UNIVERSITY OCCUPATION

SINCE MARCH THIS YEAR a war has been waged on the Sydney University Campus. And there have been casualties — 5 students expelled (3 of them have received "suspended expulsions"). The term "war" is applicable because of the methods employed by the university administration against the campus radicals — informers, cameramen to photograph those involved in a 24 hour occupation of the Administration offices, "strongarm men" to provoke what could be termed "student violence", Supreme Court injunctions to restrain radicals from further militancy, and expulsions for those who dared to defy the dictates of the university administrators.
The current struggle at Sydney began over an issue which challenged the validity of the university’s entry standards (matriculation requirements), connected as they are with the political device of “quotas” (a tool the government employs to regulate the number of students engaged in tertiary studies, thus minimising Budget allocations to education, freeing these for more important capitalist priorities — the Vietnam war and defence for example.)

The challenge eventually manifested itself in a 24 hour occupation of the university Administration offices, and was dealt with in the manner outlined above. This rampant and savage repression points to one thing, that those who engaged in it felt that something vital was at stake. It was not merely the desire to restore “law and order” to the campus but through the restoration of this to cripple the radical movement.

On the one hand the struggle at Sydney is a power struggle. Who will control the campus and university education — the legally authorised administration (open as they are to pressures from the State and business interests), or the forces now seeking power, those who are ruled, the powerless — the students and staff?

The crippling of the radicals would ensure that power on campus remained in the hands of the administration, removing the perceived threat of it shifting into those of the students and staff. On the other hand the crippling of the radicals would remove the continual threat and presence of dissent and student unrest on campus; further it would curtail the activities of radicals in using the campus for organising against capitalist society.

The Vice-Chancellor at Sydney University is himself an ex-radical. He knows how to fight radicals — isolate them, destroy their basis for mass support, pick off the leaders. No doubt he is encouraged in his repression by the lack of support the exclusion of Albert Langer from Monash earlier this year received from the students there.

It is a safe bet that the other Australian Vice-Chancellors are sitting, watching what is happening at Sydney. For if radicalism is successfully smashed there at the current most radical Australian university, it will be the signal for the others to follow and with similar tactics to smash their campus radicals. Whatever happens at Sydney will have an effect on every other university campus in Australia.

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