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Fourth International

# Youth: A central sector for the anticapitalists

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## Description:

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# 1. A particular role to play in class struggle

## a) Massive and frequent mobilisations

The Greek youth movements of recent years, the revolt of suburban youth of France in 2005, or also the mobilisation against the CPE (Contrat Première Embauché, First Hire Contract) put it beyond all dispute that youth plays a particular role in class struggle at an international level.

Though youth does not really have the means to stop the economy, the ruling class dreads youth, as we saw when a breeze of panic blew on the governments after the riots in Greece. The fear that it could spread to its own youth forced the French government to postpone the implementation of a high school reform. A curfew had even been implemented in France during the revolt of suburban youth.

**What do they fear?** It's without a doubt the frequency and the massivity of youth mobilisations. These last years, massive youth mobilisations took place in almost every country, and very frequently in some of them; anti-globalisation counter-summits, mobilisations against the war in Iraq and the occupation of Palestine, fights for democratic rights, strikes against the reforms of education and university (last year only: in Italy, Croatia, Britain, France and the Spanish State). We even saw some interaction at an international level between these struggles. The mobilisation in France against the CPE gave confidence and an example for Greek youth, who led an important strike in the universities the following year. Last year, many young Europeans identified with the Greek youth revolt.

It is also the radicality of these mobilisations that gives them a particularity. In a violent society that has no future to offer them, youths have very few to lose. Thus, they do not hesitate to confront the State, the police, and the institutions. The wish to get rid of this system is widespread in this sector. Young people identify with anticapitalism and the idea of revolution more easily.

Most of the time, youth mobilisations meet important sympathy from the workers and the population, as if the youth were saying loudly what the majority couldn't afford to say. Thus, in many instances, youth mobilisations restored to our social camp the confidence in our ability to resist; and in some cases other working sectors engaged in mobilisation, following the youth.

Of course, these mobilisations develop more often among student youth, in the universities and high schools; but we also find this spontaneity, this radicality and this stronger will to fight among young workers. In the workers' strikes of these last years, young workers were often found in first line.

## b) Particular characteristics of youth explain these specificities

Youth is defined by two major factors: its dependence on certain state reproductive institutions and its transitional situation towards the social division of labour. Youth is not a homogenous social group. It contains sectors with different or opposing class origins and/or orientation, and it therefore includes conflicting interests. That's why the student movement often chooses forms of organization that are different, more spontaneous and less coherent than those of the working class (e.g. trade unions, confederations etc).

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However, although youth is diverse, is not a homogenous social layer and even if a student, an unemployed marginalised youth, a precarious young interim worker... live different realities, there are some common characteristics to all: this period of transition, of non-determination, and a particular relation to the institutions (family, school, army, police, even the workplace). Young people are supervised, there is a will to subdue them, they do not have the possibility to make their own choices, in the workplace they do not have the same status as the other workers...

Youth is characterized by a particular place in the social division of labour: youth either has not yet entered the production system (student youth); or it has been integrated to it either for a short period of time or in an on-and-off way (alternating precarious small jobs, periods of unemployment, return to tuition...). Hence youth is less subjected to the mechanisms of work alienation. Student youth has more time to think about the working of this society, and mobilising is easier since it does not imply a loss of wage or a risk of being laid off.

Youth is less settled in life so really has much less to lose in a change of society. Youths do not own a house, a car; do not have children or a stable job. The stronger will to fight is also due to the fact that youth is less demoralised. It did not undergo the series of working class defeats, the setback of our rights and the degradation of living conditions that weighs on the workers' ability to mobilise.

Additionally, an important element is that youths have their whole life to build in this society that objectively has no future to offer them. It is obvious that the will to be done with this system is stronger when one still has 60 years to live in it than when one's life is mostly past.

One more unifying feature of youth is that it is entering, or it is about to enter, the social division of labour under certain historical circumstances and class relations that differentiates it from the past generations. The present youth generation for example comes to the foreground during a serious crisis of capitalism, which severely harms their future perspectives. On the other hand, it has not experienced the international workers' class's defeat of the late 1980 's. It is therefore more likely to radicalise further during next years. There are some contradictions in many European countries: for example you are adult enough to work, to produce (in a more precarious way, of course) at 16, but not adult enough to vote, to get married or to take decisions on your own health (abortions, surgical operations...). Youth can take some decisions (as producers) but not all of them. This contradiction makes youth understood as a passive and subordinate subject: to be taught, prepared, held, punished... and only in a few aspects are young people are seen as equals. This status makes the youth want to rebel (even if they have differences: students, precarious...).

That is why they develop common attitudes, notably a yearning for autonomy and a will to revolt against the institutions that supervise them, against the establishment.

### **c) Youth at the heart of ruling class attacks**

Youth is at the heart of a contradiction: its ability to protest represents a danger for the ruling class, but at the same time attacking youth is for them one of the easiest means of attacking the rights of the workers, of lowering the cost of work and therefore partly make up for the fall of the average rate of profit, which is a permanent problem for capitalists since the early 1970's. It is easier to break the statutes and lower the wages when one starts before the workers' entry into the work market. Thus, youth is at the heart of the governmental attacks. Education reforms and the Bologna process in the universities at a European level aim at devaluing diplomas. Attacking education, the ruling class prepares the workers to have no more collective guarantees, with an increasingly individualised curriculum, to have lower wages with diplomas not recognised in collective conventions, to be working on demand and to be adapted to the specific needs of the companies, with more and more public/private partnerships in the universities.

In Europe, the youth has also suffered the crisis stronger: from 2008 to 2009, the unemployment rate in Europe increased by 1.5% (reached 8.8%) and the youth unemployment rate increased by 3.7% (reached 18.4%). The Spanish state is the European country with the highest youth unemployment rate (last year the youth unemployment rate increased 12 points while the general unemployment rate increased 8 points) The second one is Italy, where the difference between the general unemployment rate and the youth unemployment rate is 17%.

Mass youth unemployment, which grew even more with the crisis, leads youths to accept ever worse working conditions, being less paid, more precarious. It is used as a pretext by the governments to implement specific statutes for young workers: employers' contributions exemptions for the companies hiring youths, specific working contracts with less rights, lower wages...

To solve the contradiction between youth's strong capacity of mobilisation and the necessity to attack it in priority, the ruling class is forced to deploy a repressive apparatus to try and subdue youth's explosions: police control, school discipline, exhausting timetables of studying and every-day life, ferocious repression of the movements (police in high schools, army in the universities, State of Emergency against the suburb riots in France). Even if the working class is the central force to throw down capitalism, it is obvious that youth is a decisive element, that plays a role in class struggle, which we must try to gain to our organisations and whose mobilisations we must try to influence. The IVth International organisations must try and organise the new militant generations that emerge in the different countries.

## 2. What place for youth in our organisations and how to build in this sector?

### a) Youth: a priority

To achieve this, intervention towards youth must be a priority for our organisations, meaning implementing a regular activity where youth are concentrated: universities, high schools, but also companies employing a lot of young precarious workers (Mac Donald's...). The elaboration of this activity must be discussed as such within in our organisations. It must be a major and daily concern. Being attentive to these mobilisations, maintaining a permanent elaboration and a regular activity towards this sector are the only means to influence its struggles and gain the new militant generations to our organisations.

### b) Build organisations able to seize youth specificities

We must also build militant frameworks able to seize the specificities of this youth: different ways and means of politicisation, faster rhythms of mobilisation, stronger radicality. The majority of youths come to politics through and for action. We must build organisations for action, that are in direct link with the mobilisations and useful for building these. It is also necessary to adapt in some way to the faster rhythms of mobilisation by offering daily militant frameworks. To answer to this radicality, we must display our anticapitalist and revolutionary profile.

### c) Within the organisations, need for specific frameworks to coordinate intervention towards youth and allow youths to make their own experiences.

To respond to youth's aspiration to a certain autonomy, our organisations must offer youth specific frameworks allowing them to elaborate among youths and to make their own experiences: youth organisation, youth sector within the parties or other form of youth structure within the party... Having a coordinated self-organised structure makes the youth not to delegate on older and more experimented comrades but assume responsibilities, discuss the orientation,

elaborate campaigns and so on. This way, young become conscious militants faster. The youth area also understood as an area of creation of conscious militants. We also need a specific elaboration on matters that concern youth more particularly, as well as a specific elaboration of material: tracts, brochures, newspapers, posters... At the same time, we need more attention to include specific matters and movement that concern the youth in our whole medias. The experience of these last years proves that all our sections need to reinforce the coordination of youth activities within our organisations. Trying to coordinate youth within our organisations is one of the conditions for an efficient intervention.

### **d) A strong effort of education**

For young people who often live their first political experience when organising within our sections, a particular effort of theoretical education must be made, to allow them to acquire rapidly some tools for action and to gain them to militancy and revolutionary Marxism for the long run. This task gets even more urgent considering that youth's radicalisation and politicisation is often more fragile, unstable and difficult to maintain for a long period. The systematic implementation of a basic education on Marxist economy and social movement history and revolutionary strategy is an indispensable element. Making the theoretical texts available in the form of low cost brochures participates of this effort. In this framework, maintaining the yearly Youth School in the IIRE at the end of August is a decisive element. Each section should be concerned upstream about being able to register youths in the school each year.

### **e) The Youth Camp**

In the same way, the IVth International youth camp is a central gain. It is a living education in internationalism: a too rare experience of activist-to-activist sharing on our struggle experiences, an element for a better understanding the world and for developing fraternity, comradeship at an international level. For many youths, this youth camp is what founds their profound attachment to the IVth International and their deep conviction of the necessity of internationalism. In this respect, it is an important element for building and reinforcing the IVth International.

This camp must be maintained but also reinforced. Each section must be concerned with its success, by developing mobilisation campaigns for the camp towards our young sympathisers where we usually intervene, financially helping youths who want to participate to the camp, popularising this experience in our organisations.

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