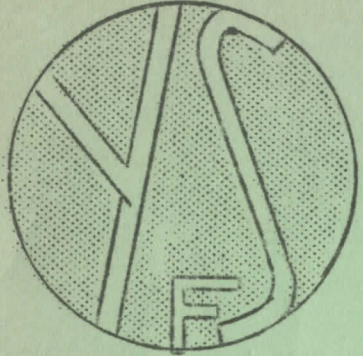


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YOUNG SOCIALIST

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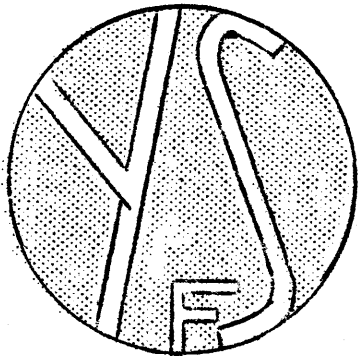
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June 13, 1958

Dear Comrades:

This bulletin and those of the same kind to follow have been authorized by the YS Editorial Board. In its meeting of May 25th the following was moved regarding "Organization of the Perspectives Discussion:"

- "1. That the perspective discussion take place under the auspices of the YS Editorial Board, and
- "2. That it take place through the 'YS Forum' bulletin and a) all YS supporters have the right to express their views therein; b) the 'YS Forum' be available to all YS supporters."

The intention is that the discussion culminate in the Labor Day conference of Young Socialist supporters.

Two points are noteworthy about the material contained in the present bulletin. First -- that the discussion was initiated mainly among young SWP members. Since the questions raised have become the property of Young Socialist supporters as a whole and are going into a YS conference for decision, it is appropriate to reprint this material here despite its formally more particular character. Second -- events have tended to reduce or eliminate some of the immediate problems referred to. Further, when the material was written the channels for engaging in and resolving the discussion had not yet been elaborated. For all these reasons this bulletin has somewhat of a preliminary character.

There is almost enough material on hand now for the next bulletin, which will be gotten out immediately upon receipt of one or two more contributions.

Fraternally,

James Robertson

James Robertson

JR: jb

ON BUILDING A REVOLUTIONARY YOUTH MOVEMENT

by Martha Wohlforth

Virtually everyone in the SWP is in agreement as to the importance and significance of the youth development, its potentialities, and the impact it has already made. As one of the initiators and active participants in this development, I am in firm agreement with the aims and approach we have developed. We have proceeded from the first with a fundamental aim in mind: to enter the promising regroupment situation in the youth field, to establish as extensive contact as possible with the Stalinist and all other radical youth, and out of this to build a nationwide socialist youth movement, open to all socialist-minded youth but with principled revolutionary socialist politics.

Many of us have had varying conceptions of the nature of the youth movement, various estimations of the other tendencies in it, and of the role of revolutionary youth in relation to these other tendencies and to the party. We have been so engrossed in our day-to-day projects, so concerned with our immediate problems, so filled with enthusiasm at our tremendous success, that we have not yet reached a clear understanding of how to turn the present youth movement into the one we wish to build.

We initiated this youth movement; were it not for us it would not exist. It now involves many people besides ourselves; upon its development much depends. It is up to us to decide what to do with this creation of ours; its fate is in our hands. We must deal out this fate with as much intelligence, as much clarity, as possible.

My purpose here is not to present finished conclusions. If I can merely raise some questions, and if these questions help to stimulate some discussion on the matter, I will consider my labor well rewarded. If I arrive at tentative answers to some of the questions I raise, however, I do not intend to refrain from setting them down; for I believe the only way to proceed is to express, in complete frankness, my thoughts on the youth movement as they are, at this moment.

As a start, I will briefly state the main thesis of this document: The youth movement which we have initiated is an unstable centrist formation which cannot last long in its present state. The contradictions within it, the sources of its instability, must be resolved. If we do not decide how to resolve them -- if, in other words, we do not work out a relatively long-range perspective, and give the movement leadership accordingly, it will fall apart, disintegrate, right under our noses, to our everlasting discredit. I do not mean this to sound frightening. It is not, if we wet out at once to answer these questions: 1) What kind of youth movement is possible and necessary, given the general political situation, and given the existing state of the youth movement; and 2) How can we go about building such a movement?

By what means can we arrive at answers to these questions? Thus far we have worked out our tactics piecemeal, groping in the dark and feeling our way at each step. That was the only possible way we could proceed; we could only estimate the result of a certain policy; if it succeeded in practice, we continued it; if it did not, we dropped or modified it. If you examine the conceptions we originally worked out during the YSL faction fight, and compare them with what actually materialized, you will see quite a difference (for instance, our abandonment of a minimal program and our slowing down of tempo). This substantial change in our plans came about gradually, almost imperceptibly.

Now, however, we need no longer develop our plans in this somewhat pragmatic fashion. Many unknown factors, of course, still must enter into our considerations; but we have something which we did not have before, which can reduce the darkness to a minimum. While we previously had to construct a youth movement in the air, so to speak, we now have a youth movement in the flesh, which we can look at and examine from many angles. Our conceptions, developed in the abstract, have materialized. By examining and evaluating the youth movement in its present state, and relating this to the needs of revolutionary youth, both in general and in this period, we can make a start, at least, toward answering the crucial question: Youth, what next?

Quality and Quantity -- the Basis of the Confusion

In what lies the similarity and where the difference between the SWP itself and young revolutionists in the party on their approach toward regroupment? For both, the regroupment of revolutionary socialists is the primary task in this period. In both cases, this perspective is complicated by the fact that there is no organized group moving in our direction with which an actual merger is possible. The SWP has met this difficulty by an aggressive policy for united action on specific issues and for discussion among all socialist tendencies. We have been able by these means to extend our influence and our ideas -- especially our stand on independent political action -- among the widest radical circles. Where we before were merely "Trotskyites" -- our very name unheard of -- we are now replacing the discredited CP as the party which is serious about the class struggle, about the fight for socialism. The main appeal of the SWP has been political. In its bid for a united socialist ticket, for example, it suggests as a basis for discussion a platform which could be acceptable to a great variety of socialists, but which at the same time is a principled socialist platform which revolutionists can firmly support.

On the youth scene, the regroupment started with a merger of two revolutionary currents, the SWP youth and the YSL Left-Wing Caucus. This presented us with a picture somewhat different from that in the adult field. For in spite of this merger, there is no revolutionary organization on the youth scene! This was no

ordinary merger. Even before it was consummated, the two tendencies were working together in a broader arena which they had drawn around themselves -- an "inverted entry," so to speak. They never had the opportunity to organize themselves nationally as a separate entity, or to discuss among themselves their important theoretical differences.

In contrast to the basically programmatic approach of the SWP, the youth has taken another tactic: the whole political content of its approach has been boiled down to the slogan of "INM" -- Independent, Broad, and Militant. We have taken this approach to avoid drawing a line around ourselves across which the many youth who are no longer irretrievable Stalinists, but by no means revolutionary socialists, will not step. Our entire appeal to these near-Stalinists is IBM: "Regardless of our political differences," we say to them, "we believe we can all work together in a common organization, within which we can take action on those issues where we agree and work out our differences on other questions." The sole political content of IBM is: Stalinists and Trotskyists can function meaningfully in a common organization. The assumption is that, for the Stalinist youth, mere willingness to work with us is a politically significant step. (When I use the term "Stalinist" throughout this article I am referring, not necessarily to CPers, but to the many people who, while holding some positions different from those of the official CP, retain a fundamentally Stalinist ideology.) Our political differences are not discussed, in many cases not even mentioned.

This puts the party youth in a strange position. As one put it recently, "I've forgotten how to talk to people about the SWP, how to try to convince people of our politics. All I can talk about is IBM." In propagating the IBM idea, by the way, the "M" -- Militant -- which was originally conceived of as a euphemism for "revolutionary" -- is conveniently forgotten, or at best it is left undefined. The "M" is the crux of the matter, if we are interested in injecting greater political content into the slogan.

An evaluation of this approach is not under discussion here, however. It is intended rather to point out a contradiction between the youth and party approaches to regroupment: On the "adult" scene we have a revolutionary party which approaches regroupment on a programmatic basis and which is sufficiently organized and cohesive to act with flexibility. In the youth field we have a revolutionary cadre, yes; but it is not and has never been organized; its tactic up to this point has been primarily organizational, not programmatic; it cannot, in and of itself, enter the regroupment field with the required firmness and flexibility, for which it is dependent directly on the party.

This is a qualitative difference in approach. Is it justified? Is there in fact a qualitative difference between younger revolutionists and older ones? In my opinion there is not; and

that contradiction -- a qualitative difference in approach where there exists in reality a quantitative difference -- is the source of many of our troubles. To amplify this hypothesis, or to try to resolve the contradiction, before the completion of our analysis, would be premature.

A Bird in the Hand: The Political Content of IBM

What is the nature of the youth formation we have brought into being? It is a centrist formation, initiated by the Trotskyists and dependent upon them for its existence. It is politically heterogeneous, consisting of many shades of Stalinists and exes, a few libertarian types, and several vague progressive social-worker types, as well as ourselves. One numerically small but politically vital component is a group of people who are without doubt revolutionary socialists, but who are not party members and who have no immediate perspective of membership.

Since no other organized tendencies are participating in this development, most of the groups in the country have the nature of SWP front groups. That is what they are, in reality. They are independent; they are broad; but at the same time all the participants know that the very existence of these groups in most localities, and certainly looking at the national picture as a whole, depends on the support of the SWP -- that nothing fundamental can be done without the support of the SWP members in the groups, and this regardless of how much they try not to dominate, and refrain from pressing political questions. A non-Trotskyist in these groups must be willing to accept this fact. Many of the semi-oppositional elements in the youth, many of the unprincipled combinations on the basis of anti-SWPism which have sprung up around the country, have been formed by people who were attracted to the IBM idea and did not discover until they were already involved in the youth organization the actual, though not formal, dependence of the IBM clubs upon the SWP.

How are our political ideas getting across in this process? Except for our conception of an IBM youth movement, the importance of which I do not wish to underestimate, our ideas are not receiving full expression. Whether consciously or otherwise, we are not pushing our political differences with the Stalinists. We believe that to initiate an all-out, serious political struggle at this time would prematurely reconstruct the very barriers between us and the Stalinists that it has taken two years and a whole series of world events to break down. Publicly, our politics are limited to IBM and a series of resolutions and statements in the fields of civil liberties and civil rights. The reason for this is simple: these are the sole areas of agreement in our heterogeneous groupings.

As for the Young Socialist, we are doing quite well, but the future is not assured. With our present policy of unanimous consent on major editorial decisions any attempt to deepen our polit-

ical analysis in editorial statements can be vetoed by one opponent. The paper is a beautiful weapon: it has a Stalinist coloration in the superficial aspects -- pictures, resolutions in support of the China visitors with no criticisms of their politics, etc; but Trotskyist politics come out in every issue. That is why a Stalinist girl could write us and say, in effect: "You took a counter-revolutionary position on Hungary; but still I welcome your paper as a progressive development." We have established a prideless tradition in the paper: many, many youth from the Stalinist milieu look to it as theirs enough, at least, to write letters to it!

But there is a danger, not to be overlooked. From the point of view of a serious political analysis of basic issues the content of the paper has shown a slight propensity to deteriorate in favor of an excess of social-worker type articles, by which I mean articles on more or less secondary issues such as juvenile delinquency, education, integration, etc. -- issues in which our distinctive political line does not find expression.

The paper is not an IBM paper. We control it and allow other points of view to be expressed. (One difficulty in our functioning which is beginning to manifest itself is that some of the Stalinists in our clubs think it is an IBM paper, an exact reflection of the present political makeup of the youth groups, and we are understandably reticent about straightening them out on this.) In the local clubs, however, our politics find much less expression than in the paper. Not infrequently, we find ourselves in the peculiar position of having non-Trotskyists in the clubs attempting to put greater emphasis on principled questions than we do.

My observations on the local clubs are perforce restricted to the New York YSA, which is in some respects atypical. We initiated the club; without our support it would undoubtedly collapse; yet, due to the influx of new members, we no longer control it. A crucial test came in our proposal for a picket line on the French bombing of Tunisia. If one took for granted the militant opposition of the Stalinist youth to U.S. imperialism, one would certainly have expected them to eagerly seize upon this plan and support it. Quite the contrary. They opposed it, and violently. It was the first real confrontation of Stalinists and Trotskyists on a political question. A second crucial test is the question of independent political action. Barely in time for the 1957 municipal elections the YSA passed, with considerable opposition, a resolution urging a socialist protest vote -- parties, unspecified, and the question of whether a vote for Flynn was a, "socialist protest vote" deliberately not discussed. Now, with the prospect of a united socialist ticket, the question of independent political action becomes even more vital. It is very unlikely that the YSA as presently constituted, with the new influx of Stalinist youth, could endorse a united socialist ticket. The Stalinist youth, for the most part, support the anti-monopoly coalition down the line and would refuse to stick out their necks

for a socialist campaign. The more successful we are in drawing Stalinist youth into the YSA, the smaller becomes the possibility of youth support for the united socialist ticket.

A third example of the limited extent to which we can express our ideas is shown in the nature of our public functions. If we arrange a public meeting with just one speaker, the speaker has to be a pro-Stalinist, or the topic must be relatively harmless and non-political. On any serious political question, such as peace, it is necessary to have a symposium of three or four points of view, in which none of the positions can be adequately expressed and in which the audience has virtually no chance to participate. A recent proposal that the YSA sponsor a debate between Shane Mage and Micheal Harrington (YSL National Chairman) on "The Defense of the Chinese Revolution," which could have been tremendously significant in drawing to us revolutionary-minded youth, as well as for the enlightenment of those we already have, was turned down on the ground that the Stalinist point of view would not be included.

Can these heterogeneous groupings maintain themselves, even on just a local basis, in their present form? An examination of the present crisis in the YSA will provide, I believe, a negative answer. Organizational forms reflect political content; the political diversity, the centrifugal tendencies, in the YSA are reflected in an organizational disintegration; the political nature of the YSA, which is a regroupment arena, is contradicted by its organizational form, which is that of a more or less homogeneous action organization. This basic contradiction within the YSA is one that we have not been fully conscious of; and again, to attempt to seek arresolution of it at this point in the analysis is impossible.

The crisis manifests itself in various ways. Most concrete are the organizational inefficiency of most of the members, the great reduction in attendance at public functions, the extreme financial difficulties of the group, and the demoralization and/or loss of interest of a large section of the membership, all of which, of course, go hand in hand. Many of the party youth, particularly, are discontented; several have expressed the feeling that they are sick and tired of youth work and would like to concentrate on party work; some feel a personal lack of serious theoretical discussion; and all are physically exhausted by the constant pressure of mechanical work which seems no longer to bring the results it once did.

The YSA is trying to carry on a full range of external and internal activities, as if it were a full-fledged group with a worked out point of view, as if it were another YSL. It conducts public meetings every week. It has a four-hour business meeting every other week, an exec meeting weekly. It has initiated three series of classes given by members -- almost a school. It plans to run a film or two in the near future, as well as a bazaar. It is making plans immediately to obtain a headquarters, in spite of its constantly increasing deficit of close to \$200. It has endorsed a

whole host of endeavors which it promises and fully intends to actively support, but which it is forced, by sheer necessity, to leave in the lurch: the Sobell committee, the American Forum, the China passport case, ECLC, the Socialist Unity Committee (Zaslow) school -- possibly even more. In addition, YSA members try to sell at least 320 papers each month, to distribute several more, to cover all the important radical meetings. Campus sales, which should provide the bulk of sales, are practically non-existent. THE most important task -- talking to contacts, both within and outside of the YSA, is woefully neglected. The functioning of the national office of the youth, which is or should be one of the main tasks of the New York YSA, is chaotic, as out-of-town comrades will readily testify. On top of all this, the party youth expect to attend a weekly branch meeting, the SWP forums and socials, and to do a little work directly for the party once in a while -- such as helping out in petition campaigns -- just to reassure themselves that they are still members of the SWP.

Thus the basic contradiction of the YSA -- the attempt of a diverse regroupment formation to behave like a homogeneous political organization -- is leading to the defeat of the two major tasks which the New York youth should be concentrating on. Their time is so taken up with organizational work, and meetings, that regroupment itself (which means primarily contact work) and our national functioning are drastically impaired.

I do not mean to imply that the sole cause of the crisis is political. Obviously we are in dire and immediate need of added help in the center, regardless of what long-range perspective we decide to adopt. Obviously, too, a certain adjustment in the YSA's activities can be made. But the effectiveness of these measures, necessary though they be, is limited by the political circumstances.

IBM does have a certain political content. A Stalinist (or a social democrat, for that matter) who is attracted to this slogan must make a fundamental break with his politics. But, as numerous examples testify, a person breaking from Stalinism can go in many directions. There is absolutely no basis for assuming that a person who is attracted to our regroupment line will automatically move in the direction of revolutionary politics. IBM clubs can offer a temporary haven for confused youth; but they cannot offer a political solution until their whole content is changed.

Nor can the IBM clubs, or a national organization formed by adding them together, reach out in any significant degree to the "masses" -- which in the youth field consist primarily of students, and to an increasing degree young workers. Without a political viewpoint, an organization cannot get anywhere building campus clubs. Without a clear conception in the group of what socialism is, a group cannot propagate socialism. We are paralyzed, in this regard, until we win over the Stalinist youth in our ranks -- or a section of them -- to decent revolutionary politics.

Don't misunderstand me. The IBM slogan is correct, as far as

it goes. But to identify this slogan with the entire content of our conceptions of a youth movement, would be just as mistaken as were those Bolsheviks who equated the slogan "all power to the Soviets" with the entire content of the Russian revolution. When the soviets, because of a rightward shift in the correlation of forces following the July Days, could no longer provide a means of peaceful transition to workers power, Lenin advocated withdrawing the slogan. Later, when workers were flocking to the Bolshevik banner, and the Bolsheviks had an actual majority in the most advanced soviets, the slogan "all power to the soviets" was reintroduced, this time with new content. At all times the slogan was subordinated to the aim of a conquest of power by the revolutionary proletariat.

A political organization without a political program cannot last! The lesson of the present regroupment period is clear. Look at what happened to a tendency which minimized the importance of program, of political ideas -- the Bartell group: it has simply fallen apart! Only the SWP, which has constantly put its views forward, has gained. An organization which is in business only as a regroupment broker may serve a useful function temporarily; but the need for it, which holds it together, will inevitably give way to the opposing forces within it. IBM, our sole raison d'etre at present, serves a useful and necessary purpose, temporarily; but its political content is not sufficient for a national organization!

Where Do We Go From Here?

I suspect that by this time you have become rather cynical about my promises to raise questions, and to answer them, if at all, only tentatively. You have probably not found much thus far that was very tentative. Let me reassure you: those promises I made in my introduction were not mere demagogy. From now on in you will run across plenty of unanswered questions.

We have almost reached that long-awaited point in our analysis where we can start to consider what type of youth movement we should aim for. But first it is necessary to recall just why we are in this youth business in the first place. We are in it for two main reasons: to build and educate a cadre of young revolutionists who will devote their lives to the struggle for socialism, and to participate in the day-to-day struggles of young workers and students as a means of furthering these struggles and at the same time of raising the level of political consciousness of the youth. These two tasks are not exclusive, one to be carried out at the expense of the other. They are inseparably linked. We try to carry out these tasks at all times, seeking organizational forms which correspond to the specific demands of the period.

The possible types of youth movements make up three major categories, with all sorts of variations within each category, all sorts of transitional forms between categories, and possible combinations of categories. But such finesse is incapable of predic-

tion. These are: 1) a mass organization or a semblance thereof, numbering in the thousands, whose politics I would not even venture to guess; 2) a cadre organization with vague centrist-quasi-Stalinist politics; and 3) a revolutionary socialist organization.

I have a sneaking suspicion that some comrades assume a mass organization to be in the offing. Just in case, I will briefly dismiss this possibility for the near future, at any rate until the whole level of mass consciousness in this country undergoes a fundamental change. In any case a mass youth organization would doubtless arise out of the labor movement or a labor party, and it would be highly unlikely that such a movement would be initiated by us, although we would be a part of it.

What about a centrist-type cadre group? This would be the probable result of the various IBM clubs if they could be stabilized and welded together nationally, a possibility on which I have grave doubts. Even if it were possible, is that the type of national formation we want to build? What justifications are there for this perspective? There doubtless are some, perhaps some good ones, and I hope someone will point them out.

And how about our original aim, a broad revolutionary organization? That perspective would seem, abstractly, a good one. But the IBM clubs cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered as belonging to this category. The only other possibility at present would be to try to turn the IBM clubs into revolutionary groupings, by infusing greater political content into the "M" part. (This infusion would boil down, in essence, to a clear anti-Stalinist position, since the clubs have already established their opposition to capitalism.) This would, in my opinion, be a mistaken perspective. It would necessitate an all-out factional struggle with the Stalinist youth in the clubs, which would negate all the progress we have made in breaking down their prejudices against us. The IBM clubs have already slipped out of our grasp, and are beyond recovery without fatal consequences. The decision not to try to transform these groupings into revolutionary ones was made a long time ago when it was decided not to press for the clubs to endorse the Young Socialist.

If none of these categories seem to be possible, what are we to do? Just give up the ghost and die? Before taking such a drastic step, let us pause and reflect a moment. Perhaps there is some possibility that we can concoct a weird mixture, made up of elements from all these categories. Of course, these, like all categories, are abstractions, and in life things cannot be sorted out into such neat, clearly defined piles. But you don't put together a youth perspective the way you invent a new recipe. It might help us if we ask ourselves what needs this youth movement must meet -- what is going to be demanded of it? Then, possibly, we can solve our dilemma. As I see it, there are three main considerations:

1. Access to the Stalinist youth. The task peculiar to this period is regroupment. Our main orientation is to those

youth who have become disillusioned with Stalinism to one degree or another. Everyone should be aware of the reasons for this orientation, so I need not review them here. We are just beginning to make real headway with this task, and the possible gains are great indeed. We must seek out discussion with Stalinist youth at all times, and participate with them in common organizations wherever possible.

2. Independence of revolutionary youth. Lenin wrote: "... the youth must come to socialism in a different way, by other paths, in other forms, under other circumstances than their fathers. ... unless they have complete independence the youth will be unable either to train good Socialists from their midst, or to prepare themselves to lead socialism forward." ("The Youth International," Collected Works, Vol. XIX, pp. 329-32. Emphasis in original.) This is no less true today than it was in 1916. This does not mean merely that "youth, in general" need independence. More: young revolutionists need independence, not as "youth in general" but as revolutionists. This need is apparent if we examine the immediate problems which face us. A merger of two revolutionary tendencies occurred, members of which had important theoretical differences. The rich and fruitful discussion which was anticipated never materialized. Our politics are not gaining full expression in the IBM clubs, as was pointed out earlier. Within the party the youth do not have sufficient chance to develop their own ideas and express them, at least not in a branch like New York, which is so large and so full of national leaders. Furthermore we have attracted to us new revolutionary youth who are not in the party. Thus neither the party nor the IBM clubs can provide the revolutionary youth with an adequate means for their theoretical development. To say, "Get your education in the party or in the YSA or else!" is to stifle political development by placing formalistic fetishes before political necessity. To say, "Get your education by reading the Marxist classics" is to ignore a basic concept of Marxist education. A mere absorption of the contents of Marxist writings does not make an educated Marxist; political ideas are developed and assimilated in the course of ideological struggle with different points of view. Precisely because the revolutionary youth are not all in the SWP, but are broader than the party; precisely because the IBM clubs are so much broader than the revolutionary youth, and are in a peculiar situation in relation to the Stalinist youth; precisely for these reasons it is necessary for the revolutionary youth to constitute themselves as a separate entity from the party and from the IBM clubs, so that they can come to socialism in their own way. The Capital class some of us initiated in New York is a step in this direction; and I guarantee that without it, an acute demoralization of some of our most active people would have occurred months ago. The party youth are in a strange position: as youth they are independent, but are not revolutionists; as party members they are revolutionists, but are not independent. Their political lives are compartmentalized. This feeling was expressed recently by a YSA member who is close to the party. He said, "My ties are not

to the YSA as such; the YSA leaves me cold. I joined, not the YSA, but the revolutionary left wing within it."

The constitution of the revolutionary youth as an independent entity is also a necessity from an organizational standpoint. Whether this entity takes the form of an actual revolutionary organization, or a revolutionary grouping within a broader organization, is for the moment inconsequential. To operate in broad groups, as we are doing now, requires for revolutionists a certain amount of organization and firm political agreement. Without the independent organization of the revolutionary youth, including those not in the party, the very independence of the entire youth movement is dependent for its necessary cohesion upon the party. This independent entity would also resolve the contradiction between quality and quantity that we discussed earlier.

3. Organizational forms must be consistent with political content. In New York, we must free ourselves to concentrate on the most pressing tasks -- regroupment and national functioning.

If we base our perspectives on these three considerations, we will not get too far off. In conclusion, let me plead once more for an immediate, but thorough, discussion of these questions. Time is of the essence. The Stalinist youth, in New York at least, have initiated a vicious attack on us, based not on politics but on SWP-baiting and petty slanders. We may be pushed into a premature factional struggle with these people against our wills. All sorts of decisions must be made immediately. How we make these decisions affects the entire future of the youth movement, and that in turn affects the development of the proletarian vanguard and the course of the socialist revolution. Such are the stakes. So let us not make these decisions in the dark.

* * *

(Note: This article was written originally three or so weeks ago, around March 1. Although I have revised it to some extent, some of the emphasis is already a little dated. -- MW.)

COMMENTS ON THE CURRENT STAGE OF THE YOUTH MOVEMENT

-- by Bert Deck

Three considerations guided our work once we began with the conception of a regroupment of revolutionary youth.

First we revived in our thinking the best Bolshevik traditions on the independent road for youth to socialist consciousness: the idea that each generation finds its own way to socialism; that the party should take an attitude of cooperation and friendly criticism toward youth who are finding their own paths, their own forms of organizations.

We did not present the party to youth in an ultimatic fashion, i.e., "We have the program, this is the party, it's the only revolutionary party; if you want to be revolutionists join this party, accept this program; it is already worked out for you." We avoided that pitfall, which could only isolate us from the best of the youth who want the opportunity, who must have the opportunity, to think through on their own all political questions and develop socialism as part and parcel of their beings -- not something handed down to them but something which grows out of their own experience and their own creative thought.

Secondly we estimated the particular stage of American radicalism: we faced the reality that no socialist tendency had unchallenged authority over the great bulk of American radicals. Due to the sharp decline of socialist organization there was no automatic transition for young people coming to the ideas of socialism associating the ideas with a particular party or organization. This underlined the general need for an independent framework within which the youth could actively participate in socialist politics and feel free for the fullest development of their own thinking.

Our final consideration was that we recognized that the CP and the Social-Democrats abhorred any idea of an independent development for young socialists. This meant that our organizational proposal would in this context have profound political implications.

We could go to all young socialists and say, "Let us build an independent socialist youth organization in this country." In practice the building of an independent movement meant a moving away from the organizational centers of Stalinism and Social-Democracy. This conception was recently confirmed by the attack from the CP and the Social-Democrats on the Midwest Conference.

Drawing all of this together: the Bolshevik tradition on the independence of the youth movement, the particular stage of American radicalism, and the concrete attitude of Stalinism and Social-Democracy to this development, we evolved the policy of being the most vigorous advocates of IBM, the independent, broad and militant youth organization.

The IBM movement has already proven its validity. The past six months has seen the growth of numerable clubs across the country whose first function has been to provide an elementary organizing center for young radicals of various persuasions.

We correctly saw that a real fusion of tendencies could take place only after a thorough process of common action and discussion. It is now necessary to make more precise our conception of this process.

The necessary "symposium" phase of the discussion could only serve to get people to talk to each other for the first time. But it loses its original value when and if it freezes the discussion into a debate only over positions developed outside the youth movement. In this way our discussions can degenerate into a lifeless reflection of the disputes between the adult organizations and the political life of the youth movement will not develop a validity of its own. We cannot speak of an independent movement in the real sense of the word until the latter occurs.

We should establish a new framework for the discussion based on the need to expand the present movement not only among previously affiliated radicals but among new youth who will become receptive to socialist ideas in the coming period.

This will mean eventually the writing of a program for socialism to be presented to American youth. Today it means an effort to turn the attention of the movement toward the problem of expanding socialist education on the campuses, and to turn the attention of the Young Socialist toward the task of "selling" socialism. This does not mean calling a halt to the discussion among socialists, but organizing it in such a way as to interest new people.

There is a danger of a hardening of groupings along the old lines after the original thaw.

There is no valid basis for pro-CP, pro-SWP, pro-XYZ caucuses within the youth movement. The only meaningful divisions should be over questions which relate directly to the building of the youth movement among American youth and the elaboration of a socialist program for a new generation.

In the process of taking the ideas of socialism to thousands of youth across the country who will listen, we will not only expand the movement, but deepen the process of healthy discussion and common action which can only result in furthering the cause of socialist regroupment.

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Detroit
Apr. 7, 1958

Dear Tim,

The following is a report on Young Socialist work in Detroit.

Following the Midwest Conference, we decided to take advantage of the paper's special offer for the March issue (1000 copies for \$15) and conduct a mass circulation campaign for the paper. We felt that the success of the Conference, our new contacts with YS readers at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) and Eastern Michigan College (Ypsilanti), and seeing new people becoming interested in the Young Socialist Club because of our last six month's activities, was all evidence that such a project would be successful.

We ordered 2000 copies besides our regular bundle of 100. They were stuffed with a leaflet in the form of a letter that briefly explained the purpose of the paper and its intention to build a broad, independent, and militant socialist youth movement. Included was the name of our club and literature agent, a local address, and a sub blank.

But how were we going to pay for all this and our back bill as well? A local fund drive was our only answer. We asked everyone who had ever shown the slightest interest in the paper for a contribution, including our new friends at Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor. We made it, and I am still collecting money. We found that a lot of people who were interested in the paper and its purpose were also willing to help foot the bill for our project. Some even volunteered to help circulate the paper.

Our next step was the distributions. We gave away 100 papers at Cass Tech high school and learned later that every World History Class that day discussed the YS. On two distributions at Wayne State University we gave away 500 copies. 175 were distributed one day at Ypsilanti, and at a Young Democratic Club showing of Salt of the Earth we distributed another 100.

The biggest and best response came when two of us went to Ann Arbor with 200 papers. As a result of minor police persecution we received publicity and a student response that was tremendous. The campus paper was filled for two weeks with letters, articles, and pictures of our activities. We returned for our second distribution with every old copy of the YS that we had. 500 were given out to a waiting crowd in only ten minutes, and I only wish we had had 500 more. Our last distribution there was at a public meeting for John Gates. About 100 were distributed and a student friend of ours took 200 which he strategically distributed around the campus.

At the same time we have been conducting a YS subscription drive. Our goal is 50 subs in the Detroit area. Subs are still coming to us and to New York through the mail. At every meeting we attend, our own and those of other groups, we ask everyone we can to buy a sub. And then we ask them to help us pay for the distribution campaign. It is often hard for us to ask people for such things, but when we do it, it works!

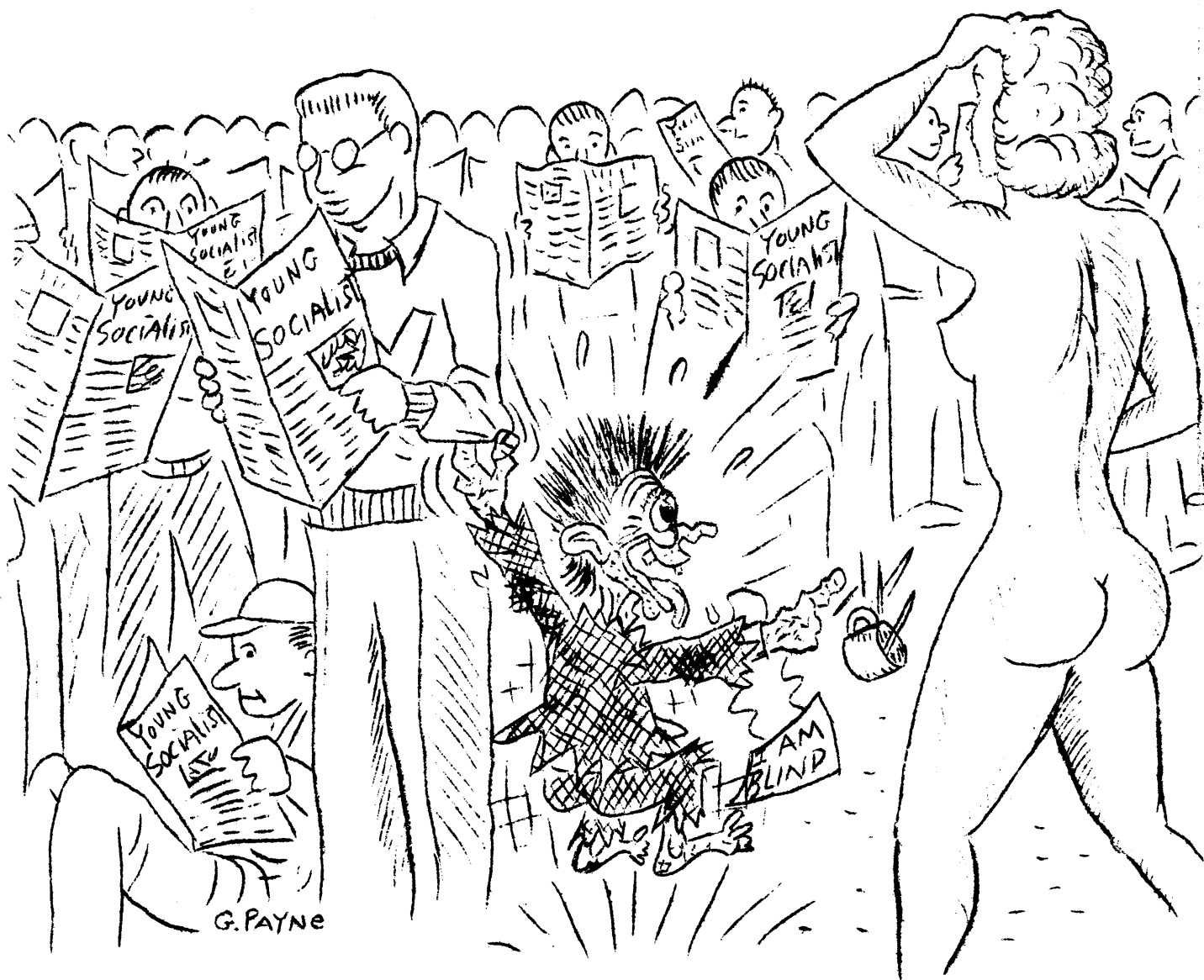
We also carried out a two-week mobilization campaign to visit every new contact who didn't have a sub. The first Sunday three crews (six people) went out, each crew with a list of five or six people to visit. It should be added here that two of these people were not yet members of the club. The second week one crew visited five people, and during the week three others went visiting after work. This work, which enabled us to talk at length with many of our contacts, yielded a number of new subs and helped us to get two new members.

A month's hard work has brought us more good contacts at Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor, a total of 20 paid subscriptions and 10 definite promises. Our YS bill has been paid in full and we have gained a new and larger periphery around the Young Socialist Club.

And finally, we have had two successful sales of the April issue of the YS. At Wayne, one person sold 14 copies in 20 minutes, and at Ann Arbor two people sold 50 copies in 35 minutes. You know, it pays to advertise!

Fraternally,

Barbara Doritty
Literature Agent,
Wayne Young Socialist Club



Detroit
April 7, 1958

Dear Tim,

I am writing this to bring you up to date on our work here in Detroit and to let you know of our thinking on some political and organizational problems that we are facing.

The club we have been working in, the Young Socialist Club of Wayne County, was reorganized in August 1957, and since then has been the only open public socialist youth group in the Detroit area. We began it as part of the national attempt to create a revolutionary socialist youth movement through the process of regrouping all leftward moving youth tendencies around the Young Socialist newspaper. We had previously made attempts to create a more broadly based group through a Labor Youth League - YSC debate and a call for a youth-regroupment discussion, but these efforts were not successful. Almost the same situation existed here in the youth field as in the adult regroupment field.

We had to begin therefor with only our own forces, eight SWP'ers. The club held biweekly public forums and monthly business meetings (in the local SWP hall), sold the YS mainly at Wayne State University, participated in the Youth for Patrick Committee (see issue #1 of the YS Discussion Bulletin), participated in an informal off-campus semi-political discussion group, and we did a lot of talking with the many young people we began to meet. Its composition and activities gave the club a revolutionary-socialist character (which we wanted) and an SWP-Trotskyist reputation (which we didn't try to hide even though we constantly tried to expand the political base of the club.

Very few CP-influenced youth attended our forums, even though we had (ex)-LYL speakers at two of them (reports of participants at the Moscow Youth Festival and the subsequent Trip to New China). Their group did not suffer the open dissensions and splits that occurred in other cities, their local leaders all remained more-or-less hostile to us, and they were able to keep most of their friends and supporters from listening to our ideas.

Even though we had little success with our regroupment approach the club recruited two people in this period and made a lot of friends. We were able to bring about a dozen non-members to the Midwest Conference. Immediately after the Conference we began an extended discussion and re-evaluation of our work. At the same time we began some projects to take advantage of the changing political climate in Detroit. The past six months of severe unemployment has set a lot of people to thinking and enquiring about socialist ideas. There are not yet any new mass movements or struggles here (the labor bureaucrats in fact are still running to the right) but a lot of new people are coming around and listening to socialist ideas.

We have met a lot of new people in the last two months, largely through participation in other groups. Particularly the above-mentioned discussion group and the SWP's Friday Night Socialist Forum. Most of these people are fairly new to politics, though some had earlier been in or around the LYL. We found an immediate and almost universal response to our reports of the conference and to the Independent-Broad-Militant slogan which we were pushing hard. As always, new people want to know why the socialists can't get together. Our effort to get them together is widely respected; it gives us a high moral position in relation to all the other socialist groups (we practice what we preach) and opens ears to our revolutionary-socialist ideas.

Though our efforts to build an IBM group on a fusion basis had failed last year we decided to try it again, using the Midwest Conference as a platform. The organizational question we faced was: would the YSC grow into a large club containing more than one political tendency, or would a new and looser organization on the pattern of the New York group be necessary? We decided that the latter development was the most probable; that it would be more difficult to build a broad group around the YSC than to work for an entirely different organization.

On the other hand, the YSC was the only socialist youth group that was doing anything. It had a number of new contacts who were at the same time attracted to the politics of the S'P, and there were opportunities for immediate work with the YS and with our own forum. We decided to expand the YSC work even though we aimed to build a different IBM group. We have tried to make the two approaches complimentary rather than contradictory and so far have been quite successful.

One of our friends was sufficiently energized by the Midwest Conference to call a group of his friends together to discuss the possibility of creating a new group along the lines of New York's Young Socialist Alliance. We helped to notify people and 18 attended the first meeting on March 22; 3 of us, 6-8 previously or still CP-influenced, the rest independents (4 from Eastern Michigan College at Ypsilanti). A lot of discussion produced only an agreement to create a new broad youth club.

The second meeting on March 29 drew 31 people; 3 of us, a dozen CP-influenced (mostly teen-agers) including Mark Solomon, the local CP youth director, 8 from Ypsilanti, 5 from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and others. This meeting debated having an avowedly socialist-broad group versus a liberal-broad group. Most of the support for the latter view came from some CP-influenced people, but the overwhelming sentiment was pro-socialist and this view finally carried unanimously.

A subcommittee of this group is now drawing up a constitution along the lines of those printed in issue #1 of the YS Discussion Bulletin, and will consciously model itself on the pattern of the IBM clubs that attended the Conference. Its immediate problems are organizational: membership, officers, a name, meeting time and place, etc. Even so, it has already begun some activities: a May Day meeting and picnic is planned and Sobell work and National-Student-Committee-for-A-Sane-Nuclear-Policy work is being discussed.

This is our first real contact with the CP-influenced youth milieu. Part of the reason for it is our past activities which have built up in their minds an awareness of us and some respect for our ideas and activities. Part is undoubtedly due to the success of the Conference. The CP leaders may yet decide to pull out and attempt to disrupt the group. But their past hegemony over many of their people is now broken and we anticipate a continual, if irregular, development of this work.

One of the things that greatly helped was Steve Max's visit to Detroit following the Conference. He spent almost a week talking to his old friends of the LYL, telling them of its success, spreading the idea of IBM, and urging them to participate in such a movement with us. He received a cool response from their leaders but was very effective in gaining support for the Conference's program from amongst their ranks. He opened a lot of hitherto closed ears for us. Where possible, such trips might be well worth the expense in other cities.

Another factor that stimulated the new group is the presence of students from Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti. You know, nothing reassures like numbers and support. And conversely, the enthusiasm here has stimulated the others to lay plans for socialist clubs at their own colleges. These people are all new contacts of the YSC whom we met while distributing the YS. Most of them are fairly new to politics, though some come from the old LYL milieu.

Three kinds of organization is possible for them: on-campus socialist clubs, off-campus socialist clubs, and on-campus socialist-caucus-or-committee work in a broader liberal organization. All three have different advantages, the first being most difficult to achieve. But from our point of view the main problem is to educate these people in the basic ideas of socialism, and to give their new clubs fraternal help from our own. We expect a definite beginning will be made during the remainder of the school year, with the big doings to come next Fall. By then we hope a solid socialist cadre will be established at both colleges.

The YSC's activities have also greatly improved in the past two months. We have moved out of the SWP hall and have been holding very successful forums and business meetings, combined with socials, in members homes. Whether staying in the SWP hall would have been as fruitful is really a moot point, since the SWP is also profiting from the new political atmosphere. Our forum on The Beat Generation drew 30 young people, almost half of whom had never been to any of our functions. The last one, What Is Socialism, drew 20 (on Easter weekend). We have recruited four new members to the YSC, two of them in their teens, all very active, and all oriented in a revolutionary-socialist direction.

Our biggest recent project has been a mass circulation of the Young Socialist. This included distribution of 2000 papers, a subscription drive, and a fund drive to pay for it all. The project proved to be a phenomenal success. A letter on it is being written by our literature agent, and a news story will appear in the YS.

We made an attempt last Fall, through the discussion group, to organize an on-campus club at Wayne U. They decided against it, and we haven't pushed the matter since then. Right now we have only one person taking a non-matriculated course at Wayne. Next Fall we hope to have at least one person attending full time. A campus club at Wayne would be a big help in our work, and we intend to try again next Fall. Though the administration won't permit another socialist action club like the old YSC, it will allow a discussion group. Both the YSC and the new group are oriented toward Wayne and as they attract more students the prospects of a campus club will improve.

Finally, as the new group develops here, there will be the problem of two separate socialist clubs with similar aims and activities. What the YSC will do will depend on how the new group develops organizationally, its political coloration, and its relation to the YS. Our general orientation is to function as a revolutionary-socialist tendency within a single broader socialist group. Right now this means developing the local YS work and ensuring a public discussion of all socialist ideas. Until we know that this can be done through the new group we will continue the activities of the YSC.

Comradely,

Allen Taplin

April 1958

Letter from Jack H., Chicago

A concise statement of the situation will yield the policy for the revolutionary party.

To see the problem we must have a foreknowledge, a point of view, otherwise we can neither see, nor therefore state the situation.

The questions we face, I think, are those outlined by Martha Wohlforth in her statement.

Generally the question adds us to how can we further the youth movement the most.

As with every question this question too has a basis. It is in a sense a conclusion of another time trying to be applied to a new situation in order to be corrected and given validity once more.

The basis of the question is mainly that a youth movement is in the interests of the revolutionary party, in the interests of the working class.

The question is asked on the basis of general conclusions found from a material reality. In this case, the Russian experience in the youth field, and the European experiences which point up the fact that:

1) Youth are generally the most revolutionary because they have the most at stake, their future. This is due to their relation to the means of production, or in other words their age in a situation of vast social change.

2) Also, and more particularly, the student youth at colleges and universities (petty bourgeoisie) can play a revolutionary role: Spain, Mexico, Soviet Union, etc.

Those are the generalizations on which the question is based. Now we have a new situation -- new possibilities -- a new State in the Youth movement (ISR, Fall 1957, Wohlforth).

It is necessary to reapply our theory -- found from reality, back to this new reality to give the generalization meaning.

We want to find the particular manifestation (everything exists only in the concrete) that our support to the youth can take.

I would like to do this but find I can come up with no proposal because I notice in my own thinking a lack of some specific information necessary to make a new statement of the generalization on which Martha's questions are based.

It is absolutely imperative that we come up with a restatement in relation to the particular circumstances. If we don't our theories lose their meaning and we become divorced from reality -- we die.

In order to come up with the theory on a higher level a process of synthesis must take place; our theory (these) of support to a broad IBM movement and the particularly new situation today (antithesis) to get (synthesis) a prospective of support to the youth movement which will be meaningful.

I cannot make this synthesis now. I don't think anyone, to my knowledge, can. I believe what must be the next stage of this discussion must be to examine the new developments in the situation.

I suggest that these topics be taken up in a synthesis with our general program of support to the independent clubs.

A reappraisal of the situation of the LYL and Stalinist youth. Have we gotten as much as we'll get from them already in trying to build a youth movement. This should involve a statement of the new developments in the Soviet orbit and in the CP here. Because it is there that the base of Stalinism exists. It is in this approach that we can understand the pressure from Stalinism put on the Stalinist youth. Through this kind of investigation we can tell whether the Stalinist youth attacks in N.Y. and L.A. will tighten or loosen and consequently what our policy in the clubs and in the paper ought to be.

We must discuss the prospects for U.S. capitalism very concretely and try and attempt an answer to how long, generally, will we have to build the youth group and revolutionary vanguard. If we see that the time is arriving fast then we must discuss top political questions with the most advanced elements and try to bring them to our position as soon as possible. If we find that quantity will not change into quality so relatively quick we can try to build a much broader, if you please, centrist formation, counting on time to allow our views to take hold in the movement while trying to win the broadest support possible.

It is with this in mind that I am glad to hear the formation of a Capital class for SWP youth in N.Y. If we know what the rate of surplus value is, if we know the productivity of the country, if we understand the development of imperialism to this day, then we know the prospects facing the international capitalists and what to expect from the capitalist in the particular period of the near future.

Examine the economy, yes! Imperative. I am trying to organize a Capital class here. I think it will take form of being more adult comrades than N.Y. but will include as much SWP youth as possible, by all means. It was not without reason that in a period of revolution in Russia, Lenin found it necessary to return to basic Marxist works.

We must pool our empirical data for the recent period on these questions plus theoretical examination of the situation in light of more general data available in statistics.

I think there is going to be a fight at the University of Chicago on the basis of academic freedoms. In effect the rights of the Socialist Youth Committee to exist are being questioned by the Administration. Is this peculiar? From this sort of empirical data, coupled with our theoretical knowledge we can, must, form our policy. We must know just what the relation of forces is in particular relation to the youth.

I favor the youth, who come to socialism their own particular way and who have the particular data in youth work, discussing with the older comrades who have more theoretical knowledge. This would be reciprocally beneficial.

I have tried to show what I feel to be the stage the discussion had reached. I have tried to make the next step I feel capable of making. I have tried to emphasize the need to reexamine the situation; from this a correct policy will flow.

Detroit
April 17, 1958

We have accomplished a great deal since we began to do youth work in an organized fashion last June: a national newspaper has been established, a number of local clubs have been organized through which we have met many young people, and a conference has been held on a near-national scale.

We originally hoped to do these things, and we have, but not exactly in the way we first expected. And we have only begun to build the revolutionary-socialist youth movement that is our goal. The work has proceeded very unevenly in different cities and a lot of experiments have been made from which we all have learned a great deal. And many of us have different ideas now than we did a year ago on what can and should be done in the youth field.

It is certainly time that the discussions on perspectives that have been occurring in the local clubs should now be extended into a national discussion.

* * *

The working class, and young people in general, in this country are still essentially conservative in their political outlook. There is no significant movement as yet toward even a labor party. What does exist that is new is a widespread dissatisfaction with the two capitalist parties and a growing interest in socialist ideas. And of course within the radical movement the regroupment process is still going on. But there is not yet any sign that a mass radicalization will occur within the near future.

This coming labor radicalization will greatly change the characteristics of the youth movement we are working in today. In a period of social crisis sharper lines will be drawn between the social democrats, the centrists, and the revolutionists as their different programs seek for mass support. Factions will organize around each program and their polemics will tend to break the youth movement apart. At that time an independent revolutionary-socialist youth organization will have an opportunity to develop on a large scale. This kind of organization is the goal we are aiming at while working in the IBM clubs today.

* * *

These clubs are really only the beginnings of a movement. They are a collection of separate organizations, held together mainly by the efforts of our own tendency within them. The loose movement that these clubs form today is certainly unstable, in the sense that it has no clear and worked-out political program, which is the only thing that can give real stability to any kind of political organization. It is even more unstable because it contains groupings that adhere to different programs, primarily the SWP and CP programs.

This does not mean that the movement will soon fall apart, nor that it has no political justification or viability. I think that just the contrary is true, that the movement's heterogenous character is well suited to the times. In fact this character is just what has stimulated its present growth and ensures its future development.

Possibly the majority of American youth are already dissatisfied with capitalism. Certainly large numbers are seeking out the socialists and listening to their ideas. And many of them are becoming socialists. The experiences of

all the IBM clubs proves this. But still, few young people are ready to commit themselves to partisan politics, to any of the established socialist parties. And few of them are ready to join a revolutionary-socialist youth movement.

But we have met many young people willing and eager to join a socialist club that will not commit them programmatically. What these people want is a club that will give them an opportunity to learn about socialism, to discuss differing socialist ideas. And they want a club that will act, and not just talk, but act in a way that will still not commit them to any definite program.

The "forum movement" is a name that can be applied to the new developments in both the adult and youth fields, and to other countries (notably England) as well as this one. Forums have probably been the largest single activity of all the IBM clubs: they have taken the most effort, and have drawn the biggest public response. Until a labor radicalization occurs it will probably remain so. This is an indication that the main activity of the youth movement today is socialist education and discussion, with socialist action only secondary.

In a way this course was forced on the clubs because of the political differences of the original participants. But it is also an atmosphere that new people are finding congenial. It will undoubtedly continue for a period, though it can't continue forever. As economic conditions deteriorate and political life increases, people will be more willing to participate in socialist political action. The natural desire of young people for action will certainly reassert itself. But for an indefinite period yet the trend will be discussion and education.

* * *

We have generally adopted the term "IBM" to designate the kinds of clubs that exist today, and to use as a slogan to interest new people. There can be a lot of dispute over the political content of the term; the words are general enough to absorb anyone's content. What it actually means to new people is this: IBM is the way young socialists can get together. In a limited sense the clubs have been a kind of united front of pro-SWP'ers and pro-CP'ers carried into a loose organizational form. This kind of unity, though it limits the activities of the clubs, is very attractive to new people as to CP-influenced people. It is just what they are looking for today. well as

Our work in the past year has followed a much different course than we had originally expected. It was first considered solely as a regroupment of revolutionary-socialists, but it soon shifted as we found we could draw political people other than CP'ers, and new people as well into the clubs. In the adult field an actual regroupment of revolutionary-socialists is still occurring, largely around the united-socialist-ticket proposals of the SWP. But in the youth field, after the merger of the Left Wing Caucus and the SWP youth, this process stopped. Instead, we have been participating in a grouping-together of revolutionary and non-revolutionary and new socialists around the simplest kind of non-partisan socialist ideas.

There are few people in the clubs today that work under the direct discipline of the CP. But there are many in the clubs that are influenced by its politics and who more or less follow its line in their political activity. The attitude of the CP toward the IBM clubs is clearly enough one of great hostility, and more and more it is trying to draw everyone that it can influence out of the clubs. As it becomes firmly reorganized under Fosterite leadership it may be more successful in this. But most of these people have broken with Stalinist

discipline, if not with Stalinist politics, and a lot of them want to participate in a socialist club. The CP doesn't want socialist clubs; it wants liberal clubs. The good elements will stay.

The presence of these people in the clubs has caused a lot of difficulty for us. It limits the political positions the clubs can take, it influences what we ourselves can say at forums, and it has even watered down the socialist character of the Young Socialist somewhat.

This is not the kind of movement we would most prefer, but it does give us a lot of advantages for building the large revolutionary-socialist youth movement that we really want and eventually must have. Earlier we scattered our propaganda more or less broadside in the youth field, but now the IBM clubs provide us with a readymade audience. We can talk to interested people through forums and debates, through club discussions, and through private conversations. We can counterpose revolutionary-socialism to stalinism and social-democracy under generally favorable conditions. We can win people over to our ideas without having to engage in organized combat against rival socialist clubs.

* * *

As the IBM movement continues to grow our relation to it should be generally the same as it has been: as a revolutionary tendency working for its ideas within a larger, amorphous, but generally socialist milieu. But as the local clubs develop and we are freed from the work of initiating them, we can devote more energy to spreading our own political ideas.

Some of the people that we have influenced have joined the SWP, most have not. Most of them feel themselves to be part of a vague revolutionary tendency. And just about all continue to work in the clubs. There is a danger that this will hinder the political development of these people, that their growth into revolutionary cadres will be slow in a club that talks more than it acts.

The best way to prevent this is to see that they get a good political education, and that they join with and work for the revolutionary tendency. To do this we will have to thoroughly understand our own problems and we will have to be well organized as a tendency. Up till now we have been working in every city as a caucus of one sort or another, in some places as an SWP fraction. But we have not been at all organized as a national tendency.

I believe that this is the most valuable step we can take right now. The local IBM clubs are not ready to fuse into a national movement, and they may never be. But the revolutionists in these clubs are ready. The process has already begun in this discussion. Out of it we should aim to work out some new organizational setup that can centralize our discussions and our local work, that can join the revolutionists in the local clubs together and enable us to work more effectively within the IBM movement.

Allen Taplin

RESOLUTION ON TASKS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE BUILDING
OF A REVOLUTIONARY YOUTH MOVEMENT

General Perspectives

1. Our fundamental task for this period is the building of a revolutionary socialist youth movement in this country. Such a movement will enable young people to develop in their own way and at their own tempo — to come to Marxism by their own path. It will provide an instrument for advancing the struggle for the particular needs of the young working people and student youth of this country. Finally it will be the best vehicle for bringing the ideas of revolutionary Marxism to a new generation of young people and by so doing help to build the cadres of a revolutionary socialist movement in this country.
2. Such a movement should be independent from the revolutionary party. Only a movement truly under the control of the young people who come to it and who make it up can carry through the tasks listed above. However, such a movement necessarily develops in fraternal cooperation and complete solidarity with all revolutionaries in common action against the ruling class and opponent petty-bourgeois tendencies.
3. The task of building of a revolutionary youth movement in the present period is sharply different from this task in other periods. Dominating our whole perspective must be a full understanding and use of the opportunities now open to us in the regroupment process. The organized Stalinist youth movement, the Labor Youth League, has dissolved, leaving us a clear field to work among young people formerly under the influence of the CP. Many of these young people are open to our ideas; and our fundamental task is to remove any formal or organizational barriers standing in the way of these young people moving toward us politically. In addition we must bring together in a common working body those youth already holding a revolutionary socialist orientation. These include the young members of the SWP, the former YSL-LWC members, those coming over from the Stalinist milieu, independent left Marxists, and elements new to socialism. And finally we must reach out to new youth, especially leftward-moving elements on the campus. However, this latter task is not our major one in this period and is subordinated to, but not replaced by or unrelated to, our overriding task of regrouping young people who are already socialists. The intimate relationship enters because the campus is the scene of part of the actual working out of regroupment among young people.
4. Our vehicle for reaching the Stalinist youth is the IBM clubs. So far these clubs have been extremely successful and contain a significant section of the former members of the LYL in their ranks nationally. Our general slogan of forming clubs truly independent of all existing tendencies and open to all viewpoints has been our most powerful weapon in bringing these youth into common organizations with us and in preventing the CP from regaining its hegemony over its former youth followers. The building and expanding of these clubs must remain for the coming period our major task.
5. However, in exactly those aspects which are the main strength and appeal of the IBM clubs lies their basic weakness. Fundamentally these clubs are a political and organizational meeting ground for revolutionary socialist

elements and youth who in one fashion or another hold to Stalinist politics. For this reason these clubs are unable to take positions on a host of important class struggle issues. To attempt to force these clubs to take stands on such issues would in effect force out exactly those elements we wish to cohabit with at the present time — and would thus destroy the basic appeal of the IBM clubs. However it is also true that exactly those aspects of the IBM clubs which make them attractive to Stalinist youth make them repugnant to non-Stalinist youth. This factor limits the ability of these clubs to reach out to new, previously uninvolved elements, in any large-scale way. Inevitably this basic contradiction in the nature of the IBM clubs will lead to their disintegration. But for the time being they play an extremely valuable role which far outweighs their weaknesses.

6. In addition to the IBM clubs we have created the Young Socialist. The Young Socialist from its very beginning has been different from the IBM clubs. Where these clubs were unable to take positions — such as on the Hungarian revolution — the YS took basically revolutionary socialist stands. Thus the YS has stood and still stands in a vanguard relation to the IBM clubs. It does not represent a unity of Stalinist-reformist and revolutionary Marxist forces but rather is the spokesman for the revolutionary socialist tendency functioning within the IBM's. As such it supports the IBMs without asking the IBMs to support it. It allows all elements in the IBM clubs to contribute their views in its pages and is thus a partial reflection of the IBMs; at the same time, as a paper it speaks out for one section of the IBMs, the revolutionary socialists. However it seeks to speak for revolutionary socialism in its broadest definition and is therefore not an explicitly Trotskyist (SWP) youth publication. So far it has been extremely successful in reaching both the Stalinist youth and the broader student audience.

7. In addition to the regroupment arenas as such, there exists the second most important arena for revolutionary socialist youth, the campus. The campus differs from "mass" arenas — the Negro organizations, trade unions, etc. — in that a socialist can function openly both propagandistically and as a participant in student issues. Currently the campus scene is gaining in importance. The response to YS sales and suppression at UCLA, Colorado, and Michigan, the formation and struggles of the anti-fraternity party SLATE at Berkeley, and the springing up of student Same committees throughout the country are signs of the favorably changing atmosphere on the American campus.

8. A natural form for functioning on campus is the broad discussion club. This is organizationally similar to the IBM club. However it differs usually in political composition, as it is a coalescence of organized socialists with a broader, more amorphous grouping of young people breaking to one degree or another from bourgeois ideology.

9. The student movements and activities as they are now unfolding do not stand apart from the regroupment process. In the presence of live activity on campus, the socialistically-inclined children of radical parents and the ex-LYL former high school youth are frequently brought into contact with revolutionary socialists, not on the basis of fellowship as socialists, as in the IBMs, but as common participants in the nuclear protests, civil rights and academic freedom fights, opposition to fraternity domination and the like now taking place.

10. Finally another element of crucial importance to our perspective must be considered, the revolutionary youth forces themselves. Presently in addition to functioning in the IBM clubs the revolutionary youth have maintained some sort of independent organization or grouping. In some areas this is simply an SWP caucus or youth committee. In others it is a broader revolutionary youth caucus. Finally in others it is openly organized as a committee for the Young Socialist. These forces are in communication with each other through the national youth center and are the only national cohesive force at work within the IBMs.

11. Quite naturally in most areas these revolutionary socialist forces have tended to group around the Young Socialist. In fact the Young Socialist depends for its existence upon the work of these groupings in each locality. In addition to selling the paper, raising fund drive contributions and discussing the paper's policy, these groupings on occasion hold open functions either to raise money for the paper or to present some activity the IBM can't or won't carry on.

12. It is clear that presently there exists no revolutionary socialist youth movement. On the one hand we have broad clubs too amorphous to function as a national entity or to engage in fraction work in other arenas, and on the other hand we have the revolutionary caucus -- at present not fully organized and far from being a youth movement in a real sense. The question is therefore posed: How do we get from where we are to where we want to go -- to a revolutionary socialist youth movement? We must choose one of the two basic ways to do this:

a. We can take the IBM clubs as they are presently constituted and by raising and forcing through one point after another of our program turn these clubs into a national revolutionary socialist force. This orientation is in our opinion fundamentally false and can lead only to a long series of demoralizing splits as one group or another, one individual or another, leaves the IBM clubs as some pet point of view is overruled. Such a process would destroy the main function of the IBMs -- that of an organizational meeting ground between the basically opponent tendencies of Stalinism and Trotskyism.

b. We can continue along the tack we have been following up to now and preserve the IBM clubs as they are. In addition we can build our revolutionary forces around the Young Socialist -- spokesman for revolutionary youth -- in the form of local and national committees for the Young Socialist. These committees will give us an organizational vehicle within which to conduct our revolutionary Marxist educational work. It will provide something to recruit leftward-moving elements to instead of being forced to recruit them prematurely (and provocatively) into the party. It will provide a more formal structure that will make the financial support and promotion of the YS far easier. Finally it will provide in combination with the IBM and campus clubs a flexible apparatus and organizational form to fit the present highly fluid situation.

Concrete Tasks

13. Our first and primary task is to build the IBMs as they are. We should definitely not attempt to force these clubs to adopt any position which even a small minority could not fully accept. We should keep these clubs organizationally independent of the YS, and separate them from the YS where they

are presently tied, so as not to limit the broadness of the clubs or put undue pressure on the YS to change its principled positions.

14. While it is difficult to estimate clearly, it is certain that we have yet to penetrate fully into the layers of youth formerly in or around the Stalinist movement, especially is this true in the very largest metropolitan centers and in certain outlying areas where we lack forces. Hence if we are to deepen and extend the IBM club approach we must continue a program of activity and discussion not only with an eye to those now in the clubs, but also toward attracting those yet hesitant or uninvolved. Therefore from this consideration too we need to avoid "tightening up" the IBMs, and as well we should emphasize those publicity and contact measures calculated to reach those youth indifferent to or unaware of the existence of the IBM alternative to the defunct Stalinist-led youth organizations.

15. We must preserve the nature of the YS as the spokesman for revolutionary socialism among youth. In order to do this it is necessary to clarify the politics of the YS which have been put into doubt by the presence of Steve Max and Gil Turner on the editorial board and by their joint anti-socialist article which appeared in the May-June issue. In order to do this we must end the unanimity rule on editorials and print at once an editorial militantly supporting the united socialist ticket. Until such an editorial appears the point of view of the YS will remain under a cloud. In addition we should adopt a minimal statement of principles similar to the ones formulated by Shane Mage and Tim Wohlforth which were rejected by Max and Turner.

16. With the line of the YS clear we must proceed with the organization of our forces in every area around the banner of the Young Socialist in the form of local committees for the YS. We should work together toward a national convention of all Young Socialist Committees to establish definitively the line of the paper and the tasks of revolutionary socialist youth for this period.

17. Our greatest weakness at present is on campus. This is true both abstractly in terms of the overall distribution of our youth forces, growing out of our high average age levels, and relatively as compared with our Stalinist and especially social-democratic and pacifist competitors. With our forces better organized in YS Committees we can more forcefully enter the campus arena, creating fractions and building new campus clubs which can be extremely fruitful sources for recruitment to the YS Committees. Such a program coupled with a nation-wide barnstorming tour can place us in the dominant position among students and push the Stalinist and Shachtmanite youth to the sidelines in as effective a way as we have already done in the direct regroupment field.

18. In summary: by continuing an extremely flexible and "soft" policy toward the IBM formations and simultaneously clarifying the role of the YS and building our forces around it we can accomplish our major task of this moment, laying the groundwork for a nationwide revolutionary socialist youth movement to replace the former dominance of the Stalinist youth and keep the social-democratic youth in their deservedly impotent state.

— Tim Wohlforth
James Robertson
• May 12, 1958