Draft Thesis on the Youth Question

proletarian families into the productive slogans and demands only on holiday ocprocess. The cheapness of its jabor casions. power, its physical and intellectual immaturity, its lack of trade union organization makes it particularly profitable present they can at best be agitational characteristics and the needs growing out of them-need for physical and intellectual development, for play, "social life"-were left almost wholely unsatisfled From a position of helpers and apprentices the youth was absorbed ever more into the general industries and process of capitalism.

These exceptional condition of exploitation the development of militarism as a support of the growing imperialism, and the need for the education of the youth for socialism resulted in the early formation of young worker and socialist youth organization.

2. The Y. C. L. was founded in Nov ember 1919 out of a need for an organization which would attract the working youth towards Communism, win, organ ize and train it for the Communist parties. The need for a special organization is called forth by the psychological peculiarities of youth-its immaturity and impulsiveness, its special activitiessports, "socal" affairs, and its physical and intellectual requirements. These can be satisfied only by particular methods; activities and organization.

The Y. C. L.s are broad educational organizations of youth. Communist training and education requires the intimate linking up of the theoretical with the practical, the study-group with the field of the class struggle. The Y. C. L. is in the forefront of the struggles of the working youth leads and organizes it for immediate economic and cultural needs and demands; struggles inside and outside the armed forces against capitalist militarism; develops itself in the struggle against the bourgeois and petty bourgeois (especially reformist) organizations and influence, as the cultural center and political leader of the youth.

The League which aspires to be the leader of a section of the working class, the employed youth are being worsened the youth, is politically subordinate to by wage-cuts, and speed-up. The absthe Communist party, the vanguard of ence of trade union protection or social the proletariat as a whole. The strategy legislation makes their position exand tactics of the party are the strategy | tremely difficult. and tactics of the League. This political subordination is accompanied by the organizational autonomy of the League, i. e., its right to elect its own committees and officers, and regulate the League's inner policies and life. Political The plight of the young workers today imbued with a military and patriotic subordination is maintained by a capable is the best refutation of the much glori- spirit. The one million children within tatives on committees, and a sound the powerful bourgeois agencies, schools Marxian policy in the class struggle press, church and youth organizations which the Leaguers will readily follow. have hammered into their heads. The A thorough discussion of the party questions affecting the League should take place during the latter's pre-convention discussion.

The restatement of these elementary and fundamental principles of the Communist youth, laid down by the first three congresses of the Y. C. I., is made imperative by their revision, in theory and practise, by the present leaders of the Comintern and Y. C. I.

3. .Limited experience with Communist youth work requires that youth tac tics, demands, slogans and special organizational forms should be put forward not as dogmas or finished products which have universal validity but rather with a view of testing them in practise, examining the results, and thereby laying the ground for more effective tactics, slogans, etc. The Comintern under Zinoviev and later Bucharin and Stalin converted the Y. C. L.'s into factional pawns. Youth policies were completely subordinated to the factional require-

ments of the moment. YOUTH IN AMERICA

4. Due to the increased mechanization and rationalization in American industry since the last war, youth labor is to be found in every important industry of the country. Over one-fourth of the workers in the U.S. are under the age of twenty-five-about twelve million. Of these, five milion are between the League; discussions on youth tacthe ages of 10 and 19. There are over tics, on trade union policies, etc., are one million children employed under the a thing of the distant past. The so-

For the youth between the ages of 18 and 24 who are being drawn in increasing numbers into the basic industries of the country (coal, metal) doing the same work as the unskilled adult, in many cases getting the same pay and suffering from the same oppressive conditions, the special forms of exploitation to which the young worker is submitted under the apprentice and helpers' systems are substituted for by the greater speed-up, and an increase in the intensity of exploitation. The youth in these industries are being increasingly of the League. absorbed into the unskilled proletariat. This strengthens the solidarity between the adult and youth (present coal strike) Special youth demands in such cases, do not arise out of the special economic position of the young workers but rather out of their psychological and physiological peculiarities and requirements -their immaturity, need for develop-

ment, etc. In those as well as in the light industries (electrical, radio electrical parts production, foods, etc.) special attention should be paid to the youth under the age of 18. Special hours of work, wages, conditions of labor can be determined only on the basis of the particular industry. At the same time the Y. C. L. a few cries about the war danger in the the moment. should put forward demands which link Young Worker have been the sum and up the struggles of the youth in the substance of the anti-militarist campaign. tions of Youth auxiliaries, and the acshop factory, mine and mill with the Even its own members are not taught tual activities of the existing ones is

1. Capitalism draws the youth of the The official Y. C. L. today utilizes its ilitarist tactics.

These demands should be put forward objects for exploitation. These same and propaganda demands. When the op- reach large sections of youth, its almost portunity offers itself, either in an industry or in the country as a whole, they can be put forward as concrete immediate slogans of action.

The struggle for the youth demands should be accompanied by a comparison of the conditions of the young worker under a proletarian rule-as illustrated the Young Pioneers; a complete absence ance of the Young Vanguard as a sec by the Soviet Union. The slogan for an annual month vacation with pay for ranks. youth under 23 can be made a powerful weapon against the Citizens' Military had exceptional possibilities for growth. Training Camps.

At the same time a struggle for the unionization of the youth should be carried on. In textile, coal, automobile., radio etc., the youth should be organized into the revolutionary unions or leagues. Special youth forms of organization (committees or sections) should develop special forms of activities to attract and hold the young workers. In industries where the A. F. of L. has some centrol (men's clothing, building, hat manufacturing, etc.) and large sections of youth are employed, they are almost completely barred from the uning of Left wing groups in the unions. Further, the most persistent struggle must be carried on to remove all discriminatory rules and practises in all trade unions.

THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS

5. The working youth is especially hard hit by the present economic crises The miserable wages previously received by the young workers made it impossible for them to save any money. Unemployment which has resulted in the throwing of over two million youth out of industry, reduces them to poverty, increases their misery. The conditions of ORGANIZATIONS

The crisis has the effect of driving many working class students out of the schools. It helps shatter their illusions about the simplicity of getting out of

their proletarian condition. youth are beginning to see this. It furnishes the best objective conditions yet known in this country for the winning half million and thirty million dollars of large sections of youth away from bouregois ideology, the Y. M. C. A., the Y. W. H. A. the Boy Scouts, etc., and for the Young Communist League. To accomplish this requires correct tactics in the class struggle, realistic youth demands and activities, a courageous, capable Marxist leadership in the Y. C. L. THE AMERICAN LEAGUE

6. Even in this period of splendid opportunities for Communist youth work, the American League is not only a mere shadow of the party (claiming 2,000 members) but has lost more than fifty percent of its membership since the last convention two years ago. The crisis which has been gripping the international Communist and revolutionary move ment for the last few years is especially acute in the Y. C. L. in this country. The reign of Stalinism in the Comintern its false strategy and tactics its incompetent leadership, internationally as well as nationally, combined with false youth tactics, are responsible for the present condition in the American Communist

youth movement. There is not a single field of its active ities in which the League can show substantial accomplishments. No real educational activity is carried on inside age of 16, exclusive of those under 10. called leaders, appointed by the party bureaucrats, are incompetents whose chief trait is their subservience and

obedience. In its most important function, that of educating the youth for Communism, the Y. C. L. has completely failed. This is best exemplified by the fact that the rapid and constant turnovers of membership in its ranks means, not that the party is recruiting from the League, but rather that the youth are turning away from the revolutionary movement. This is the major and most serious weakness

The youth leagues which in the early days of the Communist movement were in the forefront of the struggle against opportunism in the revolutionary movement are today blinded to the growing dangers of the complete degeneration of the Communist party. The real struggles and difficulties of the Russian Communists are unknown to them; they are taught to put unquestioned faith in the statements and policies of the leading faction in the Comintern and the Russian party.

In anti-militarist work, the League although it has carried on some work in the armed forces in New York, has been extremely negligent. Little more than fight against the capitalists as a class, the fundamentals of Communist anti-needed. If this is not done, this impor-

The struggle against the withdrawa of the second class mailing privileges from the Young Worker was a complete in the sense discussed in section 3. At failure. This was pre-determined by the weakness of the paper, its inability to worthless character as an educator and "collective organizer" of the young workers and the complete abandonment of the united front by the League as method of winning the youth.

The work of the League among the children is best judged by the results; under capitalism and what it would be a sharp decline in the membership of the exception of the irregular appearof Communist child education in its tion of the Militant, and some youth

> In the economic field, the League has An overwhelming majority of the youth are outside of even the legal "jurisdiction" of the A. F. of L. unions. In the needle trades where most of them do auxiliary work, the so-called youth section of the Industrial Union confines itself to several open-air meetings in the regular market, the distribution of a few leaflets for several indoor meetings. No real or consistent work in the shop or .factory.

The present West Pennsylvania and Ohio coal strike confronts a difficult task perienced in youth work. in the organization of the youth. While the latter is in the forefront of the forms of activity and organization. Tomediately commence organizing units of time. its organization throughout the mining districts. These can serve as directing groups and bases for the formation of youth sections or committees of the National Miners' Union and in rallying the young workers for Communism. Youth demands should not be "imposed" by the leadership upon the youth but rather arise out of the ranks of the young miners.

OPPONENT YOUTH

In the United States, the ideological control of the capitalists over the young workers is maintained and increased by a virtual network of youth organizations. There is hardly an age or interest of the youth which is not covered. The proletarian children, while being taught in the schools to be good wage slaves, are attracted to such groups as the Boy and Girl Scouts where they are further party cadre inside the League, which dir- fied American democracy, "fair play", the ranks of these two organizations are ects and leads it, exchange of represent and "equal opportunity for all" which developed in the spirit of subservience and obedience.

The Y. M. C. A. with its over one and a quarter million members, the Y. W. H. A., six hundred thousand strong, with their yearly budgets of over sixty and a respectfully are powerful institutions for holding back the youth from strug gle. The sports clubs and teams, or ganized by the bosses in department stores, mail-order houses, factories, the American Athletic Union, with its two million members, as well as the religious youth organizations which have millions of young workers in their ranks are organized and supported for the same or similar purposes.

The petty bougeois organizations in this country are at present weak and uninfluencial. However, with the growth of youth militancy and activity, the possibilities for the development of such groups as the Young Peoples' Socialist League at presnt having no more than one thousand members, may be realized Their actual success will depend to some extent on the activities of the Young Communist League and its ability to effectively combat the young socialist organization.

The gigantic network of bourgeois youth organizations is reinforced by the military and semi-adilitary organizations in the high schools and colleges (for example, the Reserve Officers' Traning Corps), the Citizens' Military Training Camps (38,000), the National Guard (180,000) and the Army and Navy (120,-000 and 80,000 respectfully—exclusively of officers). The struggle for the American youth means a fight against these bourgeois youth and military organiza-

To date, the Y. C. L. has failed in such work. The Labor Sports Union, which can serve as an effective auxiliary to the League, consists of a handful of clubs completely divorced from the American youth. Since the 1930 Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Young Communist International, the American League has attempted to organize a series of youth auxiliaries, the Young Liberator (young Negro organization) the Young Defenders-youth section of International Labor Defense, -Youth sections of International Workers' Order etc. The young workers attracted to these organizations can easily be won directly for the Y. C. L. The need for these groups does not exist. On the contrary, their formation has resulted in the almost complete stripping of the League of cultural and sports activities. The re shilt: The Y. C. L. deprives itself of the possibility of becoming a mass youth organization; it conducts a minimum of educational and cultural work; it completely immerses itself in "practical" activity, that is, activity which the party breaucrats lay down for them according to their factional requirements of

A thorough examination of the func-

tant part of League activity will continue to yield no results.

The Y. C. L. can make real progress only by the readmittance of the Left Opposition youth to its ranks and the opening of a thorough discussion on the tac tics of the present leadership of the League, and the policies of the party which affect the Y. C. L. At the same time, the League must call for the reinstatement into the party of the expelled Left Communists and a free and thorough discussion of its strategy and tactics. In this way a basis will be laid for a complete change in the leadership of the party and league and a return to Marxist policies in the class struggle.

THE WORK OF THE OPPOSITION

7. Since our last conference very little youth work has been conducted. With work in New York City which ended last year, this part of Oppositon activity has been neglected. This is partly explained by the need of our organization in the first period to consolidate the general Left Oppositon faction, that is, devote ourselves almost exclusively to the propagation of our general views and their application to the party policies and activities. Added to this is the fact that outside of New York there are only a scattered handful of youth comrades in our ranks. That in New York itself most of the young comrades, not having been members of the Y. C. L. are inex-

At the same time, we must recognize that the National Youth Committee and ions. Work among them is extremely struggles of today they can be held af- the National Comittee seriously neglected important. It can be an aid in the build- ter the strike only by concrete youth to carry on the work possible in this field. Steps must be taken immediately wards this end, the Y. C. L. should im- to make up for this unnecessarily lost

The Left Opposition youth puts forthe Communist cadre within it for our viewpoints and organization; participaon of Communist educational activities wherever possible, teh conducting of insuch work will mean the organization education and consolidation of a revolutionary, capable and advanced Communist youth cadre.

Towards this end we take the following steps:

- 1. The selection of a National Youth Committee of five headed by a youth organizer-youth representative on National Committee-to be in charge of national youth work.
- Every branch to have at least comrade in charge of local youth work to be responsible to the branch and the National Youth Commit-
- Wherever feasible and beginning with New York, an endeavor should be made, with guarantees against its degeneration to organize a genuinely broad club of young workers and students, under the influence of the Opposition, but assured of a wide initiative and self-activity on the cultural, social and sports field.
- The regular issuance of the Young Vanguard as a semi-monthly section of the weekly Militant which would coordinate the youth activity outlined above.
- 5. The preparations for the launching of a separate youth paper by the next conference.
- 6. The publication of a regular internal youth bulletin.
- 7. The immediate organization of a fraction in the Young Communist League. 8. Establishment of correspondence
- with the youth of the Left Opposition in Europe and elsewhere.

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The British Scene

The Danger of Left Reformisn

land's growing decline from its world dominant imperialist position, the lines are becoming more clearly drawn for the contest of influence over the British working class. From the point of view of total population, the great majority composes the industrial proletariat. By history it has long ago been invested with the decisive role. But while the Mac-Donald type of workers' "leadership" is approaching the end of its career, it would be folly to assume that the influence of reformism is about at an end. In this respect, the sharpest contest is still to take place between the forces of social reform and those of social revolution. It is still to be fought, with the Bri-

tish Communist Party becoming a much more serious contender than its present small numbers and uninfluential position would indicate. Coming objective developments will inevitably count heavily in its favor even though it will face a much more cunning and much more "Left-appearing" form of reformism, quite distinguished from the now outright and open imperialist agents of the MacDonald, Henderson and Snowden

Reformism, baving become pretty well discredited in England by the continuation of outright imperialist policies by the MacDonald government, is bringing forward new champions and new defenders. The "Left" wing within the labor party is feeling the new breeze of working class discontent and is endeavoring to set its sails accordingly. Many cfforts are being made by these "Lefts", like Maxton, Lee, and Brockway to turn the labor government failures into capiward as its main tasks the winning of tal for themselves. They sense the danthe members of the Y. C. L., especially ger of growing working class dissatisfaction. They want "real and true reformism". To make the most possible capital tion in the activities and work of the out of the present situation their slo-Communist youth movement: carrying gans and demands are becoming ever more "Left" in appearance. They are inside and outside our organization and finding important allies amongst the trade union bureaucracy who, in their dependent youth work. The results of deadly fear of any developing working denial of his having made such state class struggle, have always endeavored to turn all hopes toward the labor party "why not?" A genuine Left wing leader and the labor government. The record of this process of failures and defeats of the workers is now, because of the same fear, turning trade union leaders toward criticism of the "labor" government. While a definite split is unquestionably developing within the labor party, a radical and a reactionary differentiation a closer examination will soon prove that the radical section is merely a "Leftist" variation of the same old miserable Fabian type of reformism

A General Political Fermentation

Because of the outstanding parliamentary character of British politics at home made possible by her ruthless nonparliamentary politics within the colonial empire, the manifestations of political ferment are first of all expressed in the tions, halfway splits and regular splits, are taking place within all three major parliamentary parties. These, of course, all reflect the growing economic and political decline, the change of issues, and indicate that new problems are developing, problems which in the final analysis all bear directly on the question of class rule and the ability to hold the working class in subjection.

The already greatly declining Liberal party has practically lost a parliamentary section under Sir John Simon, to the Conservatives, while the balance of the group still hangs on to a horse-trading support of the "labor" government. Within the Conservative ranks there is developing the new united Empire party of Lord Rothermere and Beaverbrook, To an extent, this has hampered the Conservative party from taking immediate advantage of the Labor party weaknesses But it is within the Labor party that the most important fermentaion, opposition and splits are taking place. Because of its contradictory position of a party supposedly representing labor and yet being in control of a capitalist government its fermentation has become the deepest and the most clearly expressive of the recent evolution of the British empire; both in respect to the colonial field and in respect to events at home.

The present economic decline became expressed first in the split-off by the Mosley section going to the extreme Right. Both in the character of this group, as well as in its proposals for solution of England's plight, are undoubtedly contained serious Fascist elements. The endless petty pilferings of the "labor" government in its efforts to continue capitalist policies under a different label seems to have helped to lend a glamor a sytsem of economic planning and a semi-dictatorship. And it is not surprising that the former "Left" leader Ac J. Cook and the former Communist sympathizer, J. F. Horabin could become signatories to their manifesto. Perhaps THE REAL SITUATION IN RUSSIA the member which this group gained of rationalization by concentrating upon from the parliamentary fraction of the Conservative ranks, W. E. D. Allen, most clearly expressed the methods by which Fascism aims to get a foothold. In a statement: eulogizing the Mosley platform he said: "Let us save the admittedly capitalist ship and when that ship is saved we can discuss without prejudice the distribution of the cargo."

At the April Scarborough I. L. P. conference Jimmie Maxton and the other "Lefts" taunted the "labor" government, but in a well-measured moderate tone, leaving sufficient loopholes open for a retreat. Maxton asserted: "The labor ments will make it more palatable. government has signally failed to achieve the end to which its policy was directed

With the accelerated speed of Eng- | -and that failure was not due to lack of efforts or lack of honesty, but because it was a capitalist objective, carried out in the main through the medium of capitalist machinery." Very well, if it was a capitalist objective, how can one then speak of failure to achieve the end to which its policy was directed? And granted to the hilt that this objective was carried out through the medium of a capitalist machinery-which is entirely true-do Maxton or the other "Lefts' draw the proper conclusion, namely to destroy this machinery and replace it with a proletarian machinery of government? Of course not. This is not their objective.

A motion for disaffiliation from the labor party at this conference suffered a defeat of 173 to 37. In many respects this I. L. P. conference repeats the tragic-comedy of the one of 1925. That was held after the experience of the first "labor" government and at the time of a rising wave of working class resistance. It approved, after much criticism" the MacDonald policies 398 to 139. At the Liverpool labor party conference that same year the "Left" section loomed strong but completely capitulated when under fire. Not only was there no split as some of the more gullible had expected but the conference, after settling the "Left" criticism, proceeded to exclude the Communists from the labor party.

Today also the prospects of splits are being whispered. The "Lefts" are becoming more radical in their utterances. David Kirkwood as a delegate to the recent Second International congress declared that "the labor government preferred to coalesce with liberals and conservatives to maintain capitalism instead of overthrowing it." The same Kirkwood has now been cited before the labor party disciplinary committee for having stated that, "the conditions of the work er are no better under a labor government." The New Leader, official organ of the I. L. P. entered in his defense a ment. It would then be pertinent to ask not only state so but also draw the proper conclusion therefrom. Seven M. P.: of the I. L. P. "Left" section are also cited before the labor party disciplinary committee because of their voting to table the Anomalies Bill (the bill to cor rect the "abuse" of the dole).

The I. L. P. in the Past

Under pressure of the events of the world war the "Left" I. L. P. disaffiliated from the Second International. It al most proposed joining the Comintern, bu found satisfaction in the Two-and-a-Hal International, to return a little while la ter to the Second. This excursion to th Left followed the working class pressur of the stormy struggles of 1917-1920. Th ebb of this period found them returnin parliamentary sphere. Growing opposi. to the original camp where they, c course, belong. Again with the workin class rise and the struggles growing to wards the general strike of 1926 thes "Lefts" became critical, they becam more radical, they again addressed le ters to the Comintern, some of them s: in conferences with the Russians in th Anglo-Russian Unity Committee. The was upon invitation of the Stalin-Buck. arin bloc. A deal with the "Lefts"-not the workers genuinely moving towards the Left-but the Left coverings of the Fabian imperialist agents. They quickly returned from this second excursion with the defeat of the general strike, in which they had played their treacherous part

> Workers' discontent is again beginning to grow and this time with more genuine, more real possibilities. It is occuring in a period of growing working class disillusionment with the servile Crown lackeys in whom they had long placed their faith. We are in a period when comrade Trotsky's predictions, made in his "Whither England?", have increasing likeliness of coming true: "On the day when the English proletariat frees itself from the mental baseness of Fabianism, humanity, particularly in Europe, will increase in stature by at least a head."

But the gentlemen of the "Left" are also again beginning a new zig-zag, endeavoring to arrest this growth. Dialectically, it may be contended that it occurs this time on a higher plane, at least on a higher plane of maturity of the English proletariat. While these Left coverings and their aparent radicalization express the workers' discontent and in this sense records progress. they, of course act as a brake upon the movement-a reformist brake. The Left phraseology cannot be separated from the important question of basic program. of reality to the Mosleyites' demand for Fenner Brockway, for example, now proposes a "bold socialist program", which would contain the essentials: "Assume control of finances by nationalizing the banks . . . Reconstruct basic industries under national ownership and direction

. . . Meet increased productive power increasing the consuming power of the masses of the people . . . on a socialist basis to be fulfilled by national control of imports."

It is, however, well to remember the shudder of these mental offspring of the original Fabian school when in 1926 the Comintern tersely stated the problem of the English proletariat as the one of armed revolutionary force. This is not at all the program of the "Left" I. L. P. They intend merely to repeat the early MacDonald career of reformism in vain hopes that their projected embellish-

-ARNE SWABF