,600 in 1976. The UCI campus also runs the only nominally public hospital in the county, the UCI Medical Center.

Since it developed during the late 1960s, Irvine had a radical movement from the beginning, and saw active chapters of SDS, the New University Conference and a small Progressive Labor Party group, plus third world groups like the Black Student Union and MECEA, a Chicano campus group.

Women at UCI also organized, and in certain periods--the Women's Liberation Front from 1972 to 1973--were the only *organized* group visible on campus. A number of the cadres in SOC went through UCI in the late 1960s and early 1970s and gained valuable experience from the campus movement.

Because of the transitional nature of students and the high campus turnover (plus the lack of a genuine communist party), few groups have maintained any stability on campus. Nevertheless, there have been three major struggles in UCI's brief history. In each case, a connection was made between a political issue and the personal interests of students, and people at the campus with many different political ideologies united to work toward a concrete set of goals. Also in each case, a Marxist-Leninist leadership emerged, influenced by cadres from PLP and various Marxist-Leninist collectives that have existed in the county. None, however, were able to develop a stable base on the campus. In fact, many of the ultra-left and dogmatic mistakes of these groups fueled distrust and sectarianism. Present cadres of SOC were active in all three struggles, but since SOC did not exist as an organization during the first two, we will treat only the third struggle at any length and we will discuss the other two briefly.

The Kent, Brannon, Shapiro (KBS) Struggle 1968-1969

In 1968, three popular professors, George Kent, Don Brannon and Steve Shapiro were fired by the university. The SDS formed an Ad Hoc Committee to Reinstate KBS. The movement developed into a wider struggle for democratic control over their education. A rally of 800 students was organized in only four days and this led to the occupation of a meeting center in the English Department. Fifty to 80 students held the center for a week, against threats to call in the police, until the Academic Senate--the organized body of

the faculty--agreed to hear their demands. When this body refused to make concessions, the students organized themselves to disrupt it until it would listen. One technique was for students to begin speaking whenever a professor was speaking, but sit in silence when "free speech" time was given them. This forced the Senate to take them seriously, and revealed to many students the possibilities of disciplined action.

A comparison of initial demands and the eventual reforms won reveals the limits of even a tremendous struggle in this period:

KBS DEMANDS vs. EVENTUAL CONCESSIONS

KBS Demand No. 1: Students have partial control over all faculty appointments and promotions.

Faculty Recommendation: Students have control of 10% of appointments.

Final Reform: Students now control 2% of faculty appointments. The student-run Full-time Equivalent (FTE) program appoints one-year visiting lecturers who are virtually never given permanent positions.

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KBS Demand No. 3: A "university senate" to consist of students, professors and campus workers.

Faculty: 50 students be allowed to vote in ordinary Academic Senate (this would be about 30%)

Reform: Students became 20% of Academic Senate; no representation for campus workers (again, over time, student participation has become negligible.)

KBS Demand No. 2: Students have half the seats on all university committees.

Faculty: The same.

Reform: Students sit and vote on all Academic Senate committees, as a minority (student participation has become negligible today.)

The students also demanded the reinstatement of all three professors. Only George Kent was rehired, and ironically he has since become an extremely right-wing professor. The only concession still in existence, though eroded, is the student-run FTE program, and this exists only because of continued militance. In 1972 and 1975, the Academic Senate threatened to eliminate the program, but each time students crowded the meeting, demanding that it continue.

The lessons of the struggle were:
1) under the right conditions, students are willing to struggle for greater control over their education and their life,
2) political issues must be linked with the oppressiveness of the university system and the larger bourgeois society,
3) good, disciplined leadership is crucial, and 4) the level of organization and struggle must be maintained to preserve any concessions won.




The Cambodia Strike

Spring 1970

Nixon's invasion of Cambodia and the student killings that followed--four were shot and killed at Kent State, two at Jackson State, Mississippi, and six were shot in Augusta, Georgia--led to a massive upsurge of activity across the country. All UC campuses had sympathy strikes and demonstrations, and Governor Reagan shut down the University, hoping that California students would "come to their senses" if they went home and talked to their parents. Unfortunately for Reagan's strategy, the students stayed and "opened up" the university for anti-war organizing.

Three groups existed at UCI then-- SDS, NUC and a local Radical Student Union--and mass meetings filled the Commons and set up committees to spread the strike. They attempted to link the struggle to the community and to workers' struggles. Black students took the lead in going to the community, and many students worked to support a rank-and-file Teamsters strike and an organizing drive at a Santa Ana plant.

By 1970, the fragmented SDS was tearing itself apart nationally, with sections going off toward an ever-more-sectarian PLP or toward ultra-left Weather adventures, while the mass of students simply walked away. The movement at Irvine, too, was unable to sustain a stable organization. Discipline evaporated, some students seeing revolution as imminent, and others seeing the strike as an opportunity to "liberate" typewriters and other equipment from the University. The ultimate lesson that serious student revolutionaries learned from the Cambodia strike and other actions of the period was that students alone cannot make a revolution.

A number of students from these struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s went into the working class to organize, and many joined embryonic communist organizations. At UCI in this period, the opportunity to link a student movement to workers' struggles had not really been present, but in 1976 such an opportunity did arise. 

III. The UCI Bookstore Strike

1976

Prelude to the Strike

Late in the spring quarter of 1975, campus cadres of SOC took part in founding a united front organization on the UCI campus known as the Winter Soldier Organization (the name had been taken from a previous student group that was already registered as a campus organization, but the new group had no connection to the national WSO.) The group was made up of 15 to 20 students of varying radical backgrounds, and its initial purpose was to act primarily as a propaganda organization which would present speakers, films and forums on a broad range of left issues. This it did for the rest of the school year and the beginning of the next.

On Friday, March 5, 1976, the WSO held a forum on the economic crisis, with an SOC member giving the main presentation. The forum then set up four workshops, on

anti-imperialism, anti-racism, women's issues and trade unions. It was in the trade union workshop that the question of student support for the bookstore workers was first discussed. WSO members knew that the employees at the UCI bookstore (privately owned by an Eastern chain) were attempting to unionize, and the day before the forum they had voted to join the Retail Clerks Union. The workers were primarily women, most supporting children or a husband; they were not part-time students. The bookstore was notorious on campus for exploiting students and its workers, who made little more than minimum wage and no benefits at all.

On the following day, Saturday, SOC and WSO members learned that the workers were set to strike for recognition Monday. Immediately a number of groups mobilized to support the strike--the WSO, the entire

SOC, including off-campus members, and members of a small Marxist-Leninist campus organization. This grouping formed the Bookstore Workers Support Committee (BWSC) which worked all weekend with two of the bookstore employees to lay the groundwork for student and campus support of the strike. SOC members and members of the campus Marxist-Leninist group were in the leadership and a high level of unity was achieved. Pre-strike tasks were distributed among the 30 actives, and from this point on the BWSC became primary and WSO ceased to function as a separate organization.

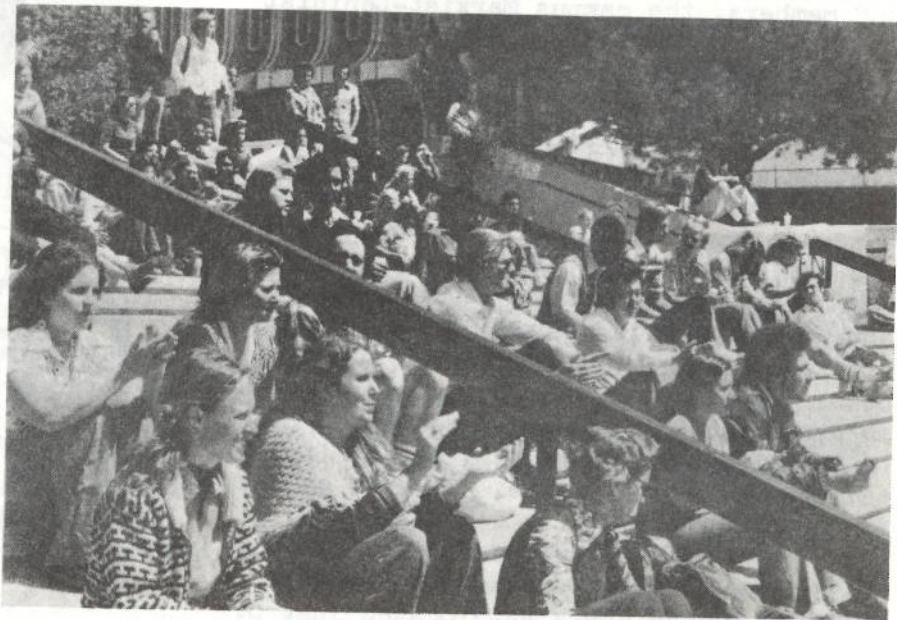
The Strike

On March 8, 14 of the 15 employees struck. Because of the organizational work done before the strike by the BWSC, a tremendous amount of energy went into strike support activities during the first two weeks--press releases, daily leaflets and strike bulletins, support and information tables were set up on campus, letters of support gathered, a strong support picket line formed, a mass rally and march to the bookstore drew 200, and alternative sources for needed books were organized (the private bookstore had a monopoly on campus and the immediate area.) The morale of the strikers was bolstered by so much student support, and many students, faculty and campus workers became aware for the first time of trade union and worker issues.

In working together around the strike, many workers and students found they had much in common. BWSC worked to spread a consciousness of these common interests--in the reality of students as future working people and in the fact that the current crisis affected both groups: workers suffering from low wages, unemployment and union busting, and students suffering from cutbacks in programs, enrollment and financial aid.

The Retail Clerks Union gave the strikers material assistance in the form of picketing pay, and arranged to have the Teamsters honor the picket line and not deliver books (though they took no initiative in this and only went to the Teamsters and the Central Labor Council after a request from the workers.) Despite this help, they gave virtually no direction to the workers on how to win the strike, and no help from other locals. Specifically, two other branches of the bookstore chain existed in California, and it was suggested they arrange sympathy picketing, which was not done. Two union "organizers" visited the picket line regularly, but simply looked on. In fact, one nearly caused a disaster. The BWSC and the workers had rejected adventurist tactics--the relationship of forces at the time simply would not have supported direct action. When a scab truck began making book deliveries, one of the organizers was caught making an amateurish attempt to disable it. When he tried to blame his act on one of the strikers, they were forced to disavow him and ask that he not come back.

Despite the success of the first few weeks of picketing, the company was determined to accept an admittedly heavy loss in business rather than recognize the union--undoubtedly pressured by other



Rally at UCI the first week of the bookstore strike. A march to the store and sympathy picketing followed.

bookstore owners who feared a chain reaction of union drives in the unorganized bookstore sector.

By the fourth week, the difficulties and contradictions inherent in the support effort became apparent. Many students had mortgaged their study time to help out, and the pressure to catch up on their studies forced many to cut back or drop support work. Also, student participation dropped off as the "excitement" and appeal of the early work dissipated into a long, hard struggle. It became increasingly difficult to maintain a high level of organization and activity. At this point, the overdependence of the strikers on the BWSC became apparent. Because of the energy of the BWSC, the bookstore workers had never been forced to take a central role in strike strategy. Not encouraging workers to take this role was a serious mistake of the BWSC. As a result, when the BWSC began falling apart, so did the strikers' morale.

Opportunist and adventurist elements now began to appear among student supporters. Some talked of vandalism to "arouse" more support. Others began to overemphasize purely campus aspects of the struggle (trying to create a student-run bookstore, which was a long-run possibility at best and would do little to help the workers.) SOC members, the campus Marxist-Leninist group and the strikers fought these lines and defeated them.

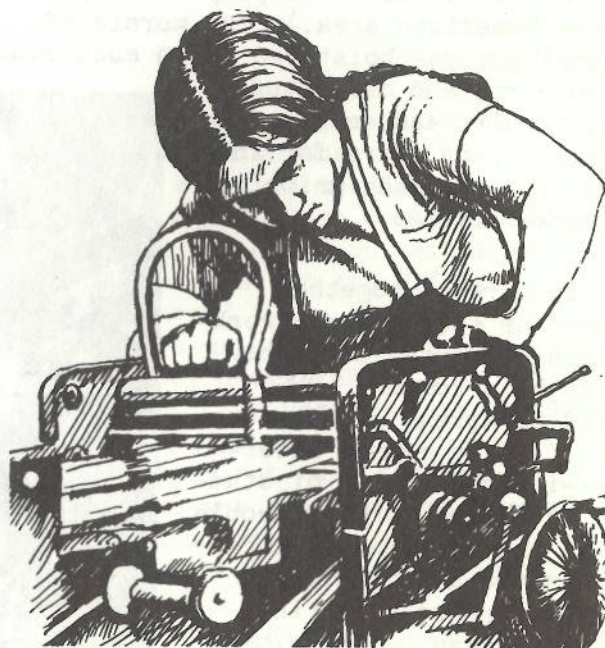
At the end of the school year, twelve weeks into the strike, no student organization was functioning. Attempts were made to revive the WSO for the summer with study groups, with little success. When the new school year began in September 1976, only four strikers remained, and attempts to rebuild the BWSC failed. The strikers continued to drift off and find other jobs, and the strike ended in defeat in January 1977, after ten months.

(Only later could we see that it had not been a total failure, at least as far as the whole university was concerned. A year after the strike ended, feeling was still strong enough so that the private monopoly, whose store was located just off campus, was denied the concession for a new on-campus facility.)

Analysis of the Strike

Before discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the strike, it is important to point out that the relationship of forces was overwhelmingly against the strikers. Orange County is open-shop territory, and UCI has many students of a bourgeois and upper petty bourgeois background to whom union issues are alien and incomprehensible. In addition, the strikers were only a tiny group against a monopoly chain, headquartered in the South, which had a strong ideological as well as practical commitment to opposing trade unionism (their "negotiator" regularly red-baited.) It appears now that they would almost certainly have shut down the local branch rather than recognize a trade union.

We should also say at the outset that since SOC had a large share of the leadership, the mistakes of the BWSC are the mistakes of SOC.



Strengths

1. Though we had no cadres among the strikers, two of the workers considered themselves socialists, and we tried to work closely with them and include them in all strategy discussions, which were held daily. (Often, however, we let this substitute for drawing all the strikers into the process of forming strategy.)

2. There were joint supporter/worker dinners, and one supporter/worker film showing (*The Salt of the Earth*) at which, lessons of the film in regard to militance and the role of women were discussed. Proceeds from the showing were distributed to the strikers.

3. There was a conscious effort to propagandize the campus about trade union issues, and some political issues related to the role of a monopoly corporation.

4. The support activities, particularly gathering letters of support, spreading news of the strike and organizing alternative book sources, were well organized and as effective as they could have been, particularly in the first weeks of the strike.

5. The support work helped SOC itself. Several times the entire organization was mobilized, and this collective involvement did much to strengthen the group internally, and give us practical experience in organizing, agitation and united front work. We also developed a working relationship with members of the campus Marxist-Leninist group, some of whom we still work with.

Errors


1. Perhaps the central error in the strike was not encouraging the initiative and leadership of the strikers themselves in all the support work. The workers had to take the leading role because in the last analysis the struggle was *their* struggle. The fact that two of the strikers considered themselves socialists and were close to us was a golden opportunity which we utilized far less than we could have.

2. Allied to this was a tendency to overemphasize the role of student support work, and to let it develop along spontaneous economist lines. We never held systematic discussions within BWSC of student and trade union struggles and rarely raised broader political questions.

3. We did not appreciate the relatively low level of support we would ultimately be able to muster on campus. We did not anticipate how this support would fall off and prepare for it, nor did we realize how long the struggle would last and prepare long-range support activities. Though bookstore business was cut considerably, the 200 who came to the mass rally (out of a campus of 10,000) probably represented the absolute limit of any kind of active support, and only 40 or so volunteered for support responsibilities. This is a legacy of the present low level of the student movement which we should have taken more into account. (Even the campus student newspaper published anti-strike material.)

4. We did not find ways to involve other campus workers in the strike in any numbers. Though the AFT and AFSCME organizations on campus, both fairly weak, gave their support, there were almost two thousand other workers not in these unions.

5. Because the BWSC could not regroup the next year, there was no chance for collective analysis and criticism, and thus many of the important lessons went unlearned for the participants.

One further lesson of the strike, though not a subjective "error," was the necessity of having a strong trade union base in the area to bring any struggle the support of organized workers. If we had had cadres within Retail Clerks or other appropriate unions, we could have spread support activities. 



IV. United Front Work on Campus

School Year 1975-1976

In the process of SOC's work in the WSO and the BWSC, we came into contact with another political group who considered themselves Marxist-Leninists. At the time we saw each other as allies in promoting communist work within campus struggles and we played a leading role jointly in bookstore strike support. We then moved in the direction of joint exploratory talks to deepen this alliance, at least on campus. Unfortunately, they were extremely secretive in the talks, would tell us nothing about themselves or their collective experience, and then broke off the talks without giving us a reason.

Some of us had thought that the strength of the group was a strong commitment to Marxist-Leninist theory, even though many of their members had gained a reputation on campus for being harsh, self-righteous and elitist, and even though they made no efforts to participate in any community or workplace struggles. We came to the understanding that this "style" was no accident, but had deep roots in petty bourgeois dogmatism and sectarianism. They had no understanding of mass line as the root of correct theory, and they continually treated possible allies on campus as enemies--which unfortunately gave "Leninism" a bad name on the campus, a legacy that we spent much of the next year trying to overcome.

This group has since split several ways, or fallen apart, but we continue to work with some of its former members.

School Year 1976-1977

We began campus work in the next school year facing two serious problems. 1) Even though we later recruited some new cadres, half the campus



SOC cadres from the previous year were no longer on campus, including one who had given the most leadership to the strike support struggle.

2) a large anti-Leninist radical trend was mushrooming on the campus--reinforced by the sectarianism of our erstwhile allies.

In order to overcome the first problem, we sought out a few allies who considered themselves Marxist-Leninists and who acted in a non-sectarian fashion. To attack the second problem, we worked together with our allies to revitalize the WSO and then patiently demonstrate within it that genuine Marxist-Leninists work in a principled, democratic fashion and do not treat others with contempt.

Many of the anti-Leninists did come into the WSO. The name was changed to the Left Information Project--a name we opposed but accepted--and a Marxist study group and a number of forums were set up. Over the course of the year, it became obvious that no matter how many times we accepted democratic decisions that we disagreed with and carried them out responsibly, the anti-Leninist group as a whole would not follow suit and would do only what *they* wanted to do. In effect the work in LIP took us nowhere.

At first we had thought we were facing a social democratic trend, but now we feel it was simply an anarcho-individualism that was so loose and so averse to struggle that no headway was possible. This trend was reinforced by an influx of somewhat more sophisticated social democratic professors and teaching assistants who offered "fun parties," contact with semi-celebrities of the left, and possible career contacts--while we offered only the relative "drudgery" of political responsibility, difficult study and political struggle. In the absence of a mass movement which could demonstrate which group was the most effective and resourceful organizer, this trend appealed to the class orientation of the students and overwhelmed any possibility for ideological advance.

SOC campus cadres are currently discussing a new approach to the campus for 1977-1978. 