

YSA

DISCUSSION BULLETIN

Vol. 9 No. 3
January, 1966

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20 cents

YOUNG SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

YSA, BOX 471, COOPER STATION, N.Y. 3, N.Y.

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Introduction

The first constitution was adopted at the Founding Convention in April, 1960. The delegates to this convention came from many different backgrounds in the socialist movement and many of them had no experience with the way in which a revolutionary-socialist organization actually functions. Consequently their constitution was an educated guess at what would be workable - the errors of which the new constitution attempts to correct.

The changes in the constitution have been based on our concrete experiences. They are part of the process of growth of the YSA. The 1962 YSA Convention amended the constitution to include an age ceiling. At the 1963 Convention the YSA took a step forward by changing its Statement of Purpose. The timeliness of this particular change was driven home by many of the experiences of the witch hunt in Bloomington. Without changing our principles, we adopted a new statement which reflected more accurately the national as well as international roots of our political heritage. The new statement was also more appropriate for public use and for our campus units trying to get official recognition.

The experience of the YSA in dealing with specific problems related to the constitution led to another major alteration at the 1965 Convention. On that occasion we eliminated references to proportional representation of minorities on the NC and the NEC. The experience of having a disloyal member of the Robertson minority on the NEC taught us that this provision was a foolish obstacle to a responsibly functioning national center. In several instances the disloyal Robertsonites passed along internal matters to opponent organizations. Consequently a "duel NEC" developed with the majority NECers meeting separately to discuss the major problems and carry out the work. The sections on proportional representation had left the door open to putting the organization in jeopardy and to a necessary "winking" at a section of the constitution to prevent this.

These changes, however, did not eliminate many of the extraneous sections or correct all of the faults of the founding constitution.

At last year's Convention, the constitutional commission pointed out that many more amendments were necessary. Not only were there several sections that the commission thought to be wrong, but there were many that simply did not belong in the constitution if it was to serve its major purpose, that is briefly and clearly define membership - its requirements, rights, and basic duties - and define the relationship between and the responsibilities of the various bodies of the YSA. The incoming NC was instructed by the Convention to rewrite the constitution. In order to accomplish this task the drafters of the new constitution began by pruning - that is deciding what a constitution is not and what problems are not with-

in their province to solve.

1. A constitution is not a statement of principles or a codification of our traditions and procedures.

For example, in drafting the new constitution the provision for granting fraternal votes to National Committee members at conventions was deleted. Fraternal votes to NCers is a tradition that we have practiced and undoubtedly will continue to practice, but it is not a defining feature of membership or of the relationship between YSA bodies. It is a procedural matter for the convention to decide.

Likewise, it will continue to be the norm for the YSA to have representation of political minorities on the NC and NEC. This is a good tradition; but it is foolish - as we found out in 1964 and 1965 - to make it part of the constitution as a formal requirement.

2. A constitution is not a collection of tips for organizers or locals; nor should it be a substitute for any needed local by laws.

One section of the old constitution states that chairmen of all meetings and committees shall have voice and vote and that the nay vote shall be taken first in calling the question. Clauses of this type do not set the boundaries on membership or define the relationship between bodies. They more appropriately belong in a local organizer's handbook than in the constitution - although the concept of taking the nay vote first is probably too weird to belong in either.

3. It is not the function of a constitution to foresee all types of future needs of the YSA.

For example, the founders of the YSA included two sections on district and regional organization apparently expecting rapid growth of the YSA. Regional and district organization will eventually be necessary, but details like these are better left to a future convention to add when the pace of growth makes it necessary and the outlines of what a region and district would be and what functions they would carry out emerge.

4. A constitution is not a listing of actions that individuals and bodies may do.

If the constitution were to list all of the activities that comrades are allowed to do the list would become infinite and would mean turning the constitution into a manual of our organizational traditions. An attempt was made to include only provisions defining what comrades must or shall do. If an action is not contradicted by the constitution that means it is not unconstitutional. It may

be wise or foolish, right or wrong, but that is up to the bodies concerned to decide, not the constitution.

The draft also deletes sections that were too rigid or formal. Experience has demonstrated, for example, that there is no necessity in outlining specific duties for the National Chairman and the National Secretary. In fact it is an obstacle to a rational division of labor within the National Office. Also it is too easy to violate provisions like this. The National Secretary, for example, has not always been the person responsible for the administration of the national office as specified by the constitution. It is much better to eliminate irrational provisions and abide by the constitution than it is to keep these provisions and continually violate them. It is important that the YSA have a constitution that we do not take with a grain of salt. The NEC tried to draft a document that is simple enough to be understood, flexible enough to be workable, and rational enough to be treated seriously.

No constitution will solve any more than a small handful of the problems an organization of our type faces. It cannot do the impossible - that is solve major political and organizational problems or be beyond the need for interpretation. But a good constitution is an important part of the YSA's structure.

YSA National Office
January 26, 1966

5. Any member more than one month in arrears in dues ceases to be a member in good standing.

Only members in good standing may vote or hold office in the YSA. Any member more than three months in arrears may be dropped after notification.

6. A member desiring to leave one locality for another must apply to his local unit for permission. A National Committee (NC) member desiring to leave one locality for another must also apply to the NEC for permission. A letter of transfer must be sent to the local unit of the locality to which the member moves. If no local unit exists in the new locality, the member shall also apply to the NEC for member-at-large status. A member-at-large wishing to transfer must apply to the NEC.

Article IV Local Units

1. Five or more members in a locality, upon application, may be chartered by the NEC and become a local unit of the YSA.

2. Each local unit shall elect an organizer and such other officers as are necessary to carry out the financial, secretarial, and educational functions of a local unit and to circulate the YSA press.

3. Each local unit shall elect an executive committee to act with the full authority of the local unit between meetings and undertake such other work as assigned by the local unit. The organizer of the local unit shall be a member of the executive.

Article V National Convention

1. There shall be a delegated National Convention of the YSA at least once every two years.

2. The National Convention is the highest governing body of the YSA and its decisions shall be binding on the entire membership.

3. The National Convention shall be called by the National Committee which shall provide for a pre-convention discussion period of at least 90 days.

4. The National Executive Committee shall issue a call at the start of the pre-convention discussion period. The NEC shall also issue internal discussion bulletins containing resolutions and discussion material that are submitted by members and bodies of the YSA. The NEC may set a deadline for acceptance of such material.

5. Local units have the responsibility to provide adequate time in meetings for discussion on resolutions submitted during the pre-convention discussion.

6. The election of delegates to the National Convention shall be conducted by the local units. A member must have joined the YSA prior to the convention call in order to vote. The ratio of delegates to membership shall be determined by the National Committee.

7. In the event of a political division, delegates shall be elected on the basis of a proportional representation system as set by the NC in the convention call. A political division exists when there is a division of the vote on conflicting resolutions.

Article VI National Committee

1. The National Committee (NC) shall be the highest body of the YSA between conventions and shall have jurisdiction over all YSA bodies and publications. The NC shall be elected by the National Convention. The National Convention shall also elect alternates to fill vacancies in the NC in the order decided upon by the convention.

Article VII National Executive Committee

1. The NC shall elect from among its members a National Executive Committee (NEC). The NEC shall act on behalf of the NC between meetings of the NC and be responsible to the NC.

2. Among the normal functions of the NEC shall be the supervision of the National Office, national publications, and the appointment and supervision of the national staff.

Article VIII National Officers

1. The NC shall elect a National Chairman, National Secretary, and such other national officers as it finds necessary.

2. All national officers shall be directly responsible to the NEC.

Article IX Discipline

1. All decisions of the governing bodies of the YSA are binding upon the members and subordinate bodies of the YSA.

2. Any member or body of the YSA may bring charges against any member for violation of the Constitution, program, or policies of the YSA.

3. Written charges shall be presented to the accused member in advance of the trial. Charges shall be filed in the local unit where the accused is a member and shall be heard by a committee it sets up for this purpose.

4. Charges brought against members of the NC or members-at-large shall be heard by a committee the NC or NEC sets up for this purpose.

5. The NC or NEC may decide to act directly in a case in which event its intervention shall supercede any local proceedings.

6. Any member subjected to disciplinary action has the right to submit a written appeal to the next higher body, up to and including the National Convention. This appeal must be filed with the NEC within fifteen days after the action being appealed. Pending action on the appeal, the decision of the disciplinary body remains in force.

Article X Miscellaneous Provisions

1. All decisions of the YSA shall be made by a majority vote.
2. Amendments to this Constitution shall be made by majority vote at the National Convention.

Submitted by the NEC
January 23, 1966

CONSTITUTION OF THE YOUNG SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

Article I. Name

The name of this organization shall be the YOUNG SOCIALIST ALLIANCE, hereafter referred to as the YSA.

Article II. Statement of Purpose

"The Young Socialist Alliance is a nation-wide revolutionary socialist youth organization, uniting young workers and students around the banner of socialism and dedicated to the building of a revolutionary movement which can lead the working people to socialism. The YSA bases itself on the principles of Marxism as developed by Lenin and Trotsky, and on the traditions of the American people represented by such leaders as Sam Adams, Frederick Douglass, Wendell Phillips, and Eugene Debs. We believe that socialism can be initiated only as a result of struggle of the working class and its allies against the capitalist exploiters, which culminates in the creation of a new type of state, a workers' state. Socialism will mean that for the first time in history, man will control his own creation - society - rather than be controlled by it. The dynamic of socialism involves a continual expansion of human freedom in all spheres: in politics, economics, culture and in every aspect of personal life."

From the "Where We Stand" Declaration of the YSA adopted at the 1963 Convention

Article III. Membership

Section 1. Membership in the YSA is open to those young people who agree with the Statement of Purpose and who accept the program and policies of the YSA, regardless of membership or non-membership in any adult socialist party.

Section 2. Applicants for membership shall be voted on by the local unit in their locale. In those areas where no unit exists, applicants shall be passed on by the National Executive Committee (NEC) and if accepted, be given the status of member-at-large.

Section 3. Every member shall belong to a local unit if such exists in the area. Exceptions to this policy may be made only by the NEC. Members-at-large shall be directly responsible to the NEC for the conduct of their political work.

Section 4. Each new member shall pay one dollar initiation fee which shall be forwarded to the National Office. Membership dues are a minimum of fifty cents a month and all of this minimum amount shall be forwarded to the National Office.

Section 5. Any member more than one month in arrears in dues ceases to be in good standing. Only members in good standing may vote or hold office in the YSA. Any member more than three months

in arrears in dues shall be dropped from YSA membership after notification.

Section 6. Members shall be guided in their political work by the program and policies of the YSA. In pursuing their work they may not take action which is in contradiction with YSA program or policies.

Section 7. YSA program and policies in all areas, institutions and organizations shall be carried out by the members in that situation acting as an organized body and subject to the decisions of higher bodies of the YSA.

Article IV. National Convention

Section 1. The YSA shall meet annually in a delegated National Convention. The National Convention is the highest body of the YSA.

Section 2. The National Convention shall be called by the National Committee (NC) which shall provide for a pre-convention discussion period of at least ninety days in issuing the convention call. The ninety day period shall begin only when the principal majority resolutions have been published.

Section 3. The pre-convention discussion shall include the publication by the NEC of national membership bulletins containing all resolutions and discussion material submitted by members and bodies of the YSA. Local units have the responsibility of providing adequate time in meetings for discussion on all material submitted for convention decision.

Section 4. In the event a special, emergency National Convention is called, the length of the pre-convention discussion period may be reduced.

Section 5. The election of convention delegates shall take place in local units. The ratio of delegates to members shall be set by the NC in the convention call. Only those who were YSA members before the convention call and who are in good standing at the time of delegates' election may vote for or run as delegates. Units may elect alternate delegates.

Section 6. Where there is a political division in electing delegates, election shall take place on the basis of a proportional representation system as set by the NC in the conference call. A political division shall be considered established and defined by the presentation for vote of a written document as the basis for representation.

Section 7. NC members and alternates not elected as convention delegates shall be fraternal delegates with voice but only a consultative vote.

Article V. National Committee

Section 1. The National Committee shall be the highest body of the YSA between National Conventions. The NC shall have final authority between National Conventions over all YSA publications, public

or internal, local or national, and over all YSA bodies, local, district, regional and national.

Section 2. The NC shall consist in size of such members and numbered alternates as is set by the National Convention.

Section 3. The NC may co-opt members to itself in the event its list of alternates is exhausted.

Section 4. During its annual regular term of office, the NC shall meet at least three times, including immediately after and before National Conventions.

Article VI. National Executive Committee

Section 1. The NC shall elect from among its members a National Executive Committee to serve as its resident executive committee.

Section 2. The NEC shall act on behalf of the NC between its deliberations and shall be responsible for such work as is delegated to it by the NC. The NC has the right of review of all NEC actions and decisions. Among the normal functions of the NEC will be the supervision of the National Office and national publications, and the appointment of the national staff.

Section 3. The NEC shall meet at least twice monthly and shall send minutes of its meetings to all members and alternates of the NC.

Article VII. National Officers

Section 1. The National Officers of the YSA shall be directly responsible for their work to the NEC and shall be elected by the NC from among its members on the NEC. The NC shall elect a National Chairman, National Secretary and such other National Officers as it deems necessary.

Section 2. The National Chairman shall be the political spokesman of the YSA and shall be the convener of the NEC.

Section 3. The National Secretary shall be responsible for the administration of the National Office.

Article VIII. Local, District and Regional Organization

Section 1. Five or more members in a locality upon application to the NEC may be chartered and known as a local unit. The maximum size of a local shall be fifty members.

Section 2. A local unit shall be administered in a regular fashion. Each local shall elect a chairman and such other officers and working committees as are required to carry out the local's responsibilities including financial, secretarial and educational functions and the circulation of the YSA press. Normally a unit will elect an executive committee to act on the local's behalf

between the latter's meetings and undertake such other work as assigned by the local. Local elections shall take place no less often than twice a year.

Section 3. Where more than one unit exists in a locale or where a single unit has grown unwieldy, a district organization may be set up, subject to the approval of the NEC. A district organization shall include a district executive committee, elected by the entire district membership meeting in conference, and such officers as the district executive committee may select. Between district conferences, the district executive committee shall be the highest body within the district organization. District conferences shall take place no less often than once a year.

Section 4. In geographically larger areas regional committees may be set up, subject to the approval of the NEC. Between delegated regional conferences, the regional committee shall be the highest body within the regional organization. Regional conferences shall take place no less often than annually.

Article IX. Trial Procedure

Section 1. Any member or body of the YSA may bring charges against any member for violation of the constitutional articles, program or policies of the YSA. The charges must be initially presented in writing to the highest body of which the accused is a member. That body may constitute itself as the trial committee or may refer the charges to a lower body of which the accused is a member. Charges may be dismissed at any time by the body having jurisdiction at that time.

Section 2. No body shall meet as a trial committee unless all members have been informed in advance of the business at hand. The accused must be given notice of the trial date and a copy of the charges at least 15 days preceding the trial. Failure to appear or to send a letter of defense in the absence of excuse for such failure shall be grounds for conducting the trial in absentia.

Section 3. The disciplinary measures which are available in the event the accused is found guilty are, in increasing order of severity: censure, private or public, suspension and expulsion. These measures may be applied only as a result of the trial procedures outlined in this article. To censure or suspend a simple majority vote is needed, to expell a two thirds vote majority is required.

Section 4. The accused or accuser may appeal the decision (dismissal of charges, guilt or innocence, or the severity of discipline) of any body to the next higher one, up to and including the National Convention whose decision shall be final. An appeal must be filed within 15 days after the action being appealed.

Article X. Miscellaneous Provisions

Section 1. Amendments to this constitution may be made only by the National Conference. All members of the YSA shall be provided

with a copy of the constitution.

Section 2. All decisions in the YSA shall be by simple majority vote except when otherwise specified by this constitution. No second shall be required for motions in any body of the YSA. The chairman of all meetings and committees has a right to voice and vote. The nay vote shall be taken first in calling the question.

Section 3. At all meetings of the YSA Roberts' Rules of Order (Revised) shall govern the proceedings, except where they are in conflict with this constitution.

Section 4. Members of a higher body of the YSA shall have the right to attend and speak at all meetings of lower bodies within the jurisdiction of the higher body.

Section 5. Local units and other bodies may adopt such by laws supplemental to this constitution as they deem desirable, providing such by laws are not in conflict with this constitution or the decisions of higher bodies.

Adopted by Founding Conference
April 17, 1960

Amended 1961 National Conference

Amended 1963 National Convention

Amended 1965 National Convention