

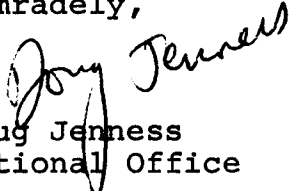
14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
March 15, 1979

TO NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

Attached for your information is an exchange of correspondence between Larry Seigle and Sally Rees on questions relating to "active sympathizers" of our movement.

Comradely,


Doug Jenness
National Office

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January 31, 1979

Dear Larry,

During an organizational tour for the YSA national office I came across a situation in a chapter of the YSA that I would like your advice on. The YSA there has been able to convince many of the students that they came into contact with to work with the YSA. Almost one-third of this chapter is composed of foreign students from the Bahamas, Iran, Palestine, Greece, and South Africa. Most of these students are not presently members of the YSA, due to various reasons ranging from visa status to personal reasons. In discussions with these comrades and with the organizer it became clear that there were several questions on the role and rights of active sympathizers that needed be answered.

While questions involving security and the extent of participation in activities needs to be decided on an individual basis, certain general criteria regarding visas, laws in this country, and what considerations should be made when people are planning on returning to their respective countries were felt to be needed.

Some of these people are leading activists in the chapter. Because they are not officially members, however, they could not be elected to the Executive Committee or become delegates to the convention, or take on positions such as organizer. The chapter has been trying to work out how to incorporate actual day to day leaders and their elected bodies. To this end they at one point had sympathizers volunteer to collaborate with the Executive Committee. They have also tried electing people to collaborate and taking them into consideration on the overall size of the Executive Committee. There needs to be a general explanation of what rights in terms of elections and in pre-convention discussion, etc. active sympathizers have and what roles they can play in the chapter.

This situation I am sure is and will be repeated in several areas of the country, especially where there are large concentrations of foreign students and due to upsurges around the world bringing us into contact with many more of these potential YSA members. As well as some specific advice perhaps a more general discussion on active sympathizers that could be sent out to chapters would be helpful.

Comradely,

s/Sally Rees

February 7, 1979

Dear Sally,

Your letter poses some good questions, ones that come up time after time. Comrades in the field often seek advice on how to handle this or that situation involving someone who is not a citizen. Naturally, there is no way to provide a general formula to cover what are really a series of individual situations, with many different factors to be taken into account in each case. Nevertheless, it might be helpful to clarify some general norms, and to clear up some confusion that has arisen on how to approach this problem.

1. The category of "active sympathizer" is designed to protect the individual involved from possible legal victimization they might be vulnerable to if they join the party or the YSA because of their status in this country. This could include deportation, denial of citizenship, suspension of student visas, and so on.

The category of "active sympathizer" is not primarily for the purpose of protecting the party as such, or the YSA. No laws exist that could victimize the party for having non-citizens (green carders, people on student visas, etc.) as members. In fact we do have and always have had such members.

The problem comes in where individuals may be victimized on the grounds of their membership in the party. In the case of people living here whose country is in the grip of a brutally repressive regime, deportation can be a very serious problem. That is why some of these revolutionists make the decision, in collaboration with the party, not to become members, but to function as "active sympathizers."

By the term "active sympathizers" we mean not just sympathizers who are active, but people who would, by all criteria be members of the party except for the legal question. This is the way the term is usually used in the party.

2. There is no automatic, universal rule that people from other countries living here should be "active sympathizers" instead of members. There is no reason why under normal circumstances someone from, say, Australia, or France, or Germany should not be a member of the party rather than an "active sympathizer."

Naturally, this has to be their choice. For example, someone who holds a green card and is applying for citizenship may run the risk of having citizenship status denied on the grounds of party membership. This would be unconstitutional, of course.

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But there is no guarantee that it could be successfully fought. We have no reliable experience to be able to judge if the government would make such a move. In any case, times change, so what they might not do today, they might do tomorrow.

If becoming a citizen is important for them, they might decide not to apply for membership, but instead to function as an "active sympathizer." This would give them greater legal protection--though, of course, still no guarantee that political activity won't be used against them in deciding on their citizenship application.

Someone who is here on a student visa from a country where there is not a repressive regime might well decide to apply for membership. The risk they face is that their student visa might be lifted on some pretext or other. For many of them, the benefits of membership in the party or the YSA far outweigh the risk, which today seems rather slight anyway.

3. Being an "active sympathizer" is not being a member-with-a-wink. "Active sympathizers" are not members. They do not pay dues, participate in the election of delegates to conventions, or have a decisive vote at branch meetings to which they may be invited. Only members are members, and the constitution defines membership quite clearly.

The worst position in the world for us to get into would be to delude ourselves into thinking that we could hide members from the government by keeping their names off the books and referring to them as "active sympathizers" (wink). That is a naive and self-defeating concept of security. People whose residency in this country might be jeopardized choose not to be members, but to be "active sympathizers" instead.

4. Designating someone as an "active sympathizer" does not mean that they are in a category with certain automatic rights such as attendance at branch meetings. The branch can vote to invite an "active sympathizer" to attend branch meetings or executive committee meetings on a regular basis. "Active sympathizers" may be urged to make a regular, weekly, financial contribution. They may be invited to participate in fractions and committees, again by membership decision. That doesn't make them members. They may have voice, but not decisive vote. The branch, by simple majority vote, can decide to stop inviting any "active sympathizer" to meetings if it sees no reason to continue doing so.

I hope this helps clarify some of the questions.

Comradely,

s/Larry Seigle