

FOR OUR NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Draft Thesis on the Youth Question

1. Capitalism draws the youth of the proletarian families into the productive process. The cheapness of its labor power, its physical and intellectual immaturity, its lack of trade union organization makes it particularly profitable...

These exceptional conditions of exploitation of 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 organizations.

2. The Y. C. L. was founded in November 1919 out of a need for an organization which would attract the working youth towards Communism, win, organize 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 activities—sports, "social" affairs, and its physical and intellectual requirements.

The Y. C. L. 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.

3. The working youth is especially hard hit by the present economic crisis. 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 League which aspires to be the leader of a section of the working class, the youth, is politically subordinate to the Communist party, the vanguard of the proletariat as a whole.

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.

The plight of the young workers today is the best refutation of the much glorified American democracy, "fair play," and "equal opportunity for all" which the powerful bourgeois agencies, schools, press, church and youth organizations have hammered into their heads.

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.

7. Limited experience with Communist youth work requires that youth tactics, 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 practice, examining the results, and thereby laying the ground for more effective tactics, slogans, etc.

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.

5. There is not a single field of its activities in which the League can show substantial accomplishments. No real educational activity is carried on inside the League; discussions on youth tactics, on trade union policies, etc., are a thing of the distant past.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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 a few cries about the war danger in the Young Worker have been the sum and substance of the anti-militarist campaign.

The official Y. C. L. today utilizes its slogans and demands only on holiday occasions.

These demands should be put forward in the sense discussed in section 3. At present they can at best be agitatorial and propaganda demands.

The struggle for the youth demands should be accompanied by a comparison of the conditions of the young worker under capitalism and what it would be under a proletarian rule—as illustrated by the Soviet Union.

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.

THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS

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THE AMERICAN LEAGUE

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12. The work of the League among the children is best judged by the results; a sharp decline in the membership of the Young Pioneers; a complete absence of Communist child education in its ranks.

In the economic field, the League has had exceptional possibilities for growth. An overwhelming majority of the youth are outside of even the legal "jurisdiction" of the A. F. of L. unions.

The present West Pennsylvania and Ohio coal strike confronts a difficult task in the organization of the youth. While the latter is in the forefront of the struggles of today they can be held after the strike only by concrete youth forms of activity and organization.

OPPOSITION YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

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 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 half million and thirty million dollars respectively are powerful institutions for holding back the youth from struggle.

The petty bourgeois organizations in this country are at present weak and unimportant. However, with the growth of youth militancy and activity, the possibilities for the development of such groups as the Young Peoples' Socialist League at present having no more than one thousand members, may be realized.

The gigantic network of bourgeois youth organizations is reinforced by the military and semi-military organizations in the high schools and colleges (for example, the Reserve Officers' Training Corps), the Citizens' Military Training Camps (38,000), the National Guard (180,000) and the Army and Navy (120,000 and 80,000 respectively—exclusively of officers).

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.

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.

A thorough examination of the functions of Youth auxiliaries, and the actual activities of the existing ones is needed. If this is not done, this impor-

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 tactics of the present leadership of the League, and the policies of the party which affect the Y. C. L.

THE WORK OF THE OPPOSITION

7. Since our last conference very little youth work has been conducted. With the exception of the irregular appearance of the Young Vanguard as a section of the Militant, and some youth work in New York City which ended last year, this part of Opposition activity has been neglected.

At the same time, we must recognize that the National Youth Committee and the National Committee seriously neglected to carry on the work possible in this field. Steps must be taken immediately to make up for this unnecessarily lost time.

The Left Opposition youth puts forward as its main tasks the winning of the members of the Y. C. L., especially the Communist cadre within it for our viewpoints and organization; participation in the activities and work of the Communist youth movement; carrying on of Communist educational activities inside and outside our organization and wherever possible, the conducting of independent youth work.

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.
2. Every branch to have at least one comrade in charge of local youth work to be responsible to the branch and the National Youth Committee.
3. 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.
4. 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 international 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 Reformism

With the accelerated speed of England'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.

It is still to be fought, with the British Communist Party becoming a much more serious contender than its present small numbers and unimportant 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 type.

Reformism, having 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 efforts are being made by these "Lefts", like Maxton, Lee, and Brockway to turn the labor government failures into capital for themselves.

A General Political Fermentation

Because of the outstanding parliamentary character of British politics at home made possible by her ruthless non-parliamentary politics within the colonial empire, the manifestations of political ferment are first of all expressed in the parliamentary sphere. Growing oppositions, halfway splits and regular splits, are taking place within all three major parliamentary parties.

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.

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 of reality to the Mosleyites' demand for a system of economic planning and a semi-dictatorship.

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 government has signally failed to achieve the end to which its policy was directed

—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, 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 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 388 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 glib 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 worker are no better under a labor government." The New Leader, official organ of the I. L. P. entered in his defense a denial of his having made such statement. It would then be pertinent to ask "why not?" A genuine Left wing leader not only state so but also draw the proper conclusion therefrom. Seven M. P.'s 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 correct 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 at first proposed joining the Comintern, but found satisfaction in the Two-and-a-Half International, to return a little while later to the Second. This excursion to the Left followed the working class pressure of the stormy struggles of 1917-1920. The ebb of this period found them returning to the original camp where they, of course, belong. Again with the working class rise and the struggles growing towards the general strike of 1926 the "Lefts" became critical, they became more radical, they again addressed letters to the Comintern, some of them sent in conferences with the Russians in the Anglo-Russian Unity Committee. This was upon invitation of the Stalin-Bucarin 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 occurring 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 likelihood 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. Diabolically, 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 apparent 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. 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 by 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 embellishments will make it more palatable.