

For a Class Line in the Student Movement

The term “revisionist” is thrown around a lot in revolutionary circles, but what does it mean? Simply put, “revisionism” is a veiled or open rejection of the scientific ideology of the proletariat, today Marxism-Leninism-Maoism with Chairman Gonzalo’s Universal Contributions. By “revision” we mean erasing or distorting one or more of the main components (philosophy, political economy, and scientific socialism) and central concepts (class struggle, dialectics, materialism, proletarian vanguard party, revolutionary violence, dictatorship of the proletariat, etc.) of Marxism. Revisionism is considered the primary danger facing the revolutionary movement, because it internally weakens, confuses, and ultimately betrays the movement its proponents claim to uphold. Revisionists are the representatives of the bourgeoisie inside the proletarian camp. This is why they are the main danger—it is unthinkable that the proletariat can successfully fight the bourgeoisie while acting under bourgeois leadership. It is the duty of all revolutionaries to openly and constantly combat and educate against revisionism and other distortions and misunderstandings of Marxism.

In *Marxism and Revisionism*, Lenin explained the pervasiveness of revisionism within the ranks of the revolutionary intellectuals and proletariat, identifying the influence of non-proletarian strata, in particular the “petty-bourgeoisie”, as its primary culprit:

“Wherein lies [revisionism’s] inevitability in capitalist society? Why is it more profound than the differences of national peculiarities and of degrees of capitalist development? Because in every capitalist country, side by side with the proletariat, there are always broad strata of the petty bourgeoisie, small proprietors. Capitalism arose and is constantly arising out of small production. A number of new “middle strata” are inevitably brought into existence again and again by capitalism (appendages to the factory, work at home, small workshops scattered all over the country to meet the requirements of big industries, such as the bicycle and automobile industries, etc.). These new small producers are just as inevitably being cast again into the ranks of the proletariat. It is quite natural that the petty-bourgeois world-outlook should again and again crop up in the ranks of the broad workers’ parties. It is quite natural that this should be so and always will be so, right up to the changes of fortune that will take place in the proletarian revolution.”

Thus we can see how revisionism is an unfortunate but nevertheless inevitable product of class society, and in particular is exacerbated by and introduced among the proletarian movement by outside forces, whether they be the downwardly mobile petty-bourgeois, students or youth of non-proletarian class origin, or by the direct agents and institutions of the capitalists themselves. It is something which must be combated, which all revolutionaries must be wary of and vigilant against, and which we will all have to constantly contend with at every step of the revolutionary process. To think that our own contemporary revolutionary movement as a whole, as young, weak, and largely petty-bourgeois as it is, does not contain a huge amount of explicitly or implicitly revisionist ideas within its ranks would be to close our eyes to the key task of combating and educating against revisionism and rightism wherever it may emerge, to pridefully pat ourselves on the back for work we have barely begun to do.

The recent article [*Center Palestine by Centering Revolution*](#), written by the Oakland-Berkeley Revolutionary Study Group and published through *The Masses*, and signed by a variety of national Maoist organizations (Revolutionary Study Group, Revolutionary Student Union, and Revolutionary Maoist Coalition) revises and amends a series of important basic principles and components of Marxism. While it begins from the abstractly correct position of polemicizing those who overemphasize the “vanguard” leadership role of the students, in its attempt it firmly falls into the very same errors it proclaims to correct. It undermines and revises the leading role of the proletariat and its vanguard, the Communist Party, in Marxist theory. We hope to use this polemic then as an educational tool and as a weapon to combat revisionism within the revolutionary movement, to “cure” the patient as Mao says by striking at the illness of anti-Marxist ideas and methods, and hope it gives pause for reflection among the signatories.

First, it is worth going over Marxist principles regarding three separate, but sometimes overlapping, groups, 1) the students, 2) the youth, 3) the intellectuals.

In Marxism, the students, youth, and intellectuals are not classes in the same way the proletariat, bourgeoisie, petty-bourgeoisie, peasantry, etc. are. The youth, students and intellectuals are rather a reflection of the classes and trends of the particular capitalist class society they exist within. There are proletarian youth, bourgeois youth, peasant youth, lumpen youth etc. There are bourgeois intellectuals, proletarian intellectuals and petty-bourgeois intellectuals. Not all youth are students, not all students are intellectuals, and not all intellectuals are either youth or students. Completing class assignments or taking courses in and of itself does not automatically make one an “intellectual”. As Lenin stated of the students in pre-revolutionary Russia:

“We find that there are among the present-day students six political groups: reactionaries, indifferents, academics, liberals, Socialist- Revolutionaries and Social-Democrats. The question arises: is this perhaps an accidental grouping, a temporary alignment of views? That question has only to be raised for anyone at all acquainted with the matter to answer it in the negative. And, indeed, there could not be any other grouping among our students, because they are the most responsive section of the intelligentsia, and the intelligentsia are so called just because they most consciously, most resolutely and most accurately reflect and express the development of class interests and political groupings in society as a whole.”

Like in Lenin’s time, the reality is that the US student movement is very divided and in its vast majority backwards and intermediate, even more so than the US workers movement, which is also very backwards and intermediate owing to our national conditions. Taken as a whole, most US students are either 1) politically inactive/passive, 2) liberals, 3) conservatives/reactionaries, or 4) revisionists. Furthermore the students are then in turn separated up by other various structural and demographic features, like whether they are in high school, undergraduate, or graduate school, whether they are at a large public or elite private institution, etc. Taken as a whole, only a very small minority of the high

school and university student movement actually even claims to uphold revolutionary communist theory, much less correctly puts it into practice. For example, the university student movement along with the petty-bourgeoisie has historically produced, and continues to re-produce, most active revisionist organizations nationally (SWP, FRSO, RCP, DSA, PSL, etc.). Recently graduated former university students, especially the self-proclaimed “radicals”, often are state syndicalism’s most active supporters and its first line of defense in the labor movement. They also are the main workforce for the capitalist state’s NGO apparatus which carries out counter-insurgency in poor, working-class and nationally oppressed/national minority communities. That the university student movement in particular is understood as incredibly heterogeneous, a vacillating reflection of broader national conditions rather than a stable force within and of itself, and objectively a key source of revisionism within the larger revolutionary movement will be important to keep in mind below.

In their attempt to polemicize what they call “Student Vanguardism” and outline tasks for the “revolutionary” students, the Oakland-Berkeley Revolutionary Study Group write:

“In a certain sense, the students can act as a vanguard of the revolutionary movement. The specific characteristics of students, who are mostly young people engaged in high level mental labor, means that students are often the first line of response to major political events, because they have high energy and are actively engaged in political life. But there are other characteristics of students that make them incapable of being a vanguard in the fullest sense of the term. Most students are not in school year round, and most students are in school for at most four years. College life also tends to isolate students from the lives of the broad masses. This makes it difficult for student movements to maintain a long term viewpoint, and to sustain protracted political struggles.

Rather than the vanguard, students are more like the scout force of the revolutionary movement. They are often the first to make contact with the enemy, but they are incapable of defeating the enemy on their own. Strategically, the students play a supportive role in the revolutionary movement, and their main task must be to facilitate the revolutionary movement of the working class.

[...]

Today, the student movement is far in advance of the main force, the working class movement. If students do not keep this in mind, this will lead to a demoralization of the student movement, when inevitably they are incapable of defeating the enemy on their own. Tactically, students must continue their offensive against the enemy as far as possible. Strategically, students must circle back to join the main force, propagate the lessons they have learned about the enemy, and plan a new course of action with the main force of the revolutionary movement.

[...]

Just as students are isolated on campuses, workers are more or less isolated in their individual workplaces. As revolutionaries, we have two tasks to overcome this problem. We must propagate the activity of the students to the working class, explain to workers why the students are rebelling, and bring light of youth energy into the dark and stale factories and warehouses. Students must teach the workers about the crimes being committed by their bosses against their class siblings around the world, in countries that many workers have barely heard of. We also must bring the salt of the earth attitude of the workers into the ivory tower of the universities. Workers who have been trained in the discipline of capitalist production can teach students how to avoid the “autonomist” anarchism that is so palatable in the petty bourgeois environment of the university. Workers who have been swindled by managers and capitalists for decades can teach students how to smell the bullshit promises of wide grinned university administration and the misleadership of demagogic professional “leftists.”

If revolutionary students can’t bring the workers to their encampments, they should form coordinated detachments, go to the working masses in their neighborhoods and workplaces, invite workers to tour their encampments, and share their experience with the broad masses, and try to gather lessons, advice, words of encouragement; anything that the workers can offer to bolster the isolated encampments. But regardless of tactics, which can never be prescribed in advanced, the advanced students must recognize that without the workers they are nothing, and to win over the workers they must transform themselves into proletarian revolutionaries, and steel themselves for the long decades of class struggle to come.”

First of all, while it is not said directly, based on the fact that the article is about the “university occupation movement” we are forced to assume that when Oakland-Berkeley Revolutionary Study Group (OBRSG) use the term “students” they are referring specifically to university students, and not high school students or youth generally.

We should begin by establishing then that from a Marxist perspective, in a modern capitalist country college students are not just not a “vanguard” in the “fullest sense of the term”: in absolutely no sense are they able to “act” as a “vanguard of the revolutionary movement”. College students, taken as a whole sector, are not a revolutionary vanguard under capitalism, period. Instead, according to Marxism, certain segments of the university students are potential “auxiliaries” of the revolutionary proletarian movement (we will go into how and which segments later). They can serve certain roles and under correct proletarian leadership have certain important qualities, but under no circumstances should this auxiliary role ever be confused with the university students as a whole “movement” being **in any sense** a “revolutionary” “vanguard”, especially when referring to their spontaneous or autonomous actions. And if there is any objection to our description of the article as describing “spontaneous” or “autonomous” action by the students, than we must assert that there is really no other direct interpretation of sections like this as they are literally written: “If revolutionary students can’t bring the

workers to their encampments, they should form coordinated detachments, go to the working masses in their neighborhoods and workplaces, invite workers to tour their encampments, and share their experience with the broad masses, and try to gather lessons, advice, words of encouragement; anything that the workers can offer to bolster the isolated encampments.”

Connected to this misconception regarding the university students acting “as a vanguard of the revolutionary movement” “in a certain sense”, the article puts forward the thesis that: “Today, the student movement is far in advance of the main force, the working class movement.” Immediately, it is worth noting that the term “advance” is never defined throughout the entire article. What then does the term “advance” mean in the formulation “the student movement is far in advance of the main force, the working class movement”? In what sense is the student movement, taken as a whole, more “advanced” than the workers movement, and importantly, as Marxists, what exactly makes a group more “advanced” from our perspective?

In many ways the entire central thesis of Marxism, around which all of its major components like historical materialism, dialectical materialism, and scientific socialism are based, is the idea that class struggle is the motive force of history and the proletariat is the most advanced class within capitalist society and in human history generally. Only the proletariat, owing to their unique conditions and role in production, is capable of producing en masse the correct class stand and revolutionary class consciousnesses necessary to lead the revolutionary process that will carry all humanity to the end of all exploitation and oppression and the achievement of a classless communist society. As Marxist thinkers have established for centuries now, while individual members of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie may take up a proletarian class stand, as a whole group, as a class, only the workers and their movement are advanced enough to lead all other sectors towards the violent overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a socialist and then communist society.

In Marxism important terms like “vanguard” are only ever afforded to the proletariat, and its leading organizations like the Communist Party, because as Marxists we hold that the proletariat is the most ideologically and politically advanced class in history. This is in many ways **the** fundamental principle of Marxism, as the original Communist Manifesto itself explains in great detail how under capitalism: “Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.” That is to say the proletariat is the only “really revolutionary” sector under capitalism, the only group that will **lead** all other groups and classes that may temporarily oppose the bourgeoisie to the end of exploitation and oppression, the end of class society.

Furthermore, when Marxists and aspiring communist revolutionaries use the term “advanced” to describe a section of society they take all-rounded revolutionary proletarian class-consciousness as the bench mark for whether or not a group or individual is “advanced”, “intermediate”, or “backwards”. That is, a fully internalized and consciously upheld understanding of the historic role of the proletariat in overthrowing capitalism, establishing socialism, and leading all of humanity to a classless society.

So if OBRSG's position is that "today" the university student movement has a more developed sense of revolutionary proletarian class-consciousness than the workers themselves, than the "working class movement" itself, that is a serious assertion that requires monumental evidence to prove. This would mean disproving the fundamental laws of human history. Which the OBRSG provided no such evidence of, and could not do so. Certainly, the recent university encampment movement has taken a more energetic stance and undertaken more combative action on the issue of Palestinian national liberation than the workers movement. Taken as a whole, certain minority segments of the university student movement (and not by any means all segments or even a numerical majority of the country's university students as a whole) have put forward the demand that their universities and colleges "divest" and generally cut ties with the State of Israel, and have been willing to temporarily occupy campus spaces and suffer arrests and the possibility of suspension in order to implement those demands. These segments are certainly more subjectively "revolutionary"-minded and advanced in comparison to the inactive or openly pro-Zionist sections of the student movement, which are in turn objectively more numerous than this more revolutionary-minded element. Does all of the above then directly correlate to the entire university "student movement" being "far in advance" of the entire "workers movement"?

The answer to this should be a resounding "no". There are a huge variety of conceivable reasons that a group or individual may be willing to take a strong public pro-divestment/anti-Israel stance that doesn't correlate with having even the most basic elements of revolutionary proletarian class-consciousness. There are those who intern in some of the largest firms and corporations in the world, believe in "humane" investing and bourgeois pacifism, and oppose the genocide in Gaza and support divestment on that basis. You can otherwise align with and support US imperialism generally, but find the Gaza genocide to be particularly gruesome and worthy of protest/action. As we have seen, you can literally be a staffer in the Biden White House, and publicly oppose this specific policy of American imperialism.

The consolidated unified force implied by the article's beginning: "Student leaders of the university occupation movement have put forward a clear and principled call to not let normalizers and opportunists co-opt their movement into a distraction from the genocide in Palestine, led by US Imperialism and waged by Zionism", simply does not exist. The university encampment movement has been incredibly anarchistic, localized, uneven, and eclectic on all levels. On an ideological-political level, most encampments have been mainly led by revisionist and liberal forces (DSA, PSL, anarchists, "left" Democrats) that materially support Israel, while others have been led by more independent revolutionary forces. Some encampments have been incredibly combative, and have required active police measures to clear them, others have collapsed through the most vague administrative promises, and in most colleges nationally there have been no encampments at all, at most single day rallies or protests. According to one count, out of the roughly 1,400 public and private colleges in the US, only around 130 have had any Palestinian solidarity encampments at all. Thus, in obvious contradiction of the formulation "the student movement is far in advance of the main force, the working class movement", its very unclear that even the minority "university encampment movement" on the whole is fully "advanced" from a revolutionary class-conscious perspective, much less the entire "student

movement” which includes within it the huge mass of Republican, Democrat, revisionist, and inactive students.

Maybe the OBRSG comrades would respond by saying that when they wrote “advanced” they were attempting to express that the university students are more combative, “active”, “militant” or “energetic” than the workers. As the article itself mentions, simply being “militant” on a specific given auxiliary issue does not automatically translate into anything else unless it is accompanied by other relevant forms of revolutionary political and organizational practice. Similarly, being repressed by the state does not automatically translate into proof of revolutionary proletarian class-consciousness. For example, certain bourgeois and petty-bourgeois segments of the environmental movement have for years engaged in theatrical and ultra-militant protests and actions which have resulted in repeated arrests and repression, almost entirely in support of the backwards idea of a transition to a more “sustainable” and “green” imperialist capitalism. And if they meant to refer to the revolutionary students specifically, then they would have to make the comparative argument that the revolutionary university students are “today” “far in advance” of the revolutionary workers and proletarian intellectuals, which obviously would be a very bold claim that is incorrect on its face.

All spontaneous popular movements are given to brief peaks of rebellious energy followed by longer generally inactive lulls, and the proletarian movement and the student movement are no exception. That is the nature of the problem of spontaneity Lenin outlined more than a century ago that revolutionaries must seek to overcome and transform. Still, even if we take the two largest most recent spontaneous popular movements nationally (the university students and the urban nationally oppressed/national minority proletarians/semi-proletarians), it must be said that the urban proletarian movement against racial discrimination/repression has had comparatively much higher peaks and demonstrations of actual class-consciousness insofar as their rebellions have been mostly aimed directly and materially against the US state and capitalists themselves. For example, during the rebellions following the murder of George Floyd, the spontaneous proletarian masses tactically defeated entire police departments in pitched battles in several major cities (albeit temporarily), taking over and burning precincts, seizing weapons, and launching offensives against the buildings and symbols of major state and corporate monopolistic institutions. They were only pacified through the declaration of generalized states of emergency and the calling out of the national guard, producing a temporary crisis of governance amid the broader dual economic-pandemic crisis, dealing significant blows against the imperialists and their regime (although it would also be incorrect to overstate and overemphasize the damage that this spontaneous, or any, movement was able to deal).

This episode is also illustrative insofar as it was the non-university student youth movement, specifically the proletarian Black and Latino youth, who made up the most rebellious sections of those uprisings, in contrast to the university student movement which played a generally negative electoralist and legalistic role tailing in the wake of the spontaneous rebellion of the proletarian masses.

On the basis of this incorrect thesis—that the university student movement is more advanced than the

workers movement—OBRSG then outlines a series of incorrect and revisionist practical proposals.

It is worth noting that nowhere, in the article's entire series of practical prescriptions and tactics, is there any mention or concrete description of the revolutionary proletariat and its vanguard organizations actually politically and organizationally leading the revolutionary student movement. At most a process of equal exchange is described (which doesn't even make sense on its face: how are random non-revolutionary workers supposed to defeat liberal anarchism and opportunism among the students if "they have barely heard of" imperialism or the Israel-Palestine conflict before?), or even more accurately a process of student-led exchange, where the organized students disseminate revolutionary ideology among the unorganized working-class masses and, in an act of rank condescension, the workers in turn give them some small folksy "salt-of-earth" "lessons" and encouragement. This section represents a serious revision of Marxism's basic positions, this time regarding the relationship between the students and proletariat, and the revolutionary students and revolutionary proletariat in particular.

Marxism does not propose a process where university students bring communist practice and theory to the workers and work to "win over the workers" through "transforming themselves into proletarian revolutionaries". It actually describes the reverse, where the conscious element of the revolutionary proletarian movement wins political and organizational leadership over the relatively advanced students, and through a proletarian revolutionary-led process transforms the student movement into an effective auxiliary force in service of the broader process of proletarian revolution. The revolutionary students are not equal to the proletarian vanguard. They instead have their own limited tasks to carry out in service to the proletarian vanguard.

This error appears again and again in the article. According to OBRSG it is up to the college students to "transform themselves into proletarian revolutionaries"? It is the task of the students to, apparently of their own spontaneous initiative, "form coordinated detachments, go to the working masses in their neighborhoods and workplaces, invite workers to tour their encampments, and share their experience with the broad masses, and try to gather lessons, advice, words of encouragement; anything that the workers can offer to bolster the isolated encampment"? It is a duty of the current university student movement to go to "the dark and stale factories and warehouses" to "teach the workers about the crimes being committed by their bosses against their class siblings around the world" and then bring random individual workers to their campuses to show them their "salt of the earth attitude" and spontaneously teach them not to be sell-outs? Not only is the revolutionary class-consciousness and capacity of the contemporary university student movement dramatically and incorrectly over-emphasized in the above formulations, but even worse, at each step the essential roles and tasks of the revolutionary workers and their vanguard organizations are replaced and filled instead by the (presumed, but never proven to be) revolutionary students and their independent spontaneously-generated mass organizations. This is the idealist fallacy typical of petty-bourgeois-minded people during an advance in any struggle: "because they're doing this thing, they must be capable of doing anything!" Ironically, the article itself is proof against its own thesis. The students were so impressed by an uptick in protest activity on campus that they decided to bestow on themselves the title of

“vanguard” “in a certain sense”—exposing their own failure to understand Marxism or even the actual terms of the struggle against Zionism.

Without even going into the very questionable formulation of the university students as the “scout force of the revolutionary movement”, a central example embodying the errors above and constituting a major revision of Marxism that must be highlighted here is the idea that the university students’ “main task must be to facilitate the revolutionary movement of the working class”. The task of facilitating the movement of the working class, of promoting, advancing, and acting like a leading force for the workers, belongs exclusively to the vanguard organization of the revolutionary workers and intellectuals, the Communist Party, and its generated organisms.

Thus in one fell swoop the following key tasks of the Communist Party, or in its absence the “earliest rudiments” of the Communist Party (the “circle”-type organizations of the conscious element of proletarian movement), are either ignored, or assigned fully/partially to the spontaneously organized revolutionary college students:

1. The task of facilitating “the revolutionary movement of the working class”
2. The task of developing the seeds of internationalist class solidarity among the workers
3. The task of leading the revolutionary student movement
4. The task of forging non-proletarian individuals into proletarian revolutionaries
5. The task of creating agitation-propaganda teams that intervene in the “factories and warehouses”
6. The task of leading first contact and early offensives against the capitalists and their state

The absence of a reconstituted Communist Party does not change that these tasks belong to the organized conscious elements of the proletarian movement as part of the basic principles of our ideology. Nor does this absence somehow shift these responsibilities onto the university student movement. It instead requires us to creatively and scientifically apply these principles to our context, while at all times maintaining the ideological-political-organizational leadership of the conscious element of the proletarian movement, and all the more so emphasizes the task of reconstituting Communist Party in the US.

We no longer live in the early capitalism of the 1800s, where bourgeois intellectuals and university students like Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, Li Da etc. had to originally found and introduce Marxism into their respective national proletarian movements. Now that this original brief historical moment of early capitalism has past, the task of disseminating Marxism and leading/initiating revolutionary activity among the workers, and indeed among all of the masses, now falls instead to the so-called “conscious element of the proletarian movement”, as it is concretely expressed in Marxist theory through the cadre and militants of the Communist Party, and when that Party has not yet been constituted/reconstituted, its earliest rudiments, the revolutionary proletarian organizations/circles in the process of

unity/reconstitution. It is the task of the conscious element of the proletarian movement, as expressed through its vanguard organizations, to lead the proletariat and its auxiliaries like the students and youth at all stages and steps of the revolutionary process, including our current stage. In the entire OBRSG article, nowhere is this proletarian leadership over the students ever concretely elaborated or established, negating the actual vanguard for a proposed pseudo-vanguard, or “scout force”.

As Lenin wrote, revisionism endlessly manifests itself again and again in class society, and we need not go far to find an exact carbon copy of the article’s positions. Indeed it was precisely at a similar moment in 1969 (but almost ten times more-so) that in the midst of the anti-Vietnam war movement and Black Power movement the famous Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) faction, the “Revolutionary Youth Movement”, would advance the following position:

“1) An organized revolutionary youth movement is itself a powerful force for revolutionary struggle. In other words, our struggle is the class struggle, as is the Vietnamese and the black liberation struggle. To call youth or even the student movement a section of the bourgeoisie which must simply support any struggle fought by working people is economism. The struggle of youth is as much a part of the class struggle as a union strike. We ally with workers by waging struggle against a common enemy, not by subjugating our movement patronizingly to every trade union battle. We also ally with the liberation struggle of those fighting against Imperialism, recognizing that this is the true expression of the working class at its most conscious level.

2) Youth is a critical force which – through struggle – can expose war, racism, the exploitation of labor and the oppression of youth. We do this by putting forth our class analysis of capitalist institutions via propaganda and sharp actions. Exemplary actions of the youth movement lead to higher consciousness and struggle among other people.

3) Because we can organize – as a student movement – around those contradictions which affect youth specifically, we can organize young working people into our class-conscious anti-capitalist movement. These young workers will (a) strengthen the anti-capitalist movement among the work-force, (b) provide an organic link between the student movement and the movement of working people, and (c) add to the effect that we will have as a critical force on older working people today.

4) The expansion of the base of the youth movement to include young working people changes the character of our movement importantly: because It fights the tendency of our student movement to define itself in terms of “student interest” rather than class interest.” - *RYM, Toward a Revolutionary Youth Movement*

One of the central RYM leaders, Michael Klonsky, would explain further that:

“When I speak of youth as a critical force, I am not just talking about exemplary action or tactics. We understand that in order to bring about conscious revolutionary struggles on the part of working people and get past economist trade-unionism, anti-imperialist consciousness will have to be injected into that movement by outside forces. The barriers to class unity and revolutionary struggle on the part of industrial workers have been racism, national chauvinism, male chauvinism, and anti-Communism. These are the main targets at the present time of the youth movement and actions by the youth movement which drive these issues into the factories, into the army, etc. can bring a higher level of consciousness to the primary agency of revolutionary change and socialist reorganization, in the same way that the black peoples’ struggle for national liberation has had its effect on the masses of working people by leading the fight against white supremacy and domestic imperialism.”
- Michael Klonsky, *Looking Back and Looking Ahead at Revolutionary Youth Movement*

Here again, but now nearly sixty years ago, the tasks and roles of the revolutionary organizations of the proletariat are systematically replaced by the mass spontaneous revolutionary student/youth movement. Getting the working class movement past economism, bringing “a higher level of consciousness”, defeating chauvinism among the workers, constructing links between the proletarian and student movements, being “primary” agents “of revolutionary change and socialist reorganization”: key responsibilities are taken away from consciously organized vanguard organizations of the proletariat and given to spontaneously organized detachments of college students/youth, in the process revising Marxism. On the flimsy basis of a subjective peak in a given popular movement, the vanguard role of the proletariat and its leading organizations was amended and leadership instead given to non-proletarian eclectic elements.

It should be no surprise then that the PB and college student-heavy “New Left” organizations that came out of SDS and RYM in particular were responsible for spawning an entire wave of revisionist distortions and incorrect practice which we still are struggling to overcome to this day.

The alternative to revising Marxism is not of course for the university students to be completely inactive and not struggle through questions of proletarian revolution. There is a world of difference between students conducting agitation among workers through the planning and leadership of a broader proletarian revolutionary organization, and spontaneously-generated university student organizations independently conducting agitation to unknown workers about “countries they’ve barely heard of” (we don’t know many workers who haven’t heard of Israel or Palestine at this point...) and then attempting to bring those workers to their campuses to give them “salt-of-the-earth” folksy wisdom and advice. In order to illustrate what a correct approach might look like in our context, compare the original OBRSG formulations (1) with our own version (2):

1. “Today, the student movement is far in advance of the main force, the working class movement. If students do not keep this in mind, this will lead to a demoralization of the student movement, when inevitably they are incapable of defeating the enemy on their own. Tactically, students

must continue their offensive against the enemy as far as possible. Strategically, students must circle back to join the main force, propagate the lessons they have learned about the enemy, and plan a new course of action with the main force of the revolutionary movement.”

2. **Today, the student movement is experiencing a new upsurge of activity and protest as expressed through the university Palestinian encampment movement. Increasingly the question of consolidating, elevating, and demarcating this movement from revisionism and liberalism becomes all the more urgent, as encampments fold through collaboration or are crushed by repression nationally. Tactically, students must continue their offensive against the university administrations as far as possible, and indeed broaden and make their current spontaneous offensive more long-term by directing their blows against the US imperialist state and imperialist system as a whole. Strategically, these revolutionary university students can play a supportive role in the revolutionary movement when under the leadership of correct ideological, political, and organizational class leadership. Their main task then must be to unite under the leadership of proletarian revolutionary organizations, and in coordination with these organizations, plan and put forward a combative, independent, and class-conscious line in the student movement not just on the question of Palestine, but as regards the mass demands and revindications of the working-class and poor students and youth generally.**

Or the difference between:

1. “We must propagate the activity of the students to the working class, explain to workers why the students are rebelling, and bring light of youth energy into the dark and stale factories and warehouses. Students must teach the workers about the crimes being committed by their bosses against their class siblings around the world, in countries that many workers have barely heard of. We also must bring the salt of the earth attitude of the workers into the ivory tower of the universities.”
2. **Revolutionary proletarian organizations should, in the course of their ongoing political and organizational work, agitate on anti-imperialist questions, like the current Palestinian national liberation movement, and forge proletarian internationalism consciousness by theoretically and practically linking the class struggle in the shops and workplaces to the anti-imperialist rebellions and resistance being carried out domestically and internationally. Revolutionary proletarian organizations can unite students with this work by incorporating them in supporting roles in the ongoing campaigns among the workers, and can support the students in their struggle for campus demands with direct political leadership, organizational resources, and general guidance and support.**

The difference between these formulations is literally the difference between Marxism and revisionism, the difference between proletarian and bourgeois/petty-bourgeois ideology. Without an emphasis on

conscious revolutionary proletarian leadership at all stages of work, organization, and development, the theory and practice being proposed ceases to be Marxist and instead transforms into its opposite. This can be ironically seen in the texts OBRSG cites as worthy of study at the bottom of their article. For example, in the Lenin work *The Student Movement and the Present Political Situation* cited both at the beginning and end of the article, Lenin does not make prescriptions for the student movement generally but instead specifically writes to the members of the Bolsheviks' own student "party groups" i.e. groups of students literally submitted to the direct discipline and leadership of the vanguard party of the proletariat. He goes as far as to say, in that very same text regarding the general student strike movement of that time: "if [the student] youth is able to organize a large- scale strike: we must do everything to help it in this under taking, but of course it is not for us socialists to guarantee the success of any **bourgeois movement**".

Similarly, in any text by Mao regarding the university students and petty-bourgeois intellectuals, the important context seemingly lost is that everything he talks about is being done under and through the ideological, political and organizational leadership of the Communist Party of China, the Chinese dictatorship of the proletariat, under the leadership of the conscious revolutionary element of the workers and peasant movement. The famous "down to the countryside" movement of the Cultural Revolution wasn't lead by students, it was lead by the proletariat through its state and vanguard organization the Communist Party and had the particular objective of strengthening the proletarian dictatorship which was under assault by the bourgeois elements concentrated in the universities.

The lack of a reconstituted Communist Party in our context does not change the universal principles or fundamental components of Marxism, it only means we must apply them scientifically and creatively to our particular context. Thus the aforementioned lack of a reconstituted Communist Party or the existence of an active protest movement does not mean that all rules of capitalist society are off, that the working class is no longer the advanced vanguard class, the university students are going to have to function as a partial vanguard for the time being, and that the revolutionary workers and revolutionary students should operate on the level of equal exchange.

Clearly on some level the authors of this piece understand or are familiar with the topics we have covered in this response, as they write about the importance of not negating or liquidating "the leadership of the advanced sections of the working class over the entire revolutionary movement" and specifically not negating or liquidating the "leadership of the working class over the student movement". The problem is that correct statements like these are directly contradicted by the majority of the analysis and proposals of the article which ironically actively revise these formulations, or are so vague as to be open to a dozen possible interpretations.

As a corrective to the OBRSG article, in our limited capacity as publication mainly focused on the workers movement (and the contemporary labor movement in particular), we would provisionally suggest for discussion the following main tasks of the revolutionary Marxist students in the current movement:

1. For the revolutionary students to link up with, patiently forge unity with, and eventually join under the higher leadership of proletarian revolutionary organizations locally and nationally who have taken correct stances theoretically and practically against the various forms of rightist and ultra-left errors which have plagued the US revolutionary movement for decades.
2. To, with the ideological-political leadership and support of the above organizations, forge a class line in the student movement, correctly scientifically analyzing the contradictions and divisions with the contemporary student movement, and synthesizing that investigation and social practice into a line that concretely forges the revolutionary students into an auxiliary of the revolutionary proletarian movement.
3. To use that correct class line in the student movement to fight, in a combative, independent and class-conscious manner for the demands and revindications of the students, not only on issues of international solidarity or in reaction to recent political events, but also on the social and economic questions which plague the working and poor students in particular (tuition, low pay for work, academic repression, features of bourgeois educational system, etc.)
4. To organizationally work with the proletarian revolutionary organizations to raise up and develop more permanent and consolidated organisms for mass work among the students, given the incredibly uneven and effervescent character university student organizations often take.
5. To do all of this keeping in mind the higher ever-present central task of reconstituting the Communist Party that will establish the dictatorship of the proletariat through armed struggle. To keep in mind the special ways the students and youth, especially the proletarian youth and university students in particularly useful fields such as medicine, engineering, education, and law can serve that movement by submitting themselves to proletarian ideological, political, and organizational leadership.

There is a reason Marxist thinkers and revolutionaries time and time again put an emphasize on the scientific precise language, and our ideology being the **ideology of the proletariat** specifically. The Communist Party of Peru once famously said that the “ideology of the international proletariat” is “all powerful because it is true” because Marxists seek to correctly understand the objective world around us on a materialist basis, and then from that correct scientific basis make and enact programmes and plans on how to change the world. In a sense then, the ultimate danger of revisionism, rightism, petty-bourgeois influence, etc. is that if revolutionaries don’t correctly understand the world, we will not be able to change it, will not be able to forge a path theoretically and practically to the conquest of power by the proletariat. Whether revisionism arises through unscientific planning, petty-bourgeois thinking, and incorrect ideas, as is the case with OBRSG’s article, or arises through a concerted organized attempt to distort and destroy Marxism, as is the case with MCU, Avakian, and others, it must be self-consciously and insistently combated at all stages with thorough-going education, line struggle, and correct social practice. Such a struggle is a key part of the movement to reconstitution the Communist Party and serves to defend the proletariat, and its scientific ideology, as the key and leading force in all stages of our revolution, here and internationally.