

STRUGGLES OF YOUTH

Young people have become increasingly vocal and active in challenging our society and its values, both in a highly organized and political fashion like the students' revolt, and in an individual and only half-conscious way, like truancy, vandalism, drug-taking.

The organized political challenge has come from young people in the schools colleges and universities, who have seen that their situation is not a privileged initiation into the mysteries of knowledge, but simply an extension of the capitalist world, which is geared to making profits, and where 'education', training, and grading exist not for the benefit of the students, but for the benefit of their future employers. So students in educational institutions throughout the country have demanded changes in the content of their education, to make it relevant to their own needs and development, and not to the needs of their future bosses. At the same time they have challenged the repressive authoritarian structures of the educational institutions, which have held young people in fear and passivity for so long, have discouraged them from thinking for themselves, or asserting their own needs, or even discovering what their own needs are. (The totally unwarranted interference by educational institutions into young people's sex lives is an example of this). Young people have fought for the right to meet with members of the opposite sex, to be able to live their lives without interference, to have contraceptives available, ~~xxx~~ to be able to decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong.

Whereas this conscious challenge to the content and form of education has come mainly from middle class students, many young working class people assert the irrelevance of 'education' to their own needs by playing truant and dropping out. In the same way they reject the values that capitalist society teaches us, that you should get a steady job, work hard and save up, get married and bring up a family. ~~xxxx~~ Often what they rebel against is the boringness and seeming pointlessness of this kind of life, and, (without having much conscious political idea that ~~xxxx~~ life might be different if society was organized differently to make us happy, not just to make profits for the bosses) they try to find ways of life which are more exciting or meaningful, with different clothes, music, drugs, freer relationships. Delinquency, vandalism, ~~xx~~ hooliganism, drug-addiction, gang-fighting, these are all ways in which young people express their boredom and dissatisfaction with what our society has to offer them. But because this revolt is not conscious or organized, and because there is no clear sense of fighting for a different kind of society, it is all too easily contained or diverted, both by the profiteers who try to appease young people with more and ~~x~~ newer commodities, and line their own pockets at the same time, by the forces of law and order which come down on young people with great ~~xx~~ severity, and by social workers, youth workers, and all kinds of social manipulators.

Nevertheless, we must not underestimate the gains that young people have won, nor the changes they have made in society. They have challenged the emptiness of life under capitalism, both work and family life, and they have shown that it is possible to reject the work and career structures laid out for us, and to have freer and happier relationships. The struggle of youth has been largely the struggle to create its own culture, to carve out its own space for freedom and creativity. And this space has constantly been invaded by the commodity culture of a capitalist production system desperate for new markets. One consequence of the ~~xxxxxxx~~

rapid expansion of commodity production in the post-war boom, was the need to discover new markets, and youth, with money to spend and freedom from responsibilities, seemed to provide an ideal and insatiable market. Commodities of all sorts - clothes, books, drinks, sex aids, cosmetics, bikes, music and musical equipment - were thrust at young people (and the entrepreneurs try to draw younger and younger people into the consumer market from year to year).) James Dean and the cult of the teenage rebel; the violence and ~~rebellion~~ exhilaration of rock'n roll music; these are only two examples where the entrepreneurs tried to find symbols to capture the imagination and spare cash of youth, only to find themselves being overtaken by real rebellion, real violence.

Young people, disaffected with the blandness and sameness of the culture offered them, have tried to create their own alternative culture - the 1950's and '60's saw a growth of alternative bookshops, music, poetry, magazines, art, clothes; they have experimented with different ways of living their lives - communal living, alternative health-centres, free-schools, the drug culture, travelling East, the peaceful alternative 'politics' of the CND movement. The violent manifestations of rebellion have come mainly from working class youth; middle class young people have on the whole contented themselves with 'dropping out' and creating alternatives. But neither of these forms of rebellion could be called revolutionary, and sometimes it seems to have frightening Fascistic overtones (Paki-bashing; sexism and virility cult in rock music). Maybe this seemingly a-political character can in part be attributed to the narrow and blinkered view of what counts as 'politics' taken by most of the Left.

For although youth culture may seem to be no more than changes of attitude in large numbers of individuals, it is in fact a whole social movement corresponding to particular changes in the organisation of capitalist society, where hundreds and thousands of bored frustrated young people are seeking for change. In Big Flame we think that capitalism must be challenged not only on account of the material and physical hardship it inflicts on the working class, but also on account of the dullness and emptiness it makes of our lives. And in this challenge, young people have taken the lead.