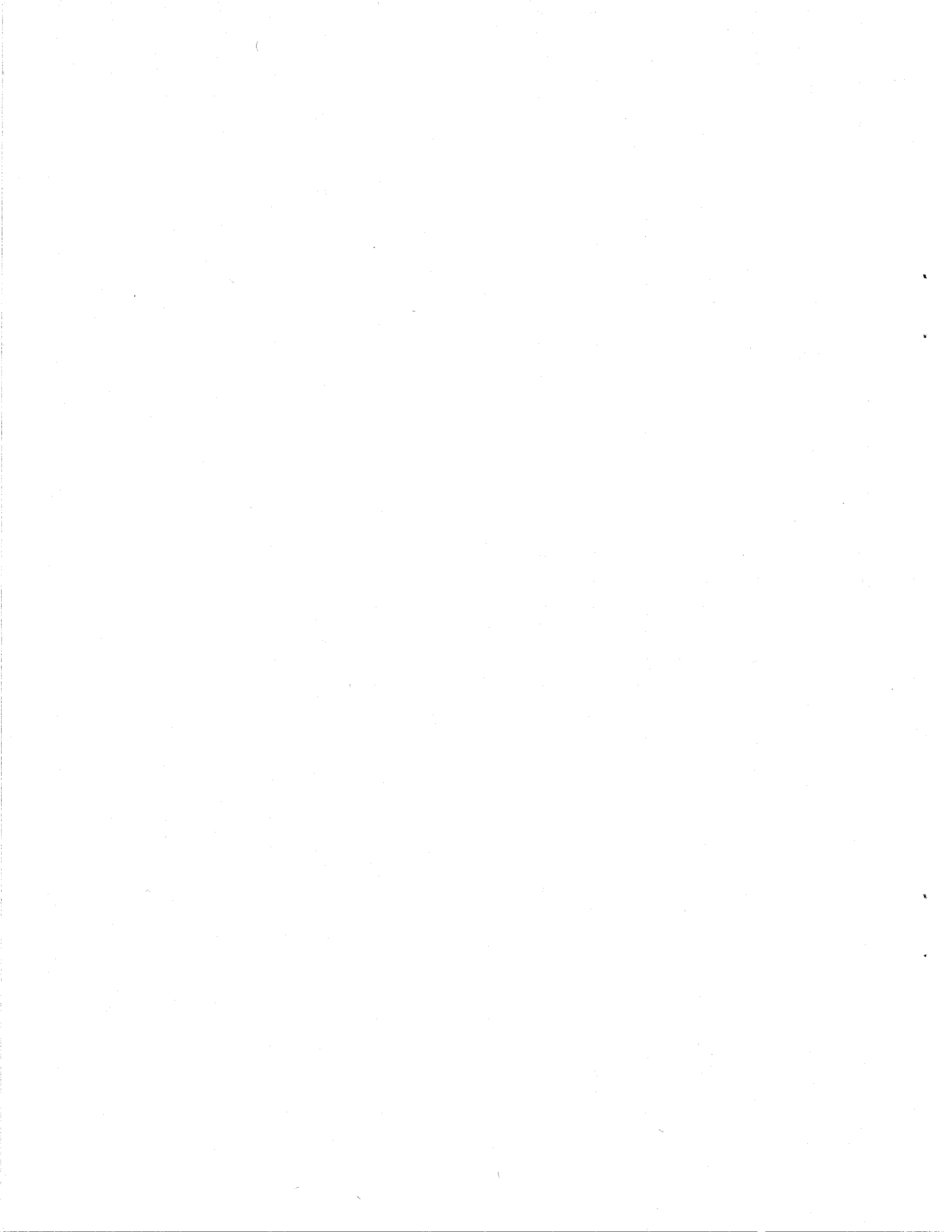


# *Marxist Bulletin No. 7*

## **The Leninist Position on Youth-Party Relations**

**DOCUMENTS FROM THE YSA & SWP, 1957-61**



# Table of Contents

Preface.....	2
Letter on PC Youth Policy by Murry Weiss.....	5
Youth Report to Eighteenth National Convention by Tim Wohlforth.....	7
On Section Eleven by Tim Wohlforth and Jim Robertson.....	9
Postscript on Section 11 by Jim Robertson.....	11
Where We Stand: Founding Declaration of the “Young Socialist Alliance”.....	12
On the Essence of Our Approach to Party-Youth Relations by Tim Wohlforth.....	14
Resolution on Party-Youth Relations by Shane Mage (Draft).....	15
Letter on the Youth Question by James P. Cannon to Farrell Dobbs, Murry Weiss and Dan Roberts.....	16

# Preface

The present collection of documents deals with the vital issue of the relationship between a revolutionary party and its youth organization. These documents, from the years 1957-61, set forth two aspects of contemporary party-youth relations: they reaffirm the earlier position of the Leninist and Trotskyist movement; and they present the history of those few years of Socialist Workers Party-youth relations during which the SWP re-established a nationwide revolutionary Marxist youth organization in this country after a lapse of nearly two decades. These documents, as a collection, but especially the draft Resolution on Party-Youth Relations, have a long history of suppression in the SWP and its youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance. Some of them have never before been circulated in any way.

## Documents and Definitions

Document one was written in 1957 by Murry Weiss, the architect of the initial attempt to rebuild the SWP's youth organization under the conditions of the break-up of the CP. Because he was one of the very few continuing leaders of the SWP with any significant experience in its earlier youth group he was particularly interested and involved in the new attempt in 1957. What he did initially was to set forth the Leninist principles upon which the earlier Trotskyist youth organization had been founded, principles which documents two through seven also restated, a few years later when the SWP leadership began to turn its back on its own history.

These documents two through seven present the position on youth-party relations of the YSA leadership both before and during the time the dispute over the Cuban Revolution forced many youth leaders to form the Revolutionary Tendency of the SWP, the forebears of the Spartacist League. This position, in brief, is that a youth organization should be *autonomously* related to the party, being *organizationally independent*, but *ultimately politically subordinate*.

Document eight, a letter by James P. Cannon, presents the antithetical position arrived at by the SWP majority leadership, namely that the youth organization, although not *openly* related to the party should be, *through the fractional intervention of party members*, in effect organizationally dependent and thus politically servile. Cannon's letter might appropriately have been titled "Epitaph," for it served that function in the discussion.

## Stands Not Alone

Because of its peculiar nature, the youth question does not stand by itself. When it comes up, it is almost never raised as an abstract issue; instead it usually reflects disagreements within the party and the youth on other political issues. For example, in 1961, a majority of the central leadership, progenitors of the Spartacist League, viewing Castro as then petty-bourgeois, condemned the SWP's uncritical treatment of him as a great "proletarian revolutionary." (See Marxist Bulletin

No. 8, *Cuba and Marxist Theory*, for the discussion on Cuba.)

The youth leadership of 1961 started by criticizing the SWP's Pabloist adaptation to Castro; but when these criticisms brought forth the SWP's perversion of the YSA, the youth leadership was faced with the need to reaffirm the Leninist youth-party relations which the SWP majority had found necessary to suppress. In order to do this, the YSA leadership based itself on the development and functioning of the Young Communist International in Lenin's time and on the YSA's own Educational Bulletin, "History of the International Socialist Youth Movement (to 1929)."

The RT's attempt to reaffirm the Leninist position made it very clear to the SWP majority that it would henceforth need to conduct discussions of youth-party relationships by concealing or prohibiting the early documents of the YSA and the earlier history of the communist youth movement. The importance of keeping today's YSAers in a state of virginal ignorance had been clearly demonstrated by the RT itself, which through its development in the YSA had understood the need for political opposition to the opportunism of the entrenched SWP leadership. Accordingly, the SWP has suppressed historically tested practices and has worked out a means for neutralizing any opposition in the YSA. It has a damned-if-you-do-and-damned-if-you-don't policy for those SWPers in the youth with some difference with the majority: it sometimes gives them permission to raise an opposing view, so that if they then don't, they stand as unserious, ashamed of their positions, etc.; however, if they do raise the differences, they are nonetheless at least informally condemned for breaking with the "best interests" of the party.

## Inside the YSA-SWP

A brief review of the particular history of this question in the SWP should illustrate the general development of struggle which any incipient opposition would find as it begins the criticism of the centrist leadership of a once Bolshevik organization.

In 1957, the SWP had inaugurated the attempt to recreate a Trotskyist youth movement in the United States after a lapse of 17 years. The SWP, however, was no longer the same party it had been in 1940; thus the formula of an autonomous youth organization caused much uneasiness among the party brass. By 1961 their centrist fears proved justified: the Cuban question showed that they were indeed unable to politically lead their youth section. Accordingly, with a majority of the YSA central leadership going into opposition over Cuba, the SWP struck organizationally at the youth majority. The SWP took over a virtual receivership of the YSA, bringing in one Carl Feingold, an SWP National Committee member, to lead a special party commission on the YSA. In doing this it destroyed the embryo of Leninist youth-party relations which had been developing since 1957.

The fate of the key seventh document in this collection, the draft Resolution on Party-Youth

Relations, well exemplifies the situation. Faced with the perversion of the YSA's internal life, the youth leadership sought in this resolution to reaffirm absolutely unambiguously the necessary and historically tested relation in political struggle between revolutionaries of different generations. The document was drafted for submission to the YSA National Conference of December 1961. The party National Office decided instead to refer it to a party "Commission on Party-Youth Relations" which never met. And later the Political Committee forbade *any* discussion of the party-youth question inside the YSA by party members (i.e. by the leading half of the YSA!). Furthermore, since the SWP had just concluded a national convention, circulation of the draft resolution was forbidden within the party itself "until the next pre-convention discussion period," two years later.

### Still Trying

Two years later, the immediate issue had long been resolved, with the YSA being held in the rigid administrative grip of the SWP, the youth majority leadership "dismissed" and the SWP's depoliticalized puppets completely instituted. However, in early May of the 1963 SWP pre-convention discussion period, the RT attempted to bring the general issue to light by submitting the bulk of the documents in this collection for internal circulation to the SWP membership. After waiting a bit, the SWP Political Committee abruptly proclaimed that since the Bloomington Indiana YSA was under prosecution for subversion by the local DA, and that since, by inference, the SWP being on the federal "subversive" list and the YSA not, discussion might incriminate the latter; therefore, once again, any and all discussion on youth-party relations must be rigidly denied for the good of the movement. The following is the motion adopted by the Political Committee on 24 May 1963:

#### **Motion by Cannon, Dobbs, Kerry and Warde:**

"The revolutionary-socialist youth face a witch-hunting criminal indictment brought against them by agents of the ruling class. As part of the frameup which is intended to stifle the voice of socialist-minded youth, the prosecution falsely labels them a section of the adult revolutionary-socialist movement. In view of this capitalist assault there can at present be only one single subject on the party agenda in the sphere of adult-youth relations, namely, defense of the youth against the class enemy. Attempts to precipitate disputes over questions of general cooperation between adults and youth who share common political views can only be prejudicial to defense of the youth against the witch hunt frameup, and such attempts will not be tolerated in any way, shape or forms. All party members are hereby instructed to conduct themselves accordingly. Any violation of this directive will be subject to disciplinary action by the appropriate party bodies."

The complete falsity of this "reason" is proved for example by the fact that the section of the indictment labeling the YSA as the youth section of the SWP had been struck by the Monroe County, Indiana, Circuit Court on 23 May 1963, one day before the PC motion was adopted. Despite the fact that the *Militant* (3 June 1963) itself printed the story that SWP-YSA relations were no longer an issue in the case, despite the repeated requests that the issue be opened for discussion when there were no more "legal" reasons for the continuing

prohibition, the party ban was upheld until *all* of the dissidents of that period had been expelled or driven out of the SWP-YSA.

### Contradiction Concealed

Behind this series of smokescreens of organizational and tactical objections stands the simple truth that the SWP was politically unable to function in a Leninist way toward its youth organization. Cannon flatly admitted this, but only to his National Committee, when he declared: "I don't think Lenin was a fetishist on the form of youth organization any more than on any other form." And further, "In fact, it [the problem of youth organization] never has been solved, not in this country or any other." (See document 8.)

Thus the SWP was caught in the archetypical centrist dilemma: making a qualitative, substantive repudiation of revolutionary practice, while insisting to the contrary. In the case of the youth question, flagrant suppression was the SWP's only means to conceal that contradiction.

We are not here concerned with merely raking over factional quarrels from 1960-61. And, as the material from documents three and four and the main point of the whole collection show, we were not then discussing formal schemas without a revolutionary content. Rather, the whole question is one of utmost importance to a growing revolutionary movement and is basic to overcoming the "old left"- "new left" generational gap. Very special needs are required to integrate young apprentice revolutionaries into the Marxist movement without their becoming office boys or sycophants. They must be assisted in acquiring, through struggle inside as well as outside the movement, the necessary revolutionary qualities of discipline and intransigence. But such struggle often clashes with internal order. Moreover, it places on the incumbent "adult" leadership the continuing responsibility and necessity to defend its program and tactics. The whole thrust of the documents contained here (except for the terminal one wherein Cannon decides to scrap Lenin's whole understanding of the importance of this relationship) outlines the kind of movement, practices and relationships which are required and for which the progenitors of the Spartacist League fought.

### WWP, PLP, SLL Too

The issues raised here exist and recur across the entire radical movement. The unthinking and total subordination of youth to adult in the radical movement facilitates, for example, the mindless activism of Youth Against War and Fascism vis-à-vis the Workers World Party; or the way in which the Progressive Labor Party could from the outside suddenly and shatteringly dump the May 2nd Movement in favor of SDS entry; or, internationally, the cavalier blatancy with which the middle-aged Gerry Healy of the British Socialist Labour League could personally and publicly act as a de facto general secretary of his unpolitical Young Socialists. The practices, long historically sanctioned, of the older reformist and Stalinist organizations present two fully developed models of how adult groups control their youth. The "democratic" Socialist Party has an outright

and declared command over the Young People's Socialist League that would bring pleasure to a militarist disciplinarian. The Communist Party avoids the possibility of any organizational independence on the part of its youth by angrily repudiating as red-baiting any suggestion of openly facing the question of relations between the CPUSA and the long succession of its youth auxiliaries.

### Reverse Control

Obviously it is the party in the long run that pays for the sterility it enforces on its youth as they begin their political development. But there is also a short-range danger to the party inherent in these practices. The only alternative to political development—if the youth do not totally stagnate—is a mindless militancy, which can be whipped up at the demagogic call of the party-sanctioned leaders. That militancy can be used by the party leadership as a club against the party itself. This danger is particularly crucial within a party which still retains a hint of its Trotskyist past, where some slightly left elements will vaguely remember their political history and will object to too headlong a revisionist flight. Thus Sam Marcy had this club available against Workers World; there is a hint of the same procedure in the way Jack Barnes of the SWP used the YSA to advance himself in the party; and Healy, along with his use of every other bureaucratic weapon available, certainly does not overlook the made-to-hand mindlessness of his personally-led Young Socialists as a weapon to keep order in the Socialist Labour League.

### Leninist Position

It was in an attempt to counter the sterilizing effects on revolutionary development which such schemes contain that the Revolutionary Tendency submitted the draft Resolution on Party-Youth Relations. This document analyzes the necessary reciprocal relationship between a revolutionary party and its youth group and calls for the necessary tactical orientation which that relationship would have entailed for the SWP-YSA:

“The political education of the youth, in addition to discussion, involves the experiences of decision and action. One of the essential functions of a youth movement is precisely the education and development of responsible political leaders. The revolutionary youth movement therefore must not be a mere discussion group but must decide its own policies and choose its own leaders to bear responsibility for carrying out those policies.

“The distinct character of the revolutionary socialist youth is necessary but is subordinate to its place as a section of the international revolutionary movement. The Marxist revolutionary party embodies the historical experience of the working class and is alone capable of leading the struggle for socialism. Wherever national sections of this party exist a revolutionary youth movement cannot think in terms of acting as a party, of substituting itself for the existing section of the world party. On the contrary, whatever organizational forms may prevail in a given country the revolutionary youth must maintain unity in action and close political ties with the revolutionary party....

“The YSA is a democratic organization. The leadership of the YSA is elected by the members in accordance with the terms of the YSA Constitution and can be removed only in accordance with the governing Constitutional provisions. All members of the YSA have the right to express their political views within the YSA and to participate in the political decisions of the YSA. This internal democracy is combined with discipline in action in accordance with the principles of democratic centralism.

“From time to time there are necessarily differences of opinion between the SWP and the YSA. In the normal course of events such divergences can be handled through the regular channels of coordination and consultation between the two organizations. When, however, serious political disagreements arise, this procedure is inadequate. In such a case it is the obligation of the youth movement, insofar as its public political activity is concerned, to subordinate itself to the discipline of the revolutionary movement as a whole. The YSA recognizes and accepts this obligation.”

Confronted with this restatement of a revolutionary, Leninist perspective, Cannon could do no more than offer the sophist truism that the “formula” of Lenin’s was not “ideal” (!) and then pretend that a youth organization is an opponent organization, in which the party members need discipline in action (with the unique logic to this fake reasoning being the need to mobilize its members to fight its own young sympathizers!). This last is particularly grotesque and is indicative of the bureaucratic degeneration into which a once revolutionary organization can fall when, in order to cover for former opportunist positions advocated by the leadership, it begins to substitute the “authority” of that vested leadership for the independent democratic criticism and discussion through which the revolutionary movement must reach its political positions. It is the very bureaucratic distortions in Cannon’s letter itself which best illustrate the necessity of the autonomous youth organization which the draft Resolution on Party-Youth Relations sketches out.

—Marxist Bulletin staff, 6 September 1967

# Letter on PC Youth Policy

By Murry Weiss

Chicago

June 14, 1957

Dear Scott:

Last Tuesday I reported to our Political Committee on the prospects for a socialist youth movement in the U.S. arising out of three inter-related processes: (a) the repercussions of the crisis of Stalinism among the ranks of the CP youth and periphery; (b) the development of the Left Wing Caucus in the YSL; (c) the increased activity of the SWP among the youth as a result of the CP crisis on the one hand and the stimulus of the YSL left wing development on the other.

In tracing the course of our policy toward entry into the YSL, I showed how it depended on the outcome of the struggle being waged by the left wing. The left wing is fighting to retain the basic character of the YSL as an unaffiliated, socialist youth organization free from domination by either Stalinism or social-democracy, and open to the youth of all radical tendencies.

To refer specifically to the problems of SWP policy you have raised, I outlined how the SWP youth would function in the YSL under present conditions if the right-wing majority agreed to open the door to all radical youth, as the YSL constitution and tradition require it should.

In this event the SWP youth would enter the YSL on an equal basis with other tendencies and individuals. While it would have the right to form a caucus, the political logic of such a step would be sectarian, and obstructive to the free development of the YSL as a revolutionary youth organization. The place of the SWP youth in the YSL would be with the Left Wing Caucus. As for the SWP youth being caucus-bound on questions over which differences had or might develop in the party, I outlined the same view I expressed to you when I was in Chicago, namely, that given the framework of a revolutionary youth organization, which invited and welcomed all tendencies of radicalism to participate, the SWP youth would freely discuss all questions of theory, program, tactics and policy without any attempt to present a ready-made and disciplined "common front" to the youth of other tendencies.

In the light of recent developments in the YSL, which appear to exclude the possibility of persuading the right-wing majority to halt its headlong course of liquidating the organization into the American social-democratic sect, the fundamental task of building a united, broad, militant socialist youth movement remains. If, despite all its efforts to open the road to such a movement through the YSL, the left wing does not succeed, and instead the right wing attempts to strangle both the left wing and the entire nucleus of the future youth movement, this will only mean that other forms will have to be found to express the needs of the movement.

In any case the problem of the SWP's relation to the youth movement remains. And you have performed a

valuable service in pressing the question at this time so that we may achieve in common the utmost clarity on this question. It is better to think these questions out now and arrive at a frank and comradely understanding rather than to allow ambiguities to blur clearly defined relations that will stand the test of time and events.

In the united youth formation that will surely arise in the next period, the Political Committee has unambiguously reaffirmed its view that it is opposed to forming a party caucus in the new youth organization, whatever its exact form may be. And we do not ask SWP members to refrain from expressing differences they may have with majority party positions in the course of the discussions within the youth organization.

Now, if this view conflicted with the basic concept of the SWP on the functioning of party members in a revolutionary youth organization, you would be perfectly correct in pointing out the contradiction and assessing it as the source of future difficulties. Either the new practice or the old concept and tradition would gain the upper hand in any crisis.

But in our opinion, there is no contradiction whatever between our attitude today and the best traditions of the movement. That is not to say that we have never made serious errors or mistakes in this field; but we regard them to be errors and mistakes precisely because they were a departure from sound concept and tradition.

You refer to my statement: "A minority does not wage a struggle against the party's position outside the party." And you see this concept as contradictory to our "claim" to favor a broad, unaffiliated revolutionary socialist youth organization. I don't think so. If you investigate the circumstances in which the concept I expressed found its most forceful expression, you will see that it referred to a minority that wanted to overthrow the position of the party by seeking support for its position in the "outside" arena of petty-bourgeois public opinion, then dominated by democratic imperialist hysteria about the Stalin-Hitler Pact.

The concept of the responsibility of a minority to confine its struggle basically to the party has never implied limiting the freedom of expression of supporters of a minority within a revolutionary youth organization, whatever the exact relation of such an organization to the party. As a matter of fact, all the great struggles within the party were invariably paralleled in the youth organization. Or, as you mentioned, under certain circumstances, found their major arena in the youth movement. Such was the case with regard to the left wing in the international social-democracy. And no one who held the Leninist view of the revolutionary party's relation to the youth movement has, to my knowledge, ever attempted to introduce the practice of a party fraction in the youth movement. This has been the case in the history of our movement in the U.S. and internationally, the early period of the Communist Party, the social-democracy before World War I, and the Russian Bolsheviks after the revolution. Only the Stalinist and social-democratic bureaucracies ultimatically imposed their control over the radical youth—in the name of party discipline and "no factionalism."

I can remember one instance when the party tried a heavy-handed organizational intervention in the youth organization. The circumstances and results of this episode are instructive.

At the 1938 YPSL (Trotskyist) national convention there was a struggle over a number of key issues between the Draper-Garrett group, who had a large following among the New York youth, on the one side, and Nathan Gould and myself on the other. Draper had come out against the party majority position on the Labor Party and won the majority of the New York youth to his position. He also opposed the resolution Gould and I were supporting on transforming the YPSL from a rather ingrown circle of sophisticated sectarians to a militant, mass organization of unemployed, working and student youth.

The fight at the convention got pretty sharp and Gould and I were winning a large majority of the delegates. Shachtman and Abern, who were the SWP representatives to the convention, intervened to moderate the struggle. They called a meeting of the YPSL NC in the very middle of the debate and demanded that we stop the struggle, and find a way to compromise. Gould and I protested that the issues had been clearly posed, the delegates were competent to decide the questions in dispute, and that Shachtman-Abern's formal intervention in the midst of debate was a bad practice. Then Shachtman appealed to Gould as a member of the Political Committee of the SWP. Gould "nobly" buckled and proclaimed that because he was a member of the PC he would have to abide by the will of the party representatives. Gould thereupon made a strange speech at the convention in which he reduced the entire dispute to a petty squabble, which apparently he had been involved in with Draper and Garrett. He dilated on the virtues of these comrades and blurred all the issues. I spoke after Gould, disassociating myself from his whole statement; I didn't regard the struggle as a personal bicker; I had nothing to do with Gould's relations with Draper; I entered the dispute to start with on the grounds of important political issues and would continue it that way.

I insisted on a clear vote on the issues in dispute and I believe we consolidated a convention majority on that basis.

Now, I am not reciting the incident to discuss who was right and who was wrong on the issues. Whatever one's views on the merits of the issues, it is clear from the entire incident that the tradition of our movement showed two things:

(a) It occurred to no one to dispute Draper's right to fight for a position on which he was a minority in the party.

(b) Although the party representatives intervened (erroneously, in my opinion), they tried to exert mechanical party pressure, not to push the youth into party positions, but to prevent the majority of the convention, which supported the party position on the Labor Party, from crowding the minority. They tried to moderate the struggle.

Again, in 1940, with all the sharp factionalism and all the disputed organization questions that arose, I cannot recall a single attempt on anyone's part to question the right of the SWP's minority to fight for its position among the youth or the charge that in doing so they were

violating some organizational principle.

We would have a different problem if we were speaking of the activities of the SWP youth in an organization dominated by Stalinists or social-democrats. In that case the SWP youth would, of course, constitute themselves as a caucus and fight for their positions as effectively and intelligently as possible. However, in such a situation the same basic method of non-ultimatistic relations with other left wing tendencies would prevail. In both aspects of the question—the attitude towards the organization as a whole and toward other left wing tendencies—the party would not rely on formal, organization rules of procedure or rigid concepts of discipline to guide the conduct of its members, but rather on the basic concept of principled politics which imbues its entire cadre.

The SWP members would refrain from waging a struggle against a position of the party they may disagree with and blocking with reformists on secondary questions against the comrades of their party, not because it is against some by-law or something, but because it is against the very essence of principled revolutionary politics. The "rules" of organization procedure flow from the character and needs of revolutionary politics and theory, they flow from Marxist method, and not the other way around.

Take the very example you give regarding the SWP minority that supports the state-capitalist position. Suppose the circumstances were a united YSL such as both the LWC and the SWP have proposed. While the SWP comrades who hold the state-capitalist position would freely discuss this question with other tendencies within the YSL, they would not, I am sure, form a bloc with right wingers in the YSL on a platform of state capitalism. Not at a time when the principled line of demarcation within the organization was over the question of capitulation to or struggle against state-department socialism. On the one hand, within the broad left wing, discussions on the Russian question or the present stage of capitalist development would undoubtedly find both SWP and non-SWP youth grouped together in favor of either the state-capitalist theory or the other viewpoints; on the other hand, all the comrades of the left wing would put to the fore the principled questions on which they agreed insofar as their discussions with the right wing were concerned.

You might ask what is to prevent the SWP from attempting to impose a different line of conduct on its members in the youth movement than the one outlined above? Well, Scott, I cannot guarantee that the SWP will never make such a mistake, because in doing so I would be making the mistake of depicting the SWP as some kind of an infallible institution. All I can say is that if we do make serious mistakes and persist in them we will be judged accordingly and the harm inflicted on the movement will be accompanied by a growing distrust of the SWP as a harmful organization. I can only tell you what our considered policy is, on what considerations it is based, and on what traditions and principles it relies. I can add that the comrades in my opinion are both enthusiastic and serious about the projected youth movement, that there is good will and a desire for cooperation and collaboration.

It seems to us that the projected youth organization will have a good possibility of succeeding largely



because, in addition to its manifest qualities as a militant exponent of socialism among the youth, it shows the desire and tendency to become the center for rich ideological discussion and clarification. It shows the potentiality to become a powerful force for the creation of a reinvigorated movement towards Marxism among the American youth. The SWP youth have every reason to want to participate in such a development on equal terms with other left wing comrades. It doesn't want to take up the ridiculous and self-defeating position that it expects everyone to participate in such a promising development of ideological life with an open mind, but as for the SWP members... they will merely state what the official views of the party may be and expect everyone to accept that. The non-SWP members would indeed have a justified objection if this were the attitude of the SWPers.

I want to stress that the above views express the gist of

the Political Committee's opinion. You can take it as our official view. I have reported regularly on the developments in the youth field over the last year to our PC. The convention offered us the opportunity to exchange views among the leading comrades nationally and to assess the situation in all parts of the country. I am sending copies of this letter to all SWP youth groups so that they will know our opinion precisely.

P.S. In my next letter I want to get to the discussion of democratic centralism as such. In the meantime, may I suggest that you read the last *Militant's* report on the convention to get an idea of some of our thinking on workers democracy which has close bearing on the subject of the role and internal regime in a revolutionary workers party.

Comradely yours,  
Murry Weiss

## Youth Report to Eighteenth National Convention

By Tim Wohlforth

—reprinted from the SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 20, No. 15

*(The following is a summary of the report to the 1959 SWP convention. The general line of the report was approved unanimously by the convention.)*

The placing of this point on the agenda of the convention signifies that the party recognizes the importance of the creation of a revolutionary youth movement to our work today.

In assisting the establishment of a youth movement the party is basing itself on the experience of the Marxist youth movement from the time of Karl Liebknecht on. It was the early socialist youth movement which carried on the struggle in the pre-World War I period against militarism and the preparations for war. In so doing the youth came into direct conflict with the general reformist drift of the social democratic parties which culminated in the betrayal of the antiwar struggle in 1914.

Virtually the whole socialist youth movement went over to the new Communist International in 1918 and helped not only to create the Young Communist International but also participated in the building of the Communist parties in their respective countries. The formation of the Fourth International again attracted youth and young people, again raised the banner of Liebknecht. Our youth today are the legitimate inheritors of this tradition.

The present forces which make up the Young Socialist movement grew out of independent movements within the radical youth forces in this country which the party responded to and helped along. First came the struggle within the Young Socialist League. The conception of

an independent revolutionary youth movement was worked out by the YSL Left Wing as an alternative to the Right Wing's capitulation to the social democracy engineered by Shachtman. On the basis of agreement on this conception the Left Wing began collaboration with the SWP which led to the fusion of the Left Wing with the SWP youth.

The fusion with the Left Wing was crucial to the development of a revolutionary youth movement not so much because of the numbers (which were small) this added to the revolutionary youth cadre but because the fusion gave the youth formation a broader independent stamp and thus made it a pole of attraction to other youth. The Left Wing fight also gave the youth a political tradition—a political past. The documents written in the YSL struggle form the "In Defense of Marxism" of the youth movement.

These fused forces then turned their attention to the turmoil existing among the Stalinist youth, turmoil created by the Khrushchev revelations and the Polish and Hungarian events. By energetically pursuing a regroupment line towards these elements we were able to further the crisis and thus postpone the consolidation of the Stalinist youth. To this day the crisis continues and the possibility of the Stalinists to launch a national youth formation is put off for some time to come. We recruited some of the best people in this milieu to our youth movement and to the party. Finally, we created a milieu within which our youth forces could work—people for us to talk to and to explain our ideas to.

The ability to develop a revolutionary youth cadre through fusion with the YSL Left Wing and then recruitment from the Stalinist milieu was made possible because of the energetic policy of the party. Without the SWP forces this youth movement could not have been created. The *political* line of the party also was attractive to young people looking for a road out of their crisis.

Finally, the *organizational* approach of the party was crucial. The party based its policy on a recognition of the organizational independence of the youth. It did not attempt to dictate to the youth. Without such a flexible policy we would not have been able to fuse with the Left Wing or reach out to the young people formerly around the Stalinists.

As a result of its support to the youth movement the party has benefited. At our Detroit Conference of the YS supporters the majority present were either non-party members or party members (and this was the largest figure) who had joined the party since the beginning of youth work.

Even more important the youth experience has developed young party and non-party members so that we now have a functioning organization with its own press, its own internal life and its own skilled youth cadres which acts as a companion movement to the party reaching out to young people and winning them over to revolutionary socialism.

The key to the progress we have made in the youth field has been our conception of the relation between the youth movement and the party. Basically we can put it as follows: *The content of party-youth relations in any period is political solidarity between the youth and the party but organizational independence for the youth.* The form this relationship takes varies from period to period. It may be expressed in open affiliation between party and youth, or in fraternal relations or, as is presently the case, in informal cooperation.

The youth movement is neither an opponent organization within which the party members operate as a fraction nor a simple appendage of the party. The youth should rather be looked upon as a section of the revolutionary movement united with the party by bonds of political solidarity. However, the youth movement must have its own organizational life with its own leadership, internal discussion, etc. Its program must be worked out jointly by party and non-party members of the youth organization. No young person in his right mind (and these are the only young people we want) would join a youth group if its policies were determined by a caucus of that group composed of members of an adult party. The quickest way to kill the youth movement is to impose that type of discipline within it.

It is precisely because of the independent nature of the youth movement that I am not presenting to this body a

full report on the many tactical problems facing the YS that the YS National Plenum will be shortly discussing. I am emphasizing here those questions which relate to party-youth relations and party policy towards the youth.

Our experience of the last two years has shown that wherever there is smooth working relations between the party and the youth, locally and nationally, both organizations benefit and grow.

As a result of our aggressive participation in the regroupment process and our correct understanding of party-youth relations we have been able to assist in the development of a functioning national youth movement. The youth now have a basic political and organizational cohesiveness worked out at our Detroit Conference. We have functioning groups in nine local areas with influence in an additional eleven areas. Our publication, the *Young Socialist*, has the largest circulation among young people of any radical publication in the U.S. We all feel we have a period of modest but highly important growth ahead of us. Many of our worst difficulties are now in the past and we are all united in our desire to start really building a fighting youth organization in this country.

In order to ensure this development we are proposing that the party continue its policy of:

1. Favoring the development of an independent revolutionary socialist youth movement in this country.
2. Encouraging its growth with the forces—personnel, financial and otherwise—available to it.
3. On the basis of the political solidarity between the YS movement and the party recognizing the necessity of organizational independence of the youth.

In return we can assure you that the youth will provide a constant flow of new forces into the party. It will act as a training ground for young party members and thus raise the quality as well as the quantity of new members. The youth will carry on a political campaign in opposition to bourgeois influences among youth whether in direct form or indirectly through the social democrats (who are strong among youth) or the Stalinists. Finally, we will build a youth cadre that will be capable of building a mass revolutionary socialist youth movement under favorable objective circumstances and thus ensuring the young working-class forces necessary to build a party capable of bringing socialism to the U.S.

# On Section Eleven

By Tim Wohlforth and  
Jim Robertson

—from Young Socialist Forum, No. 9, April 1960

As was expected when the Editorial Board drafted the “Where We Stand” document, rather widespread questioning and opposition has been voiced to that part of the resolution which sets forth the relationship of the YSA movement to the SWP. This has traditionally been a delicate point with us—but something even more important is involved. To a large extent the actual nature of the youth movement we are building is related to the way in which this movement relates itself publicly to the SWP.

It is not so much the political identity of the youth movement that is involved. By and large most of the critics of this section do not do so because of their own opposition to the SWP—in fact in most cases the critics are members of the SWP. What is really at issue is the *type* of youth movement we are creating and the political maturity of that movement in dealing with what at times can be rather touchy questions.

But before we go any further with this point let us put section 11 into its proper place in the structure of the document as a whole. It would be too bad if, in the heat of the controversy over this one section, the document as a whole is not given proper attention. The Editorial Board commissioned the writing of the document as it felt the compelling need and responsibility for a political declaration to clarify the nature of the new organization being founded and precisely why such an organization is needed. The resolution therefore falls into a certain historical framework in the brief but busy history of our youth movement.

In the very first issue of the *YS* we declared ourselves in favor of such a youth movement. We then went through an intensive sifting and testing process to allow as many young radicals as possible to experiment with differing socialist ideas, feeling that out of this process a strengthened revolutionary youth movement could be built. This period reached its height in the February 1958 Midwest Conference in Chicago—a conference which allowed for much discussion but which was incapable of anything but the most elementary expressions of political beliefs. In December 1958 we took the process a good deal further at our Detroit Conference where we were able to formulate a minimum revolutionary program and a functioning national organizational structure.

It is the task of this coming Philadelphia conference to consolidate the organizational and political steps taken in Detroit. In a certain sense we have to catch up with reality—as the real political basis of the present *YS* movement is more fundamental than the Detroit Conference decisions (more fundamental, but not in contradiction with). If we had contented ourselves with expressing no more than is given in the Detroit political program or being no more than a supporting group for a

newspaper we would have been unable to grow during the last year. This “Where We Stand” document does the job of catching up on the political front that the Constitution does on the organizational side. Both documents merely formulate the basic political and organizational ideas which motivated the core of this youth movement from the very beginning and which are largely responsible for its growth.

The declaration breaks down into three parts which are logically closely related. Section 11 cannot with justice be abstracted from the document and have the document remain as a coherent and politically sound statement. The three parts are:

(a) Sections 1,2,3—which make a positive declaration of principle and briefly sketch the history and give continuity to the new YSA. These are quite important, especially section 1 which is identical with the Article II of the Constitution and is therefore a condition of membership in the new organization.

(b) Sections 4,5,6,7,8—which by criticism of the principal opponent tendencies to the revolutionary socialist youth give additional definition and justification to the YSA. These are absolutely necessary in a founding declaration of an organization, for without these sections there would be no stated political basis for us founding this new organization as against joining another. In effect, these sections state that the principles sketched in section 1 and the politics in section 2 have been negated by the other socialist youth forces necessitating our own history (section 3) which is culminating in the organization of the YSA at this conference.

(c) Sections 9,10,11,12,13—which place the YSA in its proper context within the revolutionary movement as an evolved national youth formation, hence deal with its evolution, and its “division of labor” with the adult and international movements. These last sections are all closely inter-related. Section 9 states our opposition to youth vanguardism—by simply stating that the youth cannot lead the revolution, that this is the task of the revolutionary party. Section 10 sketches our attempt to help in the creation of a new revolutionary party out of the regroupment process. This section is the only place where we evaluate this process and state that it has come to an end—an end which did not produce any new political parties.

Section 11 states positively what section 10 states in the negative:

“11. The Young Socialist Alliance is in basic political agreement with the Socialist Workers Party. It recognizes that only the SWP of all existing political parties is capable of giving the working class political leadership on class struggle principles. It therefore offers its political support to the SWP.”

—that is: since no new revolutionary party emerged from the regroupment process, and the older non-revolutionary parties further disgraced themselves, we must support that party which emerged from regroupment with a revolutionary program and organization—the SWP. To do otherwise is to call into question either our own revolutionary outlook or our seriousness about it.

Section 12 spells out in a quite categorical fashion our adherence to the organizational independence of the YSA and section 13 our internationalism. These last five sections taken together are our answer to the demands implied in section 1 of fashioning a youth alliance that can play its role in the struggle for socialism.

To omit section 11 is to leave the document with an immense and obvious hole in it. We carefully explain that a revolutionary party is needed, that the youth movement can be no substitute for a revolutionary party, that the CP and SP-SDF are not such parties, that no new one has arisen and---? To not stick in the punch line is to either suggest that we must set ourselves the task of creating a new revolutionary party as none exists or it is simply an evasion and one which has as a lesser objection the fact that it would fool no serious political element. It is or should be a home truth that the revolutionary movement is built and goes forward through the fusion of class-struggle with revolutionary consciousness.

Such an omission can hurt us much more seriously than an open statement of political support to the SWP. It gives the impression that the YSA is simply an SWP front-group which is to be manipulated from behind the scenes. Nobody joins our organization these days without being well aware of its close association with the SWP. We have only two alternatives—either to deny this association and fool no one or we can openly formulate this relationship between these two organizations and by so doing clear the air.

We have nothing to be ashamed of: The SWP is the only party in this country to really fight for socialism. We declare in section 1 that we are committed to the traditions of Marxism. The whole history of the Trotskyists in this country should be a matter of study and of pride: the defense of truth and revolutionary integrity through years of Stalinist abuse and worse; a militant role in labor strike struggles; intransigence in the face of imperialist war and witch hunt.

The role of the SWP in the coming elections will be one that we should be eager to associate with. There is much we can do concretely to help the SWP in this campaign and there is much that the SWP's campaign

can do for us through the impact of its national presidential campaign. Both to gain and be of greatest aid, the relationship of the YSA with the SWP must be clear. We need to be in a position to say to those many youth who will be attracted by the SWP campaign that they should come to the YSA which is an organization of young people with the same kind of approach and a bond of solidarity with the SWP. Section 11 lays the political basis for the tasks of the 1960 election campaign which are now opening up to us.

We are not the ones to be ashamed. Let the YPSL explain away its SP-SDF and its support to the Democratic Party. Let the young Stalinists explain away the fossilized spineless sect that runs their groups and its line of support to the Democrats. We have no reason to share vicariously in the guilt reactions of Stalinist and Social-Democratic youth toward their parties.

In the most basic sense, the question of the YSA openly debating and defining its attitude toward the SWP flows from the fact that if the YSA is to be an organization of young revolutionists it is necessary for it to deal honestly and with the greatest possible consciousness with "touchy" questions when they are posed before it. Otherwise, we risk ending up training and having to live with the graduates of the "front-group" school of youth orgs.

To those who would attempt to use such a public statement to prove that the YSA is simply an SWP tool in which there is no room for non-SWP members or criticism of the SWP (they will accuse us of this regardless of what we say) all we have to do is point to the very discussion which produced section 11. Here we find, not a monolithic bloc of SWPers imposing support to the SWP upon non-SWPers—rather we find that the most articulate critics of this section were themselves SWPers! This discussion itself is proof enough of the type of organization the YSA really is. The conclusion of this discussion with the passing of section 11 will prove not only that the YSA is organizationally independent but that it has reached a level of political maturity necessary for the struggles that lie ahead.

March 29, 1960

# Postscript on Section 11

By Jim Robertson

Several points have emerged in the course of discussion which help to clarify the alternatives before the YSA on section 11.

Section 11 is not a statement which aims to reproduce a subjective feeling necessarily shared by every member of the YSA, as if any policy statement could or should aim to achieve this. Rather this section legitimizes the actual relations with the SWP which we *as an organization* have come to have and which virtually every member does expect to continue. For example: we often seek able teachers, members of the SWP, to lead our classes. It is for good reasons of political loyalty to the YSA program that we draw so heavily from this source for instructors. (But note that it is the YSA which chooses, specifies subjects, etc.) If some comrades are opposed to this kind of practice of using SWP personnel, then what would be in order is not some evasion of the basic tie between the groups, but a *counter* statement *and* a different practice. Indeed, if we were to avoid the question of relations, but continue them none-the-less, then how could critics within the YSA argue counter—the terrain would be too swampy. It is in this sense that section 11 has bearing as an objective statement of current and projected YSA policy.

It would be well for those who want to avoid or degrade the question to consider and explain why the entire national and international history of party-youth relations among revolutionists is for the YSA void. We are not slaves of the many decades of experience cited, but they do raise the question of what smooth streamlining has been discovered so that it is possible to gloss over one of the biggest things in the life of the youth movement and the future of many of its members—the revolutionary party.

Perhaps the most disingenuous position which could

be advanced as a substitute for the intent of section 11 would be that sort of statement, smack in the middle of a revolutionary Marxian declaration, which suggested approximately “that from time to time and on particular issues we support the SWP and that we note that our programs tend to be rather similar so it is reasonable to expect that this will probably continue in the future.” But about this: 1. we support the actions of *all* working class organizations when stands on “the issues” coincide; 2. what is needed is an explanation *why* we find empirically (as if it couldn’t be deduced) that with a unique frequency the SWP and YSA share a common line in action. Couldn’t this be a symptom of a bond of a deeper sort? Doesn’t this bond consist in both groups being revolutionary socialist, both in the Marxian tradition of Lenin and Trotsky, etc.?

Finally, there is apparently one misconception about section 11 which can and will be easily remedied. On reading the section some comrades brought into clear focus only “political agreement with the SWP” and “political support to the SWP” and with this, assumed that this meant not *principled agreement*, which it does, but *programmatically identity*, which it does not. A hostile reaction to this latter proposition is understandable, but misplaced. The distinction between principle, which is basic, and program which seeks to realize principle, must be grasped. There are yet many gaps and superficialities in the program of the YSA. These must be worked out in the YSA, not borrowed en bloc from the SWP. The section 11 discussion itself is an excellent example of such clarification from within the YSA. Possibly if “basic political agreement” were changed to read “basic political solidarity” the confusion between support to an organization as a principled class-struggle party and an imposed, automatic “support” to a particular programmatic point or tactic of that party would be cleared up.

James Robertson, 4-3-60

# Where We Stand: Founding Declaration of the "Young Socialist Alliance"

1. The 'Young Socialist Alliance' is founded in response to the need for a nation-wide youth organization capable of bringing revolutionary socialist ideas to a new generation. This is necessary for building a revolutionary movement which can lead the working class to socialism. The YSA bases itself on the traditions of Marxian socialism as developed by Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and Liebknecht. We believe that socialism can be initiated only as the result of struggle, international in scope, of the working class against the capitalist class and its allies—the struggle culminating in the creation of a new type of state, a workers' state. Socialism means that for the first time in history man will control his own creation—society—rather than be controlled by it. The dynamic of socialism is of a continual expansion of human freedom in all spheres in politics, economics, culture, and in every aspect of personal life.

2. In December, 1958, the National Conference of Young Socialist Supporters, which is now superceded by the 'Young Socialist Alliance,' issued an eight-point political statement:

(1) For a labor party by the union movement. As an immediate goal, for independent political action through united and independent socialist electoral opposition to the two capitalist parties.

(2) Unconditional backing of the fight for full equality by the Negro people and other minorities.

(3) Militant opposition to the entire witchhunt with special focus on the witchhunt on the campus and the political screening of youth in connection with military service.

(4) Support to the colonial peoples' struggles for freedom and independence. For the withdrawal of all imperialist troops from foreign soil.

(5) Advocacy of workers power as the only progressive alternative to the capitalist drive toward military dictatorship and fascism, a drive recently illustrated by General deGaulle's placement in power in France.

(6) Support to struggles for workers democracy in the Soviet Union and Peoples Republics such as the Polish and Hungarian workers' revolutions. Opposition to attempts of imperialism to reestablish domination over this section of the world.

(7) Against further nuclear tests and the build-up of the U.S. war machine; the success of the struggle against the capitalist war danger and for world peace depends upon the success of the struggle for international socialism.

(8) For the regroupment of revolutionary socialist youth into an independent, broad and militant national youth organization based on the editorial policy of the *Young Socialist*.

This earlier statement, which is based upon the principles outlined in this declaration, illustrates the general political views upon which the Young Socialist Alliance is founded. In other resolutions at this conference and at later conferences a fuller political program will be elaborated.

## Origin of YSA

3. The 'Young Socialist Alliance' is the result of a political process which began in 1956 with a crisis which rocked the then existing radical youth groups. A left wing was formed in the Young Socialist League in opposition to the dissolution of that organization and its entrance into the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation on the basis of the reformist views of the SP-SDF. Under the impact of the crisis of Stalinism the Communist Party was forced to dissolve its youth organization, the Labor Youth League. Some young people from the LYL and other organizations peripheral to the CP joined with the YSL left wing, young members of the Socialist Workers Party and independents to publish the *Young Socialist*. In December, 1958, in Detroit, the Young Socialist Supporters organized themselves into the National Committee of Young Socialist Supporters as a step toward the formation of a national 'Young Socialist Alliance.' Since that time the YS Supporters have grown in strength to the point where they can accomplish the national organization of a revolutionary youth movement.

4. The present policies of the Young People's Socialist League youth affiliate of the SP-SDF, and the Communist Party youth flow historically from the rejection by their parent movements internationally of a socialist perspective. Since 1914 the parties of the Second International have become allies and defenders of the capitalist system. In theory they have rejected the concept of *socialist revolution* and put in its place the improvement of capitalism by *social reform*. In practice the Social-Democrats have consistently taken government posts to aid the capitalists in surviving revolutionary upheavals. After the First World War the Social-Democratic parties were the main props under the collapsing capitalist system and after the Second World War performed the same function with the aid of the Communist parties.

Similarly the Communist International since the rise of Stalin has abandoned its heritage of revolutionary socialism. Under the theory of 'Socialism in One Country,' the Communist parties everywhere were transformed into servile tools of the Russian bureaucracy. In practice the Stalinists have played a role fundamentally identical to that of the Social-Democracy. On orders from the Kremlin, Stalinist parties in country after country have helped to stave off revolution, to help capitalism to survive.

5. The Social-Democracy and the Communist International support in one fashion or another the continued existence of the capitalist system and fear a frontal conflict between the contending class forces. We, as revolutionary socialists, reject completely the concept that socialism can be brought into existence piece-meal. Socialism can only come through the complete overturn of the present capitalist states and their replacement with a workers' state. Such a revolutionary development is the end result of an irrepressible struggle between the

capitalist class and the working class. We give our full support to the working class in this struggle.

6. The Young People's Socialist League is not a Marxian socialist organization. It and its parent affiliate are not only incapable of leading a socialist transformation of society, they are not even capable of promoting basic socialist education. Today, for example, they favor working within the capitalist Democratic Party rather than supporting independent socialist political action. The leadership of the SP-SDF lines up with the American State Department and the YPSL refuses to disavow this policy. Searching for 'respectability' the YPSL has forfeited any claim to represent socialism before American youth.

### CP Youth Incapable

7. The young supporters of the Communist Party (as yet not nationally organized) are likewise incapable of bringing a revolutionary program to American youth. They, even more than the YPSL, are engaged in the class collaborationist policies of support to the Democratic Party. The Communist Party youth are apologists for the bureaucratic dictatorship that rules the USSR and other Soviet bloc countries and as such are compromised before inquiring youth.

8. In addition to the Communist Party youth, the YPSL and the YSA, there exists a numerically significant grouping of young socialists who have no national affiliation. Any number of these belong to campus socialist clubs and carry on organized socialist activity on a local basis. Politically, these people may be new to socialism, having not yet made up their minds as to which of the national youth groups they support, or they may be sympathetic in one way or another with one of these three national bodies. While these campus groups are important and should be supported as a way of reaching larger numbers of youth with socialist ideas they can be no substitute for national organization. It is only through national organization that it is possible to publish a paper, send out speakers on tour, really educate socialist youth through organizational responsibility and participation in working out the political views of a national group, and carry out concerted national activity for socialism. In fact, one of the functions of a nation-wide youth organization is to aid in the establishment, stabilization and extension of broad socialist campus clubs.

9. The revolutionary socialist youth are well aware that by themselves youth cannot lead the working class to power. This is the historic task of a working class revolutionary party. The revolutionary youth played a very active role in the regroupment process in the hope that a regrouped and enlarged revolutionary party with which the YS could establish close relationship would emerge. The YS participated in the American Forum for Socialist Education, local forum groups, and the Independent-Socialist Party in New York state.

### Regroupment Tally

10. The regroupment process did not result in the formation of a new united revolutionary party. On the contrary, older political formations such as the Independent Socialist League and its youth organization, the Young Socialist League, and the *American Socialist* magazine disappeared. Most of the individuals who supported the CP left politics rather than try to discover a new but difficult path.

The right-wing socialist groups, the SP, SDF, and ISL, conducted their own regroupment into the SP-SDF, with its reformist, pro-State Department, anti-class struggle views. The Communist Party suffered a precipitous decline through the regroupment process. Having lost all its influence in working class politics it remains simply an apologist for the Kremlin. The Socialist Labor Party simply ignored the regroupment process and was ignored by it. The Socialist Workers Party conducted a campaign for a regroupment of revolutionary socialists, attracting to itself from all groupings individuals who still wished to struggle for revolutionary socialism.

11. The Young Socialist Alliance and the Socialist Workers Party are the only revolutionary socialist groups in the United States today. The YSA recognizes that only the SWP of all existing political parties is capable of providing the working class with political leadership on class struggle principles. As a result of its three year development the supporters of the *Young Socialist* have come into basic political solidarity, on the principles of revolutionary socialism, with the SWP.

12. The Young Socialist Alliance is an independent organization which elects its own officers and works out its own political views. The YSA bases itself on the principles of the organizational independence of the revolutionary youth organization and opens its doors to all young people—regardless of other affiliation—who agree with its socialist principles and accept its program.

13. The Young Socialist Alliance will, to the best of its ability, bring Marxian socialism to American youth. But this is not enough. The only socialism which deserves the name is international socialism. The YSA declares its political solidarity with revolutionary youth in all countries. The present Social-Democratic 'International Union of Socialist Youth' and the non-socialist successor to the Young Communist International, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, are travesties on the concept of socialist internationalism. The YSA will work with others toward the creation of a new revolutionary socialist youth international which will represent organizationally the political solidarity of socialist youth.

as adopted at the YSA Founding Conference

April 16, 1960

# On the Essence of Our Approach to Party-Youth Relations

By Tim Wohlforth

(Statement to the June 1961 pre-convention plenum of the party National Committee)

Attached (see page 6 [7]) is the Youth Report which I made to the last party convention and which was passed unanimously by that convention. This report summarized the general policy which had been the guiding line of the party in its attitude towards the youth since 1957 and I would say that, by and large, we have been conducting ourselves in consonance with this approach in the two years since the convention.

The growth of the Young Socialist Alliance, which has taken a substantial leap forward, recently registering a net 50% increase in membership over the last year, is largely attributable to this policy. Our policy is based both on the traditional approach of our movement as outlined by the Communist International and the Young Communist International in its early years, as well as upon our recent experiences in youth work.

It is my opinion that this general approach is a correct one and that it should not be changed at our coming party convention. However, I do feel several points need clarification, and further emphasis. First, the success of our approach to the youth as distinct from that of all other tendencies is that we do not fear the independent development of the youth and therefore base our policies on the concept of *organizational independence* of the youth. This means that the party deals with the YSA as a separate organization with its own internal life, leadership and its own press.

Secondly, we must not confuse organizational independence with *political independence*. My youth report to the 18th Convention characterizes the political relations of the youth to the party as one of *solidarity*. This was a transitional formulation because of the

newness of the youth organization and its peculiar history. This formulation, which is essentially correct so far as it goes, raises another question: How does one preserve the political solidarity of the party and youth at such times as the two organizations have political differences serious enough to jeopardize this solidarity and which cannot be settled through consultation alone? Such a situation can only be solved by subordinating one organization to the other—and obviously the youth must be subordinate to the party.

But how is one to ensure the political subordination of the youth to the party without destroying the organizational independence of the youth—its independent life and vitality which is so attractive to young people? Here again we base ourselves on the general approach of our movement historically and insist that in general the party should exert its discipline over the youth organization *as a whole* rather than resort to simply applying discipline on party members in the youth. The latter approach, which may be necessary under extraordinary circumstances and in the absence of proper forms for exerting discipline over the whole youth organization, tends to undermine the essential unity of party and non-party youth, eat away at the independent organization of the youth, and damage the possibilities for future growth of the youth movement.

Whatever concrete actions we may feel it necessary to take at the moment should be taken within the general framework of party-youth relations which we have worked out over the past four years and which have produced for us a healthy, viable, youth organization which is at the threshold of important growth in the immediate future. Certainly we should think through any suggested changes in party-youth relations and not rush into them without thorough discussion in both the party and youth.

June 13, 1961



# Resolution on Party-Youth Relations

By Shane Mage

1. The nature of the relationship between the revolutionary youth movement and the vanguard political organization of the working class has been a major problem throughout the history of the modern socialist movement. Liebknecht, Lenin, and Trotsky at various times confronted this problem and proposed policies in regard to it based on revolutionary theory and politics. No generally valid formula applicable to all countries and political situations could, by the very essence of the problem, emerge. But a certain number of Marxist guiding principles have been worked out and must provide the basis for the policy of the American Trotskyist movement.

2. In modern capitalist society youth has a special position and distinct problems. It is the young generation that is forced to sacrifice its blood in imperialist wars. Students and young workers alike seek to enter a society in which the mental and social structures are already set, in which the places are already taken. To live, to work, to think are not natural rights but can only be won through struggle, through a more or less clearly perceived conflict of generations which is also a conflict with the capitalist ruling class. This alienated position of youth under capitalism is the objective basis for the necessity of a distinct socialist youth movement.

3. As Lenin stated, every generation must come to socialism *in its own way*. Youth become socialist on the basis of experiences, problems, and ideas which are different from those of the previous generations; and thus every generation has its distinctive contribution to make. It must work out its own ideas, and neither can nor should assimilate ready-made the ideology of its elders. Consequently a revolutionary socialist youth movement must provide youth with an arena for the widest and freest discussion and examination of all social, cultural, and political questions.

4. The political education of the youth, in addition to discussion, involves the experiences of decision and action. One of the essential functions of a youth movement is precisely the education and development of responsible political leaders. The revolutionary youth movement therefore must not be a mere discussion group but must decide its own policies and choose its own leaders to bear responsibility for carrying out those policies.

5. The distinct character of the revolutionary socialist youth movement is necessary but is subordinate to its place as a section of the international revolutionary movement. The Marxist revolutionary party embodies the historical experience of the working class and is alone capable of leading the struggle for socialism. Wherever national sections of this party exist a revolutionary youth movement cannot think in terms of acting as a party, of substituting itself for the existing

section of the world party. On the contrary, whatever organizational forms may prevail in a given country the revolutionary youth must maintain unity in action and close political ties with the revolutionary party.

6. In the USA at the present time the proper organizational forms reflect a political situation characterized by the smallness and isolation of the revolutionary movement. Both the SWP and the YSA are restricted to work of a largely propagandistic character. The YSA in this period orients itself primarily to students and seeks to build a substantial cadre on the basis of Trotskyist theory and politics.

7. A condition for the success of the YSA is its ability to maintain a broad appeal as a militant youth group with revolutionary politics. One of its essential tasks is to recruit youth, particularly teenagers, who are still at a relatively low level of political development and commitment. Under present objective circumstances direct affiliation of the YSA to the SWP would seriously limit these possibilities. Consequently, the YSA should maintain its present organizational form, that of an independent youth group.

8. The problems posed by this organizational non-affiliation are discussed by revolutionaries with the utmost honesty and candor. The basic proposition is that the YSA is *an integral part of the revolutionary movement in the United States*.

9. The YSA is neither a front group nor a youth political party. The SWP does not attempt to exercise covert control or manipulation of the YSA through the fractional organization of SWP members in the YSA or through the imposition of party discipline in regard to political discussion or organizational decisions within the YSA. The YSA in turn does not use its organizational independence to attack the SWP, to compete with it, or to disrupt the necessary unity in action of the revolutionary movement.

10. The political activity of the YSA involves a continual process of consultation and coordination with the SWP. This process is expressed in the organizational form of fraternal relations between the two groups. The YSA is represented by a representative of its own choosing as a full member of the National and Political Committees of the SWP. The SWP is represented in the same way on the corresponding bodies of the YSA.

11. The YSA is a democratic organization. The leadership of the YSA is elected by the members in accordance with the terms of the YSA Constitution and can be removed only in accordance with the governing Constitutional provisions. All members of the YSA have the right to express their political views within the YSA and to participate in the political decisions of the YSA. This internal democracy is combined with discipline in action in accordance with the principles of democratic centralism.

12. From time to time there are necessarily differences of opinion between the SWP and the YSA. In the normal course of events such divergences can be

handled through the regular channels of coordination and consultation between the two organizations. When, however, serious political disagreements arise, this procedure is inadequate. In such a case it is the obligation of the youth movement, insofar as its public

political activity is concerned, to subordinate itself to the discipline of the revolutionary movement as a whole. The YSA recognizes and accepts this obligation.

September 1961

# Letter on the Youth Question

By James P. Cannon

Los Angeles, California  
May 24, 1961

Farrell Dobbs  
Murry Weiss  
Dan Roberts  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Comrades:

I have been following the development of differences on the handling of the youth question in the PC minutes with considerable apprehension. It seems to me that you are getting bogged down in a dispute over *formal* aspects of party-youth relations in the abstract at the expense of a united approach toward a real *concrete issue* involved in the dispute, concerning which there can hardly be any differences between us.

The decision to refer the whole business to the Plenum will solve nothing unless the PC comes to the Plenum with definite proposals to deal with the real problem as it has manifested itself for a long time, not in the outlying cities but in the center in New York, and particularly in the National Youth Committee and Editorial Board. And since the raging faction fight there is taking place between youth committee members who are all members of the party, and concerns disputes which are at present under discussion in the party, it seems to me completely unrealistic to ask the Plenum to find a solution by defining what the ideal relations of the party and the youth organization should be.

The real question, as I see it, is this: What are the relations of *party members* working in the youth organization, or any other organization, to *the party*? If party members working in the youth organization are free to go their own way regardless of party decisions, what would a general resolution defining ideal relations between the youth organization and the party be worth?

\* \* \*

We learned long ago that organizational forms are not sacred in themselves, but must always be adapted and subordinated to political purposes. We have shown many times that we understand this—once, in 1936, even going to the extent of dissolving our formal party organization to work as a faction in the SP. Consequently, we should have no great difficulty in coming to an agreement, or even in compromising, on the question of the *form* of party organization-youth organization relations in a given period. But we cannot serve our political purposes under any organizational form, in the

youth, or the trade unions, or anywhere else, if the party doesn't retain *control over its own members*. That, as I see it, is the real issue on which we are heading toward a showdown.

\* \* \*

We demonstrated our flexibility, as far as youth organizational forms are concerned, when we agreed a few years ago to collaborate with a group of dissidents from the Shachtmanite youth organization in setting up a broad independent youth formation, and agreed further that party members working in the new formation would not act as an organized caucus. It was a necessary concession at the time, and, on the whole, I think there was more gain than loss from it. But it was meant, I take it, as a temporary expedient to facilitate collaboration, not to revoke an old principle.

But, nevertheless, there was a great deal of confusion and disruption connected with that experiment. The agreement to refrain from caucus organization in the youth clubs was taken, in some places, as a license for party members in the youth clubs to act as free lancers without regard to party policy and party interests. We had the spectacle here in Los Angeles of party members fighting other party members in the local youth club to the benefit of outright political opponents, and even combining with conscious enemies of the party against other party members. The net result was demoralization and disruption of the youth club, an undermining of the whole concept and practice of party discipline, and considerable unnecessary disruption in the party branch.

I, for my part, never thought the agreement to refrain from caucus organization in the experimental movement could be taken as a license for party members working in this movement to be entirely free from all party control and direction. But that's the way it worked out in Los Angeles, and in other places where the Marcyites were operating.

As you will remember, by the time of the 1959 Plenum we decided we'd had enough of that horseplay. Confronted with the spectacle of the Marcyites fighting the party line in the youth movement, we decided to put all party members under party discipline at the impending youth convention in Detroit. When the Marcyites, including a member of the National Committee, violated this instruction and fought against the party at the Detroit convention, I proposed in a letter that we take disciplinary action against them. I

think the whole Political Committee was ready to act along that line. The Marcyites saved us the trouble by walking out of the party. But we shouldn't forget that we would have had to throw them out if they hadn't walked out.

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The question of the form of party-youth relations in the next period has some importance in itself, and is worth some discussion. But it is not the real question at the bottom of the present dispute.

Article VIII, Section 1 of the Party Constitution reads as follows: "All decisions of the governing bodies of the Party are binding upon the members and subordinate bodies of the Party."

The real question we have to decide is whether it is now time to say that this article of the Constitution applies to all *party members* working in the youth organization, or any other organization, without exception. I, for my part, think it is about time for this specific recommendation to be submitted to the Plenum and the Convention.

*Within that framework*, a discussion of the form of party-youth relations in the present period can be discussed for its intrinsic importance, and not as a formula that covers up the real issue at the bottom of the dispute. That is, whether party members are free to operate with complete independence in the youth organization, and even to try to use the youth organization as a club against the party.

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Even after we dispose of such pretensions once and for all, we still will not have solved the problem of youth organization in this country. In fact, it never has been solved, not in this country or any other. Various experiments have yielded various gains and losses, and we may have to experiment some more. But no organizational form will help if the party surrenders control over its own members.

I don't think Lenin was a fetishist on the form of youth organization any more than on any other form. During the First World War he supported the *independence* of the youth movement for excellent reasons given in the quotation cited by Dan. His

primary motivation was political, not organizational. It was a question then of a struggle against the social patriots, in which a considerable section of the youth movement was taking a revolutionary stand. It was certainly correct for him to advocate the complete independence of the youth movement under such conditions.

But when the Comintern was formed, Lenin's formula for the international youth organization and its national sections was "organizational *independence* and political *subordination*." That didn't work out perfectly either. When the big struggle between the Left Opposition and the Stalinist majority opened up, the formula of political *subordination* was used everywhere in all countries to mobilize the youth organization as shock troops against the Opposition.

The formula of *organizational independence* didn't prevent the various factions in the American Communist Party from doing everything they could to line up members of the youth organization and bring them into the party, in many cases before they were ready, to use them as voting blocs in the party fight.

The same thing was done by the Burnham-Shachtman faction in our great struggle of 1939-40. It is interesting to recall now that the first public attack on the party Convention decisions of 1940 was made the next week in the youth paper under the signature of Burnham.

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All this past experience indicates, as remarked above, that the problem of relations between the party and the youth organization has never been solved completely, and that a search for an ideal solution in the present circumstances will be vain. We may have to experiment some more. But, in my opinion, we cannot permit any further experiments with the absurd and monstrous idea that the formula of an independent youth movement signifies that party members are independent of the party.

Fraternally,  
(signed) JIM  
J.P. Cannon  
JPC:jh

