

SOCIALIST YOUTH LEAGUE

DISCUSSION BULLETIN

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St. Louis Unit Report

Background

Any political activity in St. Louis is handicapped by the traditional conservatism of the middle west. We are also hampered by the fact that there are no state or city supported colleges in the area. Of the two universities here one is a Jesuit institution and the other is a rich man's school especially now that the veteran enrollment has declined. Despite all this the St. Louis unit was optimistic at the time of the last report. However, shortly thereafter the unit lost its organizer and his wife who transferred to Chicago. Both youth and ISL were demoralized by this turn of events and only since the beginning of this year has the youth been able to reactivate itself. Though the ISL has steadily declined in activity, the youth is once more optimistic.

Unit Activities

1. St. Louis Politics Club. Early this year the SYL fraction and a group of sympathizers decided to form a left-liberal discussion group to discuss political questions: socialism, pacifism, and the third force position. Political activity on the campus at Washington University is extremely difficult and many of our contacts are now off campus. (We are an aging youth group.) Thus, it was decided to call the group the Politics Club of St. Louis and to include university students and other fairly young people. The first meeting was held on Feb. 25 with an attendance of about 20 people who heard a professor at W. U. speak on the United States and Southern Asia. Attendance at the next meeting was larger. The subject was Germany and German rearmament, and the speaker, who had recently visited Germany, seemed to favor rearmament though he did say that most of the German people were against it. At least nine-tenths of the audience disagreed with him in the discussion period. The third meeting was the Draper meeting which was attended by over 40 people. A contact at Kansas and one at Washington Univ. joined at the SYL public meeting the night after the Draper Politics Club talk. One more meeting was planned before the final exam period but the speaker was unable to come. We plan one more Politics Club meeting in June but will probably be inactive for the rest of the summer. The Politics Club seems to be an extremely fruitful activity.

2. Campus Activities. One more member was recently recruited reactivating the unit. For the past year we have had only one member on campus but for the summer months we will have four. There is little activity on the campus in the summer, however, we will at least be able to broaden our contacts. Three of these people will remain on the campus in the fall. The University administration will probably admit Negroes to the undergraduate school in the

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fall. In this case the comrades on campus will probably be instrumental in setting up a campus CORE group.

3. Kansas University. We have continued our close contacts with the Upstream group at Kansas Univ.

Anvil has been sponsored by the Socialist Study Group of K.U. (a recognized student group) which sold about 75 copies on the campus. Just recently this student club endorsed the West Coast Youth Resolution on War which was given considerable space in the student daily newspaper, and provoked a good deal of campus discussion (not all favorable). The orientation of this student group is mainly left-wing SP. However, a comrade from Chicago and two St. Louis comrades have just returned from three days at KU and feel that there are good prospects for recruiting within the club. The main political center is found within the co-op movement which provides most of the membership of the Socialist Study Club and the leadership for Upstream.

4. Other Organizations. With the exception of the Stalinists who are extremely weak and discredited, there are no other organizations in St. Louis in which political work can be done. We helped set up an SDA chapter last year which collapsed after we withdrew. The CORE group in St. Louis is extremely active and successful in its field but that field is not politics. One of our comrades is active in CORE but this is for personal satisfaction and not for political ends.

5. Unions. One of our comrades has joined the AFL teacher's union which is controlled by middle-aged SP'ers and is not a fertile field for SYL recruitment. Another may soon join a Railroad Brotherhood. None of our comrades are likely to be "industrialized" in the near future.

6. Anvil. We have been selling about 50 copies of each issue of Anvil. Sales of Anvil are a function of the SYL not of the Politics Club and will probably remain so. Therefore, we feel that we could do a better job if Anvil were a socialist publication since it is already looked on here as largely an SYL magazine. Sales of Anvil would improve if the quality of the articles improved. We are in favor of more non-student "guest" writers (like Irving Howe) who can write. We received a good deal of criticism on the "Symposium" composed largely of monosyllabic answers to questions.

Situation and Prospects.

In the last period we have succeeded in reactivating the unit which is no small achievement under the circumstances. Because the ISL branch is non-existent our relations with that organization are minimal. We have an increasing circle of close contacts from whom we will probably continue to recruit. Three of our present members will probably remain

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in St. Louis for some time and our goal is to develop leadership in this group so that the SYL will become a permanent organization, and the focus for radical youth in St. Louis.

Recommendations

The St. Louis unit recommends that the resolutions passed by the national convention, particularly the constitution and the war resolution, be put into pamphlet form for distribution to close contacts for possible recruitment. Such a pamphlet would present the core of our program and would be a great aid in recruiting. At present we have nothing concrete to give contacts or new members and we find this a serious handicap.

* * * * *

(The following recommendation from the St. Louis unit was received after the above report).

At a recent meeting of the unit here the resolutions and discussion of the first bulletin were discussed and voted upon. The unit proposes that in regard to "A Proposed System of National Dues" that the national dues of every member of the SYL be twenty five cents a week.

The unit wishes the following statement written into the minutes of the convention (this is not a resolution.)

The St. Louis unit of the SYL unanimously supports the SYL National Bureau resolution on Youth and War, however, in the event of actual hostilities between the armed forces of the United States and Russia this matter should again be considered.

All other resolutions and the draft of the constitution were unanimously supported.

The Socialist Youth League needs a national publication. It is important, of course, to realistically estimate what sort of a magazine we are capable of maintaining and, no less important, to understand what type of a magazine we need. But before anything else is discussed or determined, it should be understood that a national organ is an indispensable need for a national socialist youth organization.

It is true that the ISL puts out two excellent publications which the SYL can utilize, and should circulate much more seriously than in the past, but Labor Action and New International cannot be a substitute for our own magazine. An SYL magazine is important for a number of reasons; political, organizational and psychological. Requests for publications of the SYL have come into the national office any number of times. We must be in a position to send these interested youth our own material and not rely solely on the party press. If we are a national organization we are expected to publish our own material. The fact that non-members expect such material from us may not be a sufficient reason for publishing a magazine but it is an important consideration.

For our own educational development a magazine can be of great value. Our members are shy of writing for the ISL press. But as the SYL has no regular publication of its own it means that most SYL comrades have no means of expressing their views on theoretical questions in writing and have no opportunity to present the ideas of the SYL in written and organized fashion. The type of magazine which I favor would provide youth members with opportunities for discussing political questions that are discussed within the organization (Political Action, Yugoslavia, Britain, etc.). At the same time the magazine could contain articles of a propaganda nature on political topics such as Socialism and War, Academic Freedom, developments on campus, analysis of other youth and student movements, etc. This should be a magazine distinctly different from the New International and what is more important would be our magazine which would automatically break down many of the inhibitions of young comrades who do not feel up to writing for the ISL press.

But a magazine is not only useful as a means of self expression. It is something which we can use to influence non-members and even serve the role of a recruiting agent for the SYL. It can be sold at meetings, on campus among contacts and mailed out to individuals who send in interest blanks. This sort of magazine is obviously not for "concentrated mass" sales. We are in no position to publish a popular organ and it would not be as useful for the organization today as a theoretical-propaganda magazine. In short, I propose a slightly broader counterpart of "Forum" whose propaganda articles would emphasize youth political problems.

The argument could be made that an SYL magazine would conflict with Anvil. In my opinion this conflict is more of an imaginary than a real possibility. The magazine I propose is not a mass organ. It will not be published or sold in the thousands. Instead it would be sold to members and contacts at our public meetings. This would mean a probable sale of several hundred per issue. It would not be a magazine designed for mass sales; thus, it would not create a conflict with Anvil sales in necessary sales time expended for circulating an SYL organ; it would not conflict with Anvil in type of articles written; it would have articles written for it by individuals who are only occasional contributors to Anvil.

JULIE FALK

The following paragraph is to be inserted in the SYL Buro resolution on Youth and War. It is to appear on Page 9 in the second section of the bulletin after the third paragraph.

Although we reject pacifism as a method of effective struggle against war, we nevertheless declare our comradely solidarity with pacifists in their objective of fighting war. Wherever possible we will join with them in fighting the war program of the government. In the event of their persecution for their point of view we will engage in active struggle for their political freedom.

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The following paragraphs are amendments to the SYL Buro resolution "Role and Tasks of the SYL":

The SYLers in their campus activities come in contact with other political tendencies. The character of many of these groups may vary from campus to campus precisely because they are youth groups, and are usually more militant and not as hardened and inflexible as their parent counterparts. The various liberal tendencies such as SDA, the Young Liberals and, in many cases, the SLID are groups with which we can enter into close cooperation on civil liberties and similar democratic issues.

While we enter into united fronts with liberal tendencies, we do not call for united fronts which include Stalinist clubs. We should attempt to isolate the Stalinist groups on both political and organizational grounds. To call for united fronts with Stalinists would represent a compromise with totalitarianism. However the liberal clubs often insist upon the inclusion of Stalinist fronts groups in the united front action. Where this is the case we do not isolate ourselves by refusing to participate in the action. We have the responsibility of participating in the united front which includes the Stalinists to advance the objectives of the particular action, and to educate the liberals to the need of operating on the campus without cooperating with the Stalinists; and to expel them, in a democratic fashion, from the united front.

The fact that many idealistic young people have been dragged into Stalinist front organizations is not sufficient reason for including these fronts in the joint activity. Wherever possible we must attempt to educate these young people to the real reactionary nature of Stalinism, but we can not accomplish this by compromising with totalitarianism, or leaving the united front open to the "rule or ruin" tactics of the Stalinists. One of the most effective means of combatting Stalinism on campus is by taking the lead in pressing for militant student activity on democratic issues and thereby destroy the Stalinist pretenses of being the champion of democratic rights.

While we do not propose united fronts with Stalinist organizations, we nevertheless defend their civil liberties. The attack against the Stalinists is carried out as part of an attack against radical and democratic ideas. We defend the right of the Stalinists to advocate their ideas and to organize for them and attack the reactionary forces subverting their right

The Young Peoples Socialist League is the youth section of the Socialist Party, a reformist party which constantly apologizes for American Imperialism. The YPSL, accepting the program of the Socialist Party, is thus a political opponent of the SYL. Despite our important differences the YPSL is a legitimate socialist tendency which should be approached by the SYL for united action on those concrete issues upon which there is common agreement. In addition to proposing united action the SYL will make efforts to contact YPSL circles for discussion of our differences. By virtue of the fact that YPSL is a socialist tendency, it provides SYLers with a major point of contact that does not exist in our relations with other political youth groups, and warrants a friendly contact with individuals and circles of the YPSL, without hiding our deep political differences with them. On campus, SYLers should attempt to reach a working agreement with YPSLs in the organization of broad socialist or anti-war clubs. In these clubs we reserve our rights to criticize the views of the YPSL in a responsible manner- as is the case in our relations with all student groups with which we cooperate on various levels.

SOME COMMENTS ON THE SYL AND THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

In the course of the Chicago-Berkeley exchange the two alternatives - joint activity with other elements, and independent SYL activity were posed. It seems to me that in all these interchanges, including Julie's remarks, many different and qualitatively distinct kinds of joint functioning were allowed to merge under one label, thus confusing the whole issue. It is one thing to participate with other political clubs in joint actions, activities, and electoral campaigns; and quite another to join with other third camp elements in building an organic anti-war club of the type seen in the Politics Club at U of Chicago, and Focal Point at Yale.

The great political watershed of this period is the war, and it is recognized in all our political work that this is the fundamental issue about which all others revolve. Hence our primary goal on campus today is the creation of a recognized voice for the third camp that, when the student body begins to stir from its apathy, can serve as the center about which a powerful anti-war movement is built. Our function today is limited to only minor recruitment (nobody envisages a mass SYL in the near future), and primarily making the third camp anti war position known to the mass of students; the academic freedom movements which we can give leadership to are recognized by all as significant - but no one will maintain that the student mass participates in them.

Therefore our attitude towards the SDA, YPSL, and other non third camp political outfits should be quite different from our attitude towards the pacifists, the IWW, LSL etc., and liberals who accept a third camp orientation. Much closer relationships are to be desired with the latter along the lines of Don's approach, whereas we should at all times confine ourselves to the United Front limits of identification with the former groups. A club like the Politics Club or Focal Point can take on the tasks of anti-war and academic freedom activity including the pushing of Anvil, and leave the bulk of SYL energy free to handle distinctly socialist work, the building of a cadre, etc. Of course different situations require different tactics, but this is the course best applicable in most colleges outside of the political centers in the US.

Owen

NOTE

The next two bulletins (pages 181 to 230 in the continuous pagination) are not products of the youth organization of the Workers Party, but of a separate tendency which soon merged with it. In 1952, when these two bulletins were issued, the youth section of the Socialist Party--Young Peoples Socialist League (YPSL, or Yipsels) was in conflict with the parent organization, and a split took place in 1953. At the end of 1953, the YPSL, which had previously changed its name to "Young Socialists," merged with the Socialist Youth League, to form the Young Socialist League. (See the following bulletins, called "YPSL-SYL Joint Discussion Bulletins," in which this unity was discussed.)

The next two bulletins, then, are included here, to convey the politics of the youth group which, while still at this time affiliated with the Socialist Party, was soon to break with it and associate itself with the WP-ISL tendency.