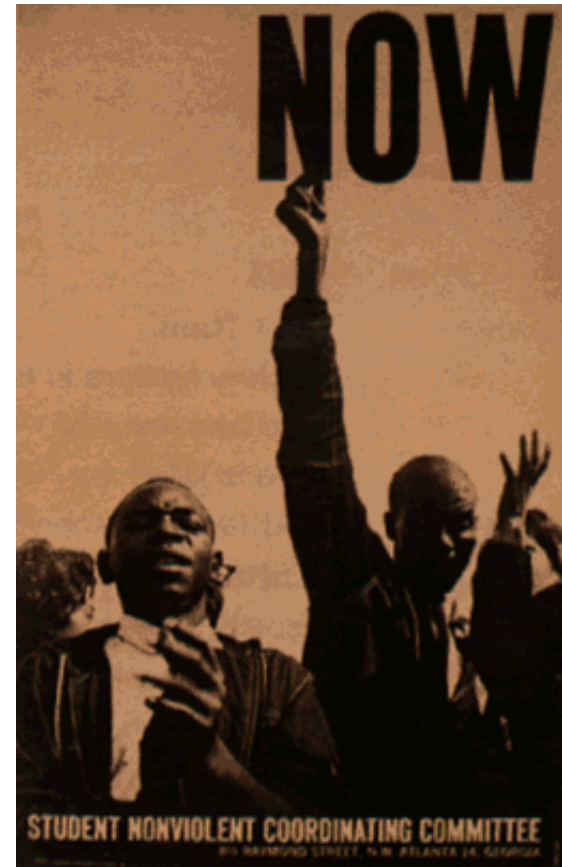


Student Power



by Aaron Kreider

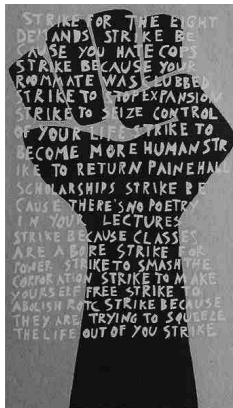
Preface

I wrote this essay primarily for college students, though much of it could be adapted for high school and middle school use. My target audience includes both students who have just become activists as well as those who have been working for justice for many years. As others have noted, this essay is limited by my personal experience. While I have tried to read everything I can find on student activism, much of this essay comes from my successes and failures in organizing students at two private residential religious schools that were homogenous regarding several key variables though they differed sharply in terms of size, typical political views, and institutional ranking. As women, students of color, working class students, non-traditional students, queer students, high school students, and commuters have experiences that differ substantially from mine, their own interpretation of student power would contain significant differences. These differences should be included and analyzed in either a new essay or added as improvements to this one.

I write this in the hopes of helping to build a movement for student power that will liberate our universities so that we may use them as a base to transform all of society.

If you care about our struggle, I encourage you to visit and participate in a new website that I have been working on since January 2002:

www.campusactivism.org



Please distribute widely and freely. Comments welcome.

-Aaron Kreider-

Originally Written: 2001

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Available online - www.campusactivism.org/displayresource-2.htm

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Free School Websites

- <http://www.sudval.org/free.html> – a good list of documents.

Organizations

- Democratizing Education Network. DEN has supported the spread and growth of the Tent State University movement, student unionism, and increased networking among students, faculty, staff, and community members around national and international education issues. <http://den.uconnfreepress.org/index.php>
- Students for a Democratic Society. A new multi-issue student radical organization started in 2006. SDS was historically a leader on this issue. www.studentsforademocraticsociety.org
www.movementforademocraticsociety.org - non-student wing.

Student Activism Websites

- **CampusActivism.org**: A website designed to facilitate networking between student and youth activists primarily in the US and Canada. Get local contacts, share resources (fact sheets, graphics, organizing guides, essays, etc), learn about upcoming events, search for things by issue, and much more. Also targets non-students with ActivismNetwork.org.

the administration had voted down our proposal 12-0 two months earlier. They had not even bothered to tell us. That is the opposite of student power.

Whether your goal is to create a recycling program, end sweatshops, divest the university endowment from Palestine, kick ROTC off-campus, remove corporate or CIA recruiters, encourage socially responsible investing, create or expand a new department (ex. women's studies), or increase racial diversity — almost anything you want to do on campus will require a decision by the university administration. Student government and the faculty senate usually do not have the power on their own. The administration chose to not give them any real power, because if they democratize the university then decisions will be made in the interests of the people instead of in the interests of the university's rich donors and corporate friends.

Even if your campaign is able to convince your administration to concede your demands on one issue, the next campaign will have to repeat the same lengthy process to gain concessions and victory is not guaranteed. An alternative approach is to use a long-term strategy. You could use each campaign to achieve greater campus democracy or even do a campaign for campus democracy for the sake of future campaigns. Then each campaign would become easier and you can increase the size of your demands. If you want to leave a permanent legacy for future activists, work for structural changes in your university that will outlast your time in colleg. Build student power for the long run.

Conclusion



We need to recognize the limits to student power. Student liberation cannot occur without parallel activist movements in the rest of society, and we will not achieve permanent campus democracy without social revolution. It may be more likely that student power will emerge from our universities, but we will not succeed without a parallel high school movement. We should avoid both privileging the student movement in place of other popular struggles,

and privileging off-campus issues at the expense of the campus activism. Student Power will only succeed in coalition with Black Power, Chicano/a Power, Women Power, Queer Power and other social movements.

But let there be no doubt that organized students are a powerful force for social change! It makes sense for students to organize our peers around issues that concern us. We can transform our universities into liberated spaces where students control the university, or have at least been adequately politicized, and where alternative theories can be developed and practiced. Once we have a space of our own, we must work hard to maintain it, recognizing that this will be difficult as reactionaries will try to take it back. However with this space in our hands, we can use its resources to support off-campus struggles and strengthen the fight for global justice.

Student Power

What does it mean to be both a university student and a social justice activist? Where do students fit-in to the wide spectrum of movements for social change? How can we best use our position to create an alternative democratic future?

A commonly expressed argument is that activists should organize where they are. Doing this is easier, avoids patronizingly telling other people how to run their struggles, and is often the most effective method of organizing large numbers of people. This method calls on us to organize the people who surround us, to work for issues that they feel are immediate. For many of us this means we are organizing students in our high schools, universities and colleges — often around school-issues.

As young people, many from backgrounds of privilege, we find ourselves concentrated in institutions of higher learning that are being regularly corrupted by corporate influence, and where we possess tremendous power to shape our unjust society. This power is STUDENT POWER.

A Historical Background of Student Power

In the United States, students first protested on campus two hundred years ago. The earliest significant wave of student activism was in the Thirties. The actual term “student power” was probably invented by Students for a Democratic Society in the Sixties after the development of Black Power ideology by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC defied the commonly held view that Blacks on their own were too weak to fight and win, and thus that they had to rely upon the support of white liberals. SNCC argued that if they were to recognize their own power, mobilize, and fight for Black Liberation then they could achieve significant successes.

The concept of student power recognizes that young people can develop their power on campuses and construct liberated bases for social movements. An early form of student power was seen in the Sixties when young people mobilized to sweep away “in locus parentis” rules that gave the power traditionally held by a student's parents to their university administration. These rules had severely restricted students' rights. Student power can be the simple assertion that campus organizing is valid in of itself, that students have issues that are important and that we should not merely be used by other social movements as easily recruited foot-soldiers for their struggles. Or it can be a stronger belief that student activism plays a critical role in resistance to corporate power (a.k.a. capitalism), and white and male dominated institutions.

A noteworthy powerful demonstration of student power occurred in France in May 1968 when students occupied their universities, placed decisions in the hands of democratic mass assemblies, and started to work with the faculty to fundamentally restructure their schools. Young people occupied high schools as well. Students built alliances with workers who occupied factories and ten million workers went on strike, placing severe pressure on the national government. Unfortunately while students realized their goals in the short-run, when the rebellion ended stu-



dents no longer had as much power and the administrators were able to reverse the most important gains.

Like France in 1968, student power has often shaken and even toppled governments. And it should not be seen as only a Sixties phenomenon, as just in 1999 Mexican students went on strike for many months and took over their national university (UNAM). That same year, Indonesian students played a key role in organizing demonstrations that toppled their dictator Suharto. Ten years earlier Chinese students led a pro-democracy movement, occupying Tiananmen Square while their government hesitated for one month between agreeing to their demands and using brutal repression.

Student Power Matters



The struggle for control of the university includes the fight for democratic worker control of the sites of production (akin to workers fighting for control of a factory or service provider) and the struggle for democratic community government.

A common myth is that the campus is not the “real world” and what goes on here is not important. Unfortunately, this can lead would-be student activists towards apathy. In fact campuses are critical areas of knowledge production in a society where information is becoming

the most important product. Universities both educate students as well as produce research for corporations, the military, and the public good. Both the educational programs of over ten million students and the research program of hundreds of universities are up for grabs. Corporations want the educational system to train young people to work for them, and they want university research to develop products for them to sell. If we do not want to work for corporations or give them new products, then we have got to resist their agenda. Not only do universities produce research for corporations, but they also produce ideology. Universities work with high schools and grade schools to reproduce the hegemonic ideology of the ruling class that justifies our current social practices of environment devastation, putting profit before people, sexism, racism, heterosexism, and imperialism. Universities provide greatly needed legitimacy to our unjust social system. Noam Chomsky is correct in arguing that propaganda is more essential in a democracy than in a dictatorship, since in a democracy the people, if they are not misled by propaganda, can oppose the wishes of the ruling class. So it is in our society that the educational system is a leading producer of propaganda. We must resist the propaganda where it occurs, in our schools, since it is much harder to address these lies after someone has had them drilled into their head for twelve or sixteen years.

Like a community, *residential* college campuses can be total environments for millions of students who live, work, study, play, sleep, and eat – all on campus. For these millions of students, university administrations are like municipal governments that exercise limited powers (for instance through their control of the police) over their community members. The difference between the two is that while city governments are at least elected, administrations are unelected and unaccountable

increased. Even students who had no prior experience protesting would join in!

A campus revolution would likely include a mixture of building occupations and other actions that would build up to a student strike or an administration cancellation of classes due to the unrest. To solidify student/worker power during the uprising and to prepare for a post-strike future, it will be useful to hold mass assemblies based on one-person one vote



Harvard Living Wage Sit-In (2001)

to replace all former bodies of power. The advantage of a mass assembly is that it gives students, faculty, and staff a direct voice in their affairs. By contrast bodies like student and faculty government channel discontent without granting real power. Also in a large assembly you can see your power in the presence of hundreds of your fellow students/workers/faculty, and this process will raise everyone’s political consciousness. The assembly can create committees to run various functions (security, newspaper, leaflets, actions, communication with other schools, etc) and start to develop a plan for how the university will run in the future.

To American students this idea may sound like an impossible dream, but campus revolutions have happened in the Sixties in the U.S., in 1968 in France and several other countries, and as recently as 1999 in Mexico. Domestically within the past fourteen years, students at Mills College (1990) and at Gallaudet (1988) shut down their schools. This idea of campus revolution is of both practical and theoretical relevance. We need a positive theory of radical change to accommodate our critique of the educational system – a plan that we can advocate. “Free schools” exist in the United States and show that our democratic goals are possible. For instance Sudbury Valley School (<http://www.sudval.org>) has all of their decisions (including financial) made at the School Meeting, on a one-person one-vote basis. Students choose what they do, whether it is studying or playing soccer all day. Students even elect the staff (a.k.a. teachers). This same organizational structure can work in our colleges and universities.

The Need for Structural Change: Thinking Long-Term

How many times have you campaigned to change something at your school, collected hundreds of signatures, gained the support of student government and/or the faculty senate, mobilized students for rallies, distributed leaflets, brought in speakers or shown videos – only to have your administration say “NO!” And that is often the end of the story. It does not matter if the administration’s arguments are valid. For so long as they satisfy themselves and their rich donors the decision stands, because in most important matters the administration has all the power.

For instance at Notre Dame students had a campaign to include sexual orientation in our non-discrimination clause. We collected over a thousand signatures, brought in speakers, held rallies (150 and 300 people), won support of student government, faculty senate, and our Academic Council; only to learn in Feb. 1999 when we were doing our “Week of Action” on the last day of a three day fast that

governance. As a mouthpiece for your movement, you should create a progressive campus newspaper and work to ensure your message is included in the mainstream college media. You may need to take back your campus media, for instance many college radio stations have most of the work done by students but their programming is controlled by the administration.

Tactics of Liberation

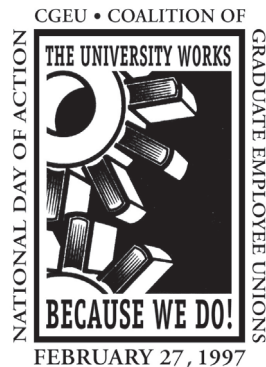
To liberate campus, students need to use tactics that realize our power. The ultimate source of this power is that our overwhelming numbers allow us to either withdraw from the educational process and govern ourselves, or to disrupt the current governing structure. Here again I will only touch upon this topic, and if you want more information you should consult an organizing guide that will discuss the long process of how to choose and fight campaigns strategically, to put your organization and student body in a position where it can exert student power.

The most basic and essential tactic is that of education. We can expose our university's corporate ties (through pamphlets, disorientation guides, newspaper articles and letters, guerilla theater, etc.) and by showing the illegitimacy of our administration we can put them on the run, creating an opening for our proposals for a democratic alternative.

Once a critical mass of students is on our side, we should combine education with action. Rallies, petitions, and letter writing are all traditional and useful forms of activism. There are several tactics that are used primarily on campus and are worth commenting on. Strategic rule breaking might be a good place to start a campus democracy campaign. Pick several rules created by the administration that are particularly hard to justify and that make it difficult to be an activist (for instance if you must secure advance approval for demonstrations). Violate the rules, and by doing so you are either forcing the administration to respond and risk public backlash, or if it fails to respond then you are effectively eroding the administration's power and establishing the ability of student power to determine rules. This is a good step towards changing or abolishing the rule.

An alternative withdrawal tactic is to create a parallel university, like a Free University, where anyone could offer and take classes that would be free. You might offer courses on anything from vegan cooking, to gardening, to globalization, to desktop publishing. Many students created free universities in the Sixties.

Another form of agitation is the strike. Students can refuse to attend classes and thus bring the university to a halt. Faculty and staff can also strike. A student strike is difficult to organize, as it requires that a majority of students participate. If you have less support you can do a sit-in, or a building occupation which is more confrontational as it involves taking control of the building (or office) and not letting administrators in, whereas a sit-in will generally allow the administration to keep on functioning. Generally sit-ins or occupations target the university president's office or the administration building as those choices most effectively disrupt the administration. My analysis of eight student anti-sweatshop sit-ins shows that the longer a sit-in lasted (at least up to the second week), the more student involvement



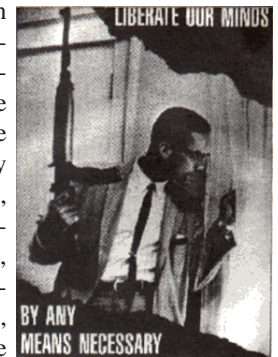
dictatorships. Even for students at non-residential campuses, which are not total environments, there is no good reason that democracy should cease for those eight to twelve hours when one is working at a job or studying at school.

A Critique of the Educational System

Any radical perspective of our educational system will quickly determine that it serves the interests of the ruling class, putting corporate profit before human needs. The educational system is flawed due to unequal access, the corporate designed curriculum, its abstraction from real life, and the artificial separation of the ivory tower from the community.

Educating Whom?

Firstly, who is the system educating? Is education equally accessible to all members of society or is it a privilege of the few? The evidence shows that there is massive inequality of access along class lines. For instance while 76% of children from families in the top income quartile get a Bachelor's degree by age twenty-four, only 4% of students from the lowest quartile do the same (Loeb, 1994). Clearly governmental financial aid has proved inadequate to provide equal access. Also according to Loeb, college students are primarily white with the student population including only 8% African-Americans, 4% Asians, 4% Hispanics and 0.5% Native Americans. Not only are working class students and students of color less likely to participate in higher education, but if they do they are more likely to attend public universities and community colleges than elite private schools. As a good education is becoming increasingly more essential for future economic success, the exclusion of the working class and students of color from universities and colleges serves to reproduce class and race inequality in our society.



Educating to do What?

Secondly, what are students being educated to do? Are we being trained to create a better society? Unfortunately not. Students are being taught values and skills that will make us productive and profitable workers for large corporations. The educational system is designed so that most of us will, without hesitation, reinforce the hegemonic ideology of the ruling class. As future teachers, researchers, politicians, advertisers, writers, or scientists most of us will express our support for human domination over the environment and for unbridled free markets as the best economic system.

Corporations are pushing practical skills like business, computers, medicine, science, law, and engineering – all of which train us to lubricate the corporate machinery. As a consequence fewer students are studying humanities, an area in which students are more likely to be taught to think critically and become opponents of corporate power and white and male dominated institutions. In our increasingly business-oriented system, students will even take unpaid internships at

corporations – here the exploitation is stunningly clear. Even paid internships serve to indoctrinate students into corporate values, reinforcing the corporate system.

Our own universities have even adopted the profit motive. They express it by trying to maximize their ranking. This requires them to maximize their endowment, which is fed by donations from rich alumni (and non-alumni) who sit on corporate boards. When it comes to money, some alumni are more important than others are. For instance at Notre Dame, in 1998 three percent of the alumni gave sixty percent of the total alumni donations. Universities are joining more partnerships with corporations, as they privilege research for corporations and the military over teaching students. This is even more true in the past twenty years, as since the 1980 passage of the Bayh-Dole Bill universities have been able to profit from their patented research by selling the patents to corporations. Previously the results of this research would have been placed in the public domain. Corporations like to do research at universities as it is subsidized by the public through federal research grants and public subsidies of higher education. In sum, our entire curriculum and research agenda is up for sale to the highest bidder – large corporations.

Educating How?

The impact of the educational system upon students is not only a result of the material that is taught but also a product of the educational process. The problems with this process include top-down pedagogy, credentialism, the dominance of negative incentives, the focus on easily measurable skills, and unnecessary specialization.

One of the reasons that students are so alienated from the educational process is that pedagogy is primarily top-down. This happens when teachers lecture, attempting to fill the supposedly empty minds of the students with their Truth. Is it just a coincidence that this relationship parallels the boss/worker one found in most workplaces? Could this pedagogy be intended more to teach students to stay in their place and not question authority (whether that of the State, Church, the “as interviewed on TV” expert, or other institution) – than for its educational effectiveness? A more progressive pedagogy would have more discussion, group work, independent projects, student presentations, student control of the curriculum, and it would encourage students to challenge their teachers. Students who think for themselves and teach their peers are learning skills that are essential for a democratic society.



Paris Students and Youth Revolt (May 1968)

Building Student Power

How can we build student power? We need to democratize our campuses – transforming them into liberated spaces that are bases for activist movements. This process is long and hard, and this essay will only paint broad strokes, skipping over most of the details as they are best left to organizing guides such as those produced by the Center for Campus Organizing and the Student Environmental Action Coalition.

Democratizing Campus

Firstly we need to recognize our class privilege that helped most of us get into college and our responsibility to use this advantage to dismantle the structures of privilege, opening the gates of higher education to working class students and students of color. To equalize access we need to support affirmative action, reduce tuition, and replace federal loans with grants. Some schools, like the City University of New York, demonstrate how this accessibility is possible by admitting everyone who has graduated from high school – working with students from where they are to help them get a degree.

Opening admissions is not enough, as we need to transform the institutions as well. We should demand the creation or strengthening of departments that reflect our values of diversity and justice (programs in ethnic, women’s, peace, labor, queer, and environmental studies). Also in the general curriculum, it should be required that students take one or more classes that address racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism. Students should be both free and encouraged to create and teach their own courses, as well as to get credit for doing activism either counting as an internship or experiential learning.

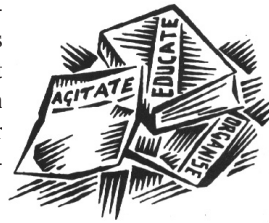
Ultimately students need to reshape the power structure of the entire university. We should analyze and expose the corporate connections of the administration (whether president, vice-presidents, board of governors, trustees or other). We can demonstrate that they are generally wealthy businessmen (and some women) who do not share the interests of the working majority of Americans. We should agitate for a university senate or similar democratic structure that would allot all power to students, faculty and staff through either representative or participatory democracy.

While you are working for the replacement of your current administration with a democratically elected one, it will be helpful to build alternative power bases on campus. Thus you could run a progressive party for student government and use that as a platform, backed up by student activism, to legitimate your demands for increased student power and also to implement progressive programs. Students have recently done this at Kansas (Delta Force), Louisiana State (Progressive Student Alliance), Wisconsin, and Iowa. Also you can build up strong activist organizations, as well as working to support and unionize campus workers (staff, students, and faculty) – to prepare them to take a role in campus



University of Oregon, Spring 2000

disparity is that student activists organize around different issues at less prestigious schools and receive less attention for their work. However I suspect that this fact would not explain all of the difference. What we can learn from this is that it is important to recognize if your activism is facilitated by your privilege, so that you realize that it is not always as easy for others to be active.



One primary source of our power is our people. Students outnumber administrators and this allows us to do successful grassroots organizing. Just imagine how many people would come if your administrators organized a rally or tried to do a petition drive!

A second source of power is our education. We can use our school-learned skills to speak, write pamphlets, do research, use persuasive arguments to win others to the cause, gain media coverage, and plan strategic campaigns. Between the library and the Internet one can adequately do research on most important social issues, and then with the facts on our side we are more likely to win.

A third power is that the purpose of being a student is to learn. So we just need to slide our radical propaganda into the process =)

Millions of students are in training for the future elite. As activists, we can share information and work on campaigns. Our goal is to convince our fellow students to move away from the values and practices of the ruling elite. One possibility is that students might choose to defect. They could dropout of the rat race and take a position of neutrality in respect to the exploitation of people and the planet. For instance they might work only enough to pay their bills and not try to crawl up the social ladder as that would only increase their culpability in exploitation of their fellow human beings. Another option is that they might still join the elite but move it towards liberalism, so it is less likely to support repression of social movements and more likely to compromise with our goals. The most preferable outcome is that they become activist-intellectuals that will join our movement for social and environmental justice. Any of these three outcomes will hurt the power elite and create a social structure that is more open to progressive social change.

A fourth strength is our youthful idealism. Less touched by failure, young people are more likely to believe that a new world can be realized and willing to take the risks that are necessary to accomplish it. Typically having neither child, spouse, nor full-time job - students are also more able to take risks.

Fifthly, students often identify strongly with their school, especially if the school is small or residential. For some people it is an almost-all encompassing community, as they live, shop, study, eat, and play all in the same setting. Students share a common set of experiences due to our years in school and growing up at the same time. Thus most students care enough about their school and their fellow classmates to agitate to improve the school to fit the just society that we are trying to build.

A sixth source of power is the liberated spaces that already exist on campus. We can use our schools to develop and practice alternative theories. We can create safe spaces that insulate people from sexism / racism / capitalism / heterosexism – and by doing so, we can show others and ourselves the society that we are trying to create and use this to strengthen our spirit of resistance.

In education, all too often the goal of teaching knowledge, methods, and critical thinking is replaced with the goal of getting a good grade so that one can receive a diploma. Students need the diplomas so that they can get a “good” high-paying job. The fact that the diploma is more important than knowledge and that much of what schools teach is irrelevant to real life is called credentialism.

The use of grades as negative incentives is the result of poor teaching methods and the irrelevancy of the material that is taught. Due to these causes, students do not want to learn things for themselves and instead of encouraging learning, schools threaten to give low grades. These grades reinforce the idea that the only reason one learns is to avoid the negative incentive, and thus grades socialize students to avoid unnecessary studying/learning. Conveniently for the ruling class, this means that students are less likely to read books on their own and come across system-threatening ideas like feminism, anarchism, deep ecology, and others. Since it is very rare for students to study radical theories in school, most students will never study alternatives. By promoting student complacency, our unjust social system tries to assure its survival.



An additional problem with grades is that they bias the educational process to focus on knowledge that can be easily measured. Teachers are often overburdened with work and will resort to getting their grades from tests that take the least time to mark. Thus teachers will use multiple-choice exams instead of long answer ones, essays and “show your work” questions (in math and the sciences). We have all memorized facts for tests, sometimes the night before, only to forget them within a very short time.

Facts are easier to measure than ideas.

This problem can also be observed by the use of the SAT and GRE exams to determine acceptance into undergraduate and graduate school. Both of these work from a questionable belief that a student’s academic ability can be measured by their vocabulary and math skills. Also the SAT, which was written for middle-class white students, has been shown to discriminate against working class students and students of color. Another example is the current controversy with national testing of grade school and high school students. The test will strongly push teachers to use the phonetics approach to teaching children how to read, instead of using a holistic approach where students look at the context of the word within a sentence and within a text to determine its meaning. The phonetics method could come to dominate simply because its results are easier to test.

Education should be based on learning how to think critically, write, problem solve and other skills that one will remember in the future due to constant use. Facts should not be abstracted from their context. Often understanding the meaning of an event is more important than knowing the exact year it took place, and knowing an event’s context is probably necessary for long-term recollection of the date. Conveniently for the ruling class, the educational process trains students to mindlessly regurgitate facts and what their teacher said instead of thinking for themselves. This practice serves to socialize them for a future boss/worker relationship. The increased level of free thought at college is due to the need for college students to be bosses (middle management or professionals) and also a recognition that our information economy cannot function without some freedom. We should resist this

system, using whatever level of critical thinking we are taught to challenge injustice, and refuse to be either worker or boss.

Some freedom of thought is necessary for the functioning of our economy, but this freedom is also dangerous to the ruling class. So what is the solution? Specialization! Free thought, so long as it is confined to narrow boundaries that do not question the critical assumptions of the system like the profit motive, will actually serve to maintain the system.

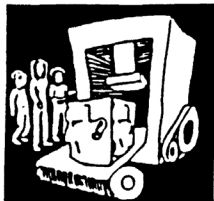
Education, especially at the higher levels, becomes increasingly abstracted from real life. At the same time, the focus of a student's studies narrows more and more. By the time one is in graduate school, you are not only taking all of your courses in one subject, but also focusing in with a master's thesis and dissertation on a very small subset of an area within that discipline. For instance, I am studying sociology, particularly social movements, and within that field I am writing a sixty-page thesis about recruitment for high risk/cost actions. And while this might sound appealing, the nuts and bolts work is primarily statistical and the entire project is telling me less about the topic than attending the April 16, 2000 protest against the IMF and World Bank did.

The danger with this specialization is that what students learn is hard to share with people who are not in their field or have not attended college. Students are taught to communicate with their fellow academics, but not how to explain ideas to the public. Our society would benefit from having a widely and well-educated population that could discuss a wide range of topics. Both of these things are necessary for the functioning of democracy, however due to the educational system's high level of specialization they are currently lacking.

Democracy requires education, as history has shown we cannot trust the experts on matters of economics, military affairs, environmental policy and other issues. But with specialization people do not realize the full impact of what they do. For instance it is easy for a business major to join corporate management and ignore the economic exploitation of the firm's workers. Likewise scientists found nuclear power to be an exciting invention, without thinking about its impact upon world peace and the environment. To realize our resistance to corporate power and white and male dominated institutions, a people's movement that is strong enough to topple it must be alliance of many movements. The alliance can only come when people understand that all forms of oppression (and thus also of liberation) are connected. This requires a broad education.

Another level of abstraction in

Students are not products



Teachers are not tools



The University is not a factory



academia comes from the mathematical takeover of the sciences and more questionably so its takeover of the social sciences. Especially with the advances in computer technology and statistical software, students find it easier to analyze data (preferably that someone else took the time to collect) than spending time with a group of people to understand what they are doing, or to do lengthy interviews. Economics is an excellent example of a social science that at the graduate level can be almost pure math. By turning people into numbers it is easier to ignore them, and to avoid developing relational ties of solidarity upon which our resistance is based.

Instead of this abstraction, it should be possible to integrate learning with real life. The potential of this is limited somewhat by the fact that a typical student's level of school work is very time-consuming, the need for students to work due to high tuition rates and a lack of federal grants, and that educational process has socialized students into not wanting to learn on their own. But within these limits there are still areas in which the educational process can be improved. Students could do experiential learning, for instance getting credit for their activism (or get paid for it through a work-study position). Also students could learn from discussion with friends, experience, surfing the Internet with a purpose, reading books, listening to speakers, and in other ways. All of these are already a part of the college experience, however they are currently devalued since they cannot be graded.

Educating Where?

The educational process thus discriminatorily selects students based on race and class, then submits them to a corporate curriculum which is taught in an unjust and improper manner and where they are pushed to unnecessarily specialize. Is it any wonder that many campuses are a privileged space separate from the community in which they are located? A liberated campus will be integrated with the community (and likewise the region, nation, and world), incorporating its participation for more than just sporting events, and students would be involved in community affairs (for instance through experiential learning – both service and activism).

Where Can We Find Our Power?



Now that we have examined the systematic failings of our educational system, we turn to the question of how students can realize their power so that we can transform the educational process into a liberating one.

Sometimes a social movement does not need to wait and hope for outside assistance for it to be able to succeed. Rather, it needs a transformation of its consciousness so that it recognizes how it can use its untapped resources to win. The same can be said for us. Students need to recognize our power.

Some of this power is the product of our privilege. If you look at U.S. student activism, you will find that it is disproportionately (though not purely) located at the more prestigious schools. For instance a recent spring 2000 list of United Students Against Sweatshops contacts showed that 53% of them were from schools ranked by US News and World Report in the top quartile of their respective category, while only 5% were in the lowest quartile. Part of the explanation for this