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CORRECTIONS FOR 'SOME NOTES ON THE REVOLUTIONARY UNION'

by Gordon Fox, Berkeley local

(We are printing below a corrected version of Gordon Fox's article, Some Notes on the Revolutionary Union. It was printed in YSDB, No. 5, but a number of paragraphs on page nine were in an incorrect order.)

The Bay Area has one of the largest Maoist milieus in the country. This is due to two factors. First, the size and weight of the student movement, particularly in Berkeley, tends to cause many of our opponents to concentrate their forces in the Bay Area. Second, many burnt-out radicals have either been produced in or have gravitated towards the Bay Area. Furthermore, because of these specific characteristics, many groupings, journals, etc., have originated in the Bay Area.

The Revolutionary Union began in the Bay Area. Due to this fact and the other factors noted above, they have a relatively large presence on Bay Area campuses, particularly at the University of California's Berkeley campus, San Jose State University, and San Francisco State. They see large, central campuses such as these as their major area of work at this time, much as we do.

Because the RU has for some time been our major opponent on the UC Berkeley (Cal) campus, we have had the opportunity to observe them at close range and gain an understanding of their functioning. Our observations on their methods of functioning may be useful to comrades elsewhere, since the RU is growing nationally and seems to have been successful in establishing a campus-based front, the Revolutionary Student Brigade. What follows, then, are some observations and generalizations about the RU's functioning, rather than a political analysis of the RU. For such an analysis, comrades are referred to Jon Hillson's article "Why U. S. Maoists Fail to Form 'New Communist Party' " (Intercontinental Press, Vol. 12, No. 7, February 25, 1974), and to The Militant's articles on the RU's line in Boston.

The RU is a very serious organization. They are trying to build a nucleus of hardened Maoist cadre with the ultimate aim of building a mass Maoist party, and they have grown significantly over the past few years. For this reason, they tend to approach political developments in a serious, political manner--more like our approach than that of most other opponents. However, the organizational functioning of the RU is unique among our opponents.

The primary characteristic of the RU's functioning is frontism. It is extremely rare that the RU ever does anything in its own name. In fact, they believe that a sizable portion of their membership should be "underground," apparently in preparation for any period when this might actually be required. On the Cal campus, we have seen only two or three individuals openly identify themselves as RU members over the past several years. This is despite

the fact that they clearly have a much larger campus base; in general, RU members are rather clumsy at attempting to conceal their membership. Invariably, the "underground" members openly collaborate with "public" members, utilize the distinct RU jargon, etc. Nevertheless, their undergroundism undoubtedly hampers their ability to recruit in this period.

Undergroundism also fits in well with the RU's lack of public propaganda. The RU has no regular forum series; their occasional forums are invariably on theoretical questions and usually only attract other radicals. They do not make any effort to sell their press, either Revolution or the Bay Area Worker. At one point, some comrades at Cal were told by an RU member that it would be "incorrect" for them to sell their press like we sell The Militant and the YS. While this view is apparently no longer held by the RU, we have not seen any increase in their sales on campus or elsewhere. They occasionally have a literature table up on the Cal campus, but their table has only a few items, and few people stop at it.

Instead of functioning openly as we do, the RU functions through various fronts. For almost two years, the RU was the dominant force in the Radical Student Union (RSU) at Cal, which began as a general ultraleft group. However, the RU nationally made a decision to build the Revolutionary Student Brigade (RSB, formerly the Attica Brigade) as a campus front. This led to a split between the RU and the "independent" ultralefts in the RSU.

This split produced not only two campus groups, RSU and RSB, but at least one revealing document that we have acquired. In this document, "RSU Position Paper on Why We Didn't Join the Brigade," the real nature of the RU's frontism becomes clear. The RSUers complain that the "RU failed the RSU last year by not helping raise and in some ways actually stifling the political development of other RSU members." While this charge reflects the general ultraleft worship of abstract theory, it also shows that the RU members in the RSU tended to act in an elite, bureaucratic manner, refusing to discuss political questions and even making their own political decisions in the name of the entire group.

The RU also participated, in the name of the RSU, in the Ethnic Studies Defense Committee (ESDC), a group set up to defeat a University attack on the Ethnic Studies department, and under the domination of a rival group of Maoists. The RU waged a fight against the nationalist character of the ESDC, which ultimately led to the ESDC's

expulsion of the RU. The RSU "Position Paper" says that "this important struggle in ESDC grew for nearly two whole quarters, yet it wasn't brought to the attention of the RSU until the end of Spring quarter, and even then it came from people working in the CSCS/Committee to Save the Crim School; see the article on the Berkeley Criminology School elsewhere in the discussion bulletin after the division in ESDC had become almost explosive. During the year occasional drifts of conversation would lead RSU members to ask our representatives in ESDC what was happening but each time we were either told nothing or the 'insignificance' of the struggle was offered as a neutralizer. As it turned out the division was very serious, led to a split in ESDC. . .", etc. If this isn't convincing enough about the RU's bureaucratic methods of functioning in their fronts, another example is offered by the same RSUers: "For example, a Bay Area-wide demonstration was being planned around an expected visit by Kissinger to San Francisco. A couple independent RSU members went to what was called a preliminary planning meeting and found that they were the only non-RU people there, the meeting having been hardly publicized. There the politics, slogans, and even [] the leaflet was decided upon and only then was the call put out to organize other political groups and people to join in."

This sectarian approach characterizes everything the RU does. They do not consult others in an organization they're working in, they call demonstrations in their own name, etc. It is only under the most extreme circumstances that they work with others, particularly the YSA, and even then their functioning is dishonest. They frequently refuse to work with us under any conditions. For example, they completely rejected our proposal for a united action against a visit by Rockefeller to San Francisco this fall; they, after all, had already called a demonstration and were not about to let the YSA in on it.

At the center of the RU's strategy for building a "new communist party" is their vanguardism. Despite the apparent failure of the Maoist regroupment, the RU is still looking around for any already radicalized elements they can find to regroup. They do not approach newly radicalizing people, as we do. Their approach is to people who are already ultralefts. Obviously, this fits well with their frontism and lack of any independent propaganda. While they do hold actions in the name of their fronts, such as the RSB, these actions are invariably directed at drawing in the "vanguard," not broader layers.

Even when the RU attempts to reach out to broader layers, their attempts are extremely clumsy. Instead of a united front approach, they either work only with other Maoist and ultraleft groups, or set up new fronts, such as the "Worker's Committees to Throw the Bum Out," the "Bum" being Nixon. As a substitute for a united front approach, they utilize what they apparently think is language used by workers: Nixon was always a "bum," Ford is a "chump," and in response to Nixon's fall we should "Kick

'em while they're down." Obviously, this cheap substitute for politics is doomed to failure.

At the same time as the RU is hampered by these limitations, they have some advantages. Functioning as they do in the ultraleft "vanguard," they can attract others because they are well organized, disciplined, and represent the Chinese revolution in the eyes of many radicals. They can present clear and cohesive politics to fuzzy-minded radicals. This is a distinct advantage. Whether this advantage is outweighed by their bureaucratic methods or unpopular positions (e.g., opposition to nationalism and feminism) remains to be seen.

Furthermore, the RU orients to the major political questions of the day. They have oriented to the question of financial aid cutbacks at Cal, not to some secondary question. Within the mass movements, they are extremely flexible tactically, and often attract people by being more ultraleft than the ultralefts. For example, during the struggle around the Criminology School at Cal, they were the most vehement defenders of "militant actions," i.e., building occupations.

Finally, one other limitation to the RU's ability to win over significant numbers of people should be noted, aside from their general political limitations. The RU's bureaucratic methods within the mass movements sometimes go over into heckling and violence against their opponents. They carried out a vicious assault against the Spartacists at a demonstration in San Francisco last spring. When we intervened in a Criminology School forum this fall with our position of demanding the abolition of Criminology, the RU organized heckling and attempted classical Stalinist smear methods ("Your position is the same as the Chancellor's, etc."). While these methods can be attractive to ultralefts, they tend to be repulsive to broader layers of students.

The key problem for the RU is their political line. Their line on many questions is hard to swallow for many students. The RU is capable of the most crass opportunism imaginable. On the Cal campus, they have opposed the nationalist character of the Ethnic Studies struggle. They oppose the women's movement and the gay liberation movement. They are currently attempting to move into the center of the Committee to Save the Crim School, thereby revealing their fundamentally reformist line. They recently held a public forum "proving" that the Soviet Union is a capitalist country. They give back-handed support to the Democrats by abstaining from the elections. And they side with the racists in Boston. In general, they follow very closely all the twists and turns of the Maoist bureaucracy in China. These are the kinds of issues on which we want to fight the RU. In this context, an understanding of their methods of functioning can be very helpful.

THE STRUGGLE FOR INDIAN LIBERATION

by John Linder, Twin Cities local

In this contribution, I hope to outline the main features of the oppression of American Indians and the struggle against that oppression. Wounded Knee II, the growth of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the general rise in the combativity of the Indian people over the last five years make this an important discussion for the YSA. This article is only designed to initiate such a discussion.

It is difficult to evaluate a struggle without being familiar with the oppression that causes it. Consequently, I have included somewhat detailed information on the history and forms of Indian oppression.

A History of Genocide

Unlike any other oppressed nationality in the U. S., Indians have had a conscious and stated policy of genocide carried out against them. Unlike any other national minority, Indians have never been a major source of cheap or unpaid labor; from the point of view of the capitalist class, Indians were not a necessary evil, but an unnecessary evil, to be uprooted and destroyed.

The basis of this oppression was land. The "primitive communism" of Indians knew no such thing as land ownership. Land was a means of life to be shared with all living creatures, which could not be bought or sold. American capitalism required land in the form of private property. The Indian population needed nearly all of the land of the U. S. in order to survive with a hunting and gathering economy. As American capitalism expanded, it demanded all of the U. S., fighting the Civil War to take the South from the slave-owners, robbing the Southwest from Mexico, and nearly eliminating the Native Americans.

The years 1800-1870 were the worst years of genocide for the American Indian. The most common estimate of the Indian population in 1800 is one million, roughly the same as the figure for 1492, although estimates go much higher. The official U. S. census taken in 1870 placed the Indian population at 25,731. This near extinction was the result of war, disease imported from Europe, forced removal and consequent starvation, and the Gold Rush, which obliterated many California tribes.

By 1870 the U. S. government had successfully carried out most of its goals. The Indian population had been reduced to less than three percent of its former size. The remaining population was in concentration camps, called reservations, and nearly the entire U. S. had been opened up to capitalist development. But three problems remained. 1) The

Indians who had survived were only temporarily subdued. They refused to be assimilated or to accept their subservient status and fought stubbornly to maintain their identity, culture and heritage. 2) Due to their fierce resistance, 138 million acres remained in the hands of Indians. 3) The high Indian birth rate meant a significant rise in population after the major wars ended. The 1890 census count was 248,000, although part of the rise can be attributed to a poor 1870 census.

1870-1974

Since 1870 there have been two main prongs to the U. S. government's continuing oppression of the Indian people. The first is cultural genocide--a conscious attempt to strip Indians of their language, religion, history and identity through the use of "educational" and religious institutions. The second is a continuing attempt to rob the Indian people of that land which they still hold and to deny Indians access to lands and rights granted by treaties long ago but since stolen.

Cultural genocide is an attempt to destroy the last bonds of solidarity and pride that hold together the Indian people. The widespread belief that the Sun Dance, greatest of the Sioux spiritual ceremonies, was outlawed by the U. S. government because of alleged cruelty is a myth. The Sun Dance was outlawed because it gathered together all the Sioux Nation, creating a threatening force for the racist government. A more telling example was the outlawing of the traditional giveaways, ceremonies in which a family would give away all of its possessions or the possessions of a deceased relative. This ceremony didn't quite jibe with the values of private property that the capitalist class was trying to shove down the throats of Indians, and the giveaways were consequently outlawed.

A three-sided educational system of Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, church schools, and public schools has been the first line of attack on Indian culture. The first BIA school was set up in 1879 by an intelligent army lieutenant who realized that it was too expensive to kill Indians (one million dollars per Indian in Red Cloud's War). Consequently, he established a school to kill Indian culture. Indian youth were forbidden to speak their language (usually their only language), sing Indian songs, or practice their religion. This became the model for all BIA schools. As the publicity brochure issued in 1970 by the BIA-run Intermountain Boarding School in Utah states, "The task of Intermountain school is to change language, change diet, costume, housing, manners, customs, vocations and civic

duties. Changing people's habits and outlooks is one of the most complex tasks in human affairs." I have spoken to many middle-aged Indians who had their mouths washed out with lye soap for speaking their languages while attending school.

Public schools and church schools, sometimes less blatant, serve the same purpose.

In the long run, these schools have backfired. The schools mixed various tribes, creating bonds of intertribal solidarity. Repression bred resistance and a desire to find out more about the repressed culture, causing the early radicalization of many Indian militants.

The role of the church on Indian lands is similar to its role in the colonial world outside the U. S. Missionaries were the vanguard of imperialism, providing the sell-out negotiators in treaty negotiations and creating the ideological basis for anti-Indian racism, in exchange for Indian lands granted by the government. Today, the church uses Indians as a big source of financial gain, receiving tens of millions each year in funds supposedly collected to help Indians, but which always end up in church coffers.

The wars and policies of genocide, the slaughter of the buffalo, and the eventual imprisonment of the Indian people reduced them to a welfare status under the control of, and at the mercy of, the U. S. government. Originally organized under the War Department, the BIA was transferred to the Department of Interior in 1849. This conflict of interest has been pointed out by many Indian leaders. The department which is responsible for the development of American capitalism is the supposed guardian of the rights and lands of Indians.

The only legal basis for all relationships between the government and the Indian peoples are the 371 treaties signed between 1778 and 1871. (In 1871, Congress stopped making treaties with Indians, preferring to call them agreements.) To the Indians these were sacred agreements, and according to the U. S. Constitution, they are higher than law. The treaties, like any agreement, represented the relationship of forces at a particular time. Because the relationship of forces continued to worsen, the treaties were continuously broken. Today, all of the treaties have been broken, and even liberal capitalist politicians like George McGovern have the audacity to say, "I think the treaties were abrogated by an act of Congress one hundred years ago and that it's ridiculous to talk about the Treaty of 1868 being carried out."

The demand for treaty rights is at the center of the Indian struggle. I will describe how this demand has been expressed later. First, I want to outline how the treaties have been violated.

Most of the treaties granted near-sovereignty to the Indian people, recognizing the different tribes as sovereign nations. BIA agents were given some rights, but usually only by tribal consent.

From the earliest days, the BIA carried out a policy of anti-Indian exploitation. BIA agents became notorious as career-making entrepreneurs, often pocketing funds allocated for Indians. This practice is maintained today, only under a better cover. In 1970 federal funds allocated for reservation Indians totaled \$460 million, or \$5,600 per family, while the average income for a reservation family was \$1,500.

The greatest anti-Indian theft has been the theft of land, prepared by the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887. By 1880, most resistance had been crushed. With few excuses for initiating violence and the upper hand in all dealings, the capitalist government set out to steal the rest of the Indians' land. Vine Deloria Jr. describes the process this way:

"One day the white man discovered that the Indian tribes still owned some 135 million acres of land. To his horror he learned that much of it was very valuable. Some was good grazing land, some was farm land, some mining land and some covered with timber.

"Animals could be herded together on a piece of land, but they could not sell it. Therefore it took no time at all to discover that Indians were really people and should have the right to sell their lands. Land was the means of recognizing the Indian as a human being. It was the method whereby land could be stolen legally and not blatantly."

The Dawes Severalty Act attempted to make Indians into small farmers, granting the head of each family 320 acres and busting up the cooperative economy that previously existed. With no capital, largely dry land, no interest in agriculture, and opposition to private land ownership, Indians found that this act simply replaced guns and bullets with laws and dollars. By 1934, 60 percent of the 138 million acres was in the hands of whites. Huge amounts of land fell into trust status under the BIA's control. The BIA then rented this land--some to the U. S. government which was leasing land at three cents per acre until ten years ago, some to white ranchers for two dollars per acre.

In becoming the self-appointed director over American Indians, the BIA destroyed the previously existing democratic tribal governments. The crowning blow came in 1934, when the "liberal" Indian Reorganization Act destroyed what was left of the traditional tribal councils, placing BIA-imposed superintendents in charge of puppet tribal governments. The power of the tribal governments

is limited to the power of corruption, and many have become infested with graft, etc. The only way to appeal a decision of the council is through the Area Superintendent and up the ladder to the Secretary of Interior. Reservation members have no rights in state courts and are normally refused direct access to "busy" federal courts.

Government agencies other than the BIA have an equally rotten record as regards Indians. In 1885 the seven Major Crimes Act was passed, violating all treaties by giving the FBI jurisdiction in murder, manslaughter, rape, assault with intent, arson, burglary and larceny cases on reservations. Wounded Knee II showed the real attitude of the FBI towards protecting the rights of Indians. Worse yet is Public Law 280. Passed in 1954, this law gave the states of Washington, Oregon, Nebraska, Minnesota and Wisconsin jurisdiction over the reservations within their borders. This led Washington and Oregon state police and game wardens to violate Indian fishing rights. In Minnesota, the state used its new power to break up Indian families, until in 1970 the ratio of Indian children to white children in Minnesota foster homes was 24 to one.

These varied forms of oppression have given the Native Americans--a people who once knew no such thing as disease or alcoholism--what seems to be the lowest standard of living of any nationality in the U. S. One out of six Indians dies before age 15, compared to one out of 20 non-Indians. The life expectancy for an Indian living today is 43 to 46. On the Navajo reservation, the biggest in the U. S., the average per capita income is \$300 per year. The official statistic for reservation unemployment in 1972 was 40 percent, although unemployment reaches 90 percent on many reservations. Despite this appalling rate, less than half of the jobs created by the 238 on-reservation enterprises are held by Indians. Malnutrition is the single greatest cause of Indian deaths and has caused diseases otherwise unheard of in the U. S., like kwashiorkor. All of these statistics reveal the conscious policy of the government to first reduce the Indian people to welfare status and then stop the welfare.

The New Rise of the Indian Movement

Numerous factors have led to the new rise of the Indian struggle. The obvious factors, oppression and degradation, have existed for at least one hundred years. Other events have caused the momentous increase of Indian struggles in the 1970s.

Earliest of these was World War II. During the war, 25,000 Indians, or one out of three males between the ages of 18 and 50, enlisted or were drafted. For the Indian community, which was until then almost exclusively on reservations, this meant their first contact with the outside world, much of which turned out to be sympathetic. Many Indians

became respected war heroes and returned home to find racism and conditions as bad as ever. Vets found that they were unable to collect their GI loans unless they accepted a miserable \$45 per month income. Out of this turmoil, the National Congress of American Indians was formed in 1944 as an Indian lobbying organization.

Termination and the threat of it was the second major factor. In 1953, the entire House and Senate voted that "all Indian tribes shall be terminated as rapidly as possible." This meant that the U. S. government, which had forced Indians into economic dependency, would end its relationship with particular tribes, ending all medical, educational and other funding, and making reservation lands taxable. The policy was disastrous, and the struggle to end termination was the major Indian issue of the 1950s.

The third major factor was the policy of relocation, also begun in the early 1950s. Headed up by Dillon Myer (who previously ran the War Relocation Office, which put thousands of Japanese in concentration camps), relocation involved the mass recruitment of Indians for relocation in urban centers. The BIA provided travel expenses and a few weeks rent to its recruits. The policy was designed to destroy the remaining tribes. Only those between the ages of 18 and 35 were allowed to participate, while young and old were left to starve. Relocation was a disaster for those who participated, usually the poorest and most poorly educated of the reservation population. But it was also a disaster for the BIA. Out from under the oppressive BIA governments, free from the threat of termination, and in contact with other social forces, this new urban Indian population was more free to challenge its oppression. By 1970, one-third to one-half of the one million American Indians lived off reservations.

The 1960s also saw the rise of militant struggles among Black people and students, which inspired every oppressed sector of society. The Black community in particular won some significant concessions through struggles that became examples, both of successes and failures, for the Indian movement. While Indians received some spinoffs from OEO and other funds allocated to buy off the Black struggle, these were just crumbs of the crumbs, creating, but not fulfilling, hopes for adequate funding.

Prospects for the Indian Struggle

The underlying cause of the Indian struggle is national oppression--creating the desire of Indians to take their destiny into their own hands. The Indian community has never been assimilated, either economically or politically. Most Indians have never accepted the white capitalist government as their own nor the fate of the U. S. as their fate. This has its roots in the productive system of the Indian people at the time of the European invasion--while

the system was crushed over centuries, the values were not. Indian people never demanded 40 acres and a mule. As I pointed out earlier, when offered 320 acres, many probably most, Indians, refused it. Most Indians never accepted the illegal thefts of land. The return of the sacred Black Hills has been a popular desire ever since the hills were stolen.

Unlike the Black community, Indians do not have to look very far to find their past. Elders are still alive who remember the great Indian nations and leaders. While Blacks were uprooted and divided, making all direct heritage virtually impossible to trace, every Indian can tell you what tribe he or she belongs to, what battles his or her grandparents fought in, etc.

The recent revival of Indian culture and nationalism has meant both tribal identification and more importantly, identification with the Indian people as a whole. Common oppression has brought the separate tribes together for a common struggle.

Nearly every Indian struggle that has developed over the last five years has centered on the concept of self-determination--the right of Indians to live as they please, on their own land, and controlling their own institutions. The most common expression of this thrust has been the demand for treaty rights. Struggles have developed around treaty-guaranteed fishing, hunting, water, mineral and land rights. The First International Treaty Convention, held in July, 1974, and attended by over 3,000 people representing 97 tribes, called for full sovereignty for the Indian people as guaranteed in the treaties. An International Treaty Commission was set up to raise the issue of treaty violations before the U. S., the World Court, etc. As the current expression of the demand for self-determination, the YSA should support the call for treaty rights. This demand is far more than a cultural question. Rights to water, fish, game and land are a life-and-death matter for many Indians.

The American ruling-class is unable to grant large enough concessions to stop the rise of the Indian movement.

The biggest reason for this is the uncompromising and widespread demand for self-determination, although this demand has been expressed in many ways. An independent Indian state or states, even full sovereignty on the existing reservations, would provide a powerful example to the Black, Chicano and Puerto Rican nationalities, as America's rulers know all too well.

In addition, the lands of the Indian tribes are increasingly valuable sources of energy for the monopolies. Indian reservations, under the control of the Department of Interior, are always the first to go when the rich get profit-hungry. Under the cover of the "energy crises," coal companies are

maneuvering to receive land, water and coal from Indian reservations. Plans exist to strip mine over half of the Northern Cheyenne reservation in Wyoming.

Unable to grant Indian control of Indian land, the government cannot admit that treaties are legitimate. It must ignore, befuddle, and if necessary, physically destroy the issue of treaty rights. Wounded Knee II was a very clear statement of the lengths to which the ruling class is willing to go to stop even a small community from controlling itself. Had the political conjuncture been different, the rulers of the U. S. may well have carried out the second Wounded Knee massacre.

Meanwhile, urban Indians face the same massive cuts in social services as all poor people. While the ruling class could grant Indians decent funds and programs, it is unwilling to sustain all of the nation's poor, and cannot raise one oppressed nationality out of poverty while leaving the others behind.

The further development of an Indian movement and leadership faces certain objective obstacles, given the strength and determination of the enemy. The first is the size and location of the Indian population, which as I mentioned earlier, is one million, one-half of which is isolated on reservations. Unlike most oppressed nationalities in the U. S., Indians are not primarily located in the major urban industries. Given the huge reservation unemployment rate, high urban unemployment, and a very unstable work force, the Indian population has little direct social weight. On the other hand, the Indian movement can have a important indirect political impact through the exemplary effect that its demand for self-determination will have on other nationalities.

Alliances, therefore, become crucial. Widespread support for Indian rights exists among non-Indians. Fifty-one percent of the American people supported the "occupation" of Wounded Knee, actually supported Indians using guns to take control of their land, despite hostile press coverage. During the trials of Dennis Banks and Russell Means, numerous rallies of over 100 took place in otherwise conservative Twin Cities suburbs. There are several reasons for these surprising statistics. First, it is generally accepted that the Indian people have been and are being mistreated by the U. S. government. Although chattel slavery is similarly viewed, the end of slavery, and then of Jim Crow, meant to many whites the end of governmental oppression of Black people.

Second, few whites receive day-to-day benefits from the second-class status of Indians. In contrast, whites clearly see and defend the immediate advantages derived from discrimination against Blacks in housing, education and employment. On the other hand, a number of rural

whites benefit greatly from the oppression of Indians and the misuse of Indian lands, accounting for the virulent racism in states like South Dakota. The catch phrase for most major candidates in the latest elections in South Dakota was "Stop AIM Violence."

The American Indian Movement

The American Indian Movement (AIM) is by far the largest militant Indian organization in the U. S. It has over 79 chapters in the U. S. and Canada and enjoys wide support from many sectors of the Indian population.

AIM was formed in 1968 by Dennis Banks, Clyde Bellecourt and George Mitchell. Much like the Panthers, AIM was built in response to police harassment of the Minneapolis Indian community. It began by identifying three enemies: the church, the BIA and the Office of Education. Since that time, AIM has led or participated in most of the major Indian struggles.

One of the first large AIM actions occurred in February, 1972, in Gordon, Nebraska, when 1,300 Indians protested the murder of Raymond Yellow Thunder. Some concessions were won, and AIM successfully united urban and rural Indians.

On November 1, 1972, the Trail of Broken Treaties caravan entered the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in Washington D. C. and occupied it for seven days. Major press coverage and several concessions were received, and the BIA was shaken up. Secretary of Interior Morton was forced to suspend the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Deputy Commissioner and the Assistant Secretary of Interior.

On February 27, 1973, the American Indian Movement, invited by and working with local residents, took over the town of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. The demands first raised by those in Wounded Knee were that the government enforce their treaty rights as stated in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 and that Senator Fulbright lead an investigation of the 371 treaties and the government's violations of them; that Senator Kennedy lead an investigation of the BIA's role on the Pine Ridge Reservation; and that free elections be held among the Oglala Sioux. Ignoring the demands, the government moved in 250 FBI men, U. S. marshals and BIA cops, surrounding Wounded Knee with armored personnel carriers and a stockpile of high-powered weapons.

Indians were activated around the country. Some came to Wounded Knee, and others pledged to rise in struggle if the government moved on Wounded Knee. Despite this, support and massive support from non-Indians, few support actions took place. As Wounded Knee continued, the press

played a more and more destructive role, and the public became increasingly confused.

On May 7, the people of Wounded Knee surrendered, after signing an earlier agreement with the government for meetings to discuss the demands raised during the seizure. The government has refused to carry out this pledge, part of a continuing pattern. Every major AIM action has centered on the very modest demand for a governmental investigation of Indian treaty rights. The government has consistently refused to carry this out, confirming the danger it recognizes in any legitimization of the treaties. In the Trail of Broken Treaties takeover, the government was fairly soft, even paying travel expenses home for Indians gathered in D. C. The government's attitude towards Wounded Knee was much different, because Wounded Knee was not only a demonstration for, but also the implementation of, the treaty rights of the Oglala Sioux. Consequently, the government chose to make Wounded Knee an example, not of what the government could do for Indians but of what the government can do to Indians.

Following May 7, the government, hand-in-hand with the bourgeois press, went on a big campaign to brand AIM as vandals, goons, etc. Meanwhile, it silenced opposition by jailing Russell Means, Pedro Bissonette, head of the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization and Leonard Crow Dog, AIM spiritual leader, forcing Dennis Banks to leave the country, and bringing charges against a total of 428 people. Meanwhile, Wilson's goons (Dick Wilson is the corrupt and hated tribal chairman of Pine Ridge) stepped up repression on the reservation, leading to the murder of Pedro Bissonette in October, 1973. In my opinion, the government views the Wounded Knee trials and the repression that followed Wounded Knee as an attempt to destroy or seriously cripple AIM by murdering and jailing some leaders and by tying up the organization with bail, trials and varied harassment. This attack is no less serious than the government's concentrated and successful repression of the Panthers five years earlier. The ability of AIM to meet this threat will be a key factor in determining AIM's future.

During Wounded Knee AIM was largely unable to mobilize its forces around the country and other organizations in significant actions outside of South Dakota. This can partially be explained by the day-to-day problems and isolation created by the liberation. But since the end of Wounded Knee II, AIM has not consistently carried out the kind of mass-action oriented campaign that could have involved the broadest possible forces in the defense. Such a campaign, organized nationally, is the only way to have all the charges dropped--both those arising out of Wounded Knee and from other AIM actions.

AIM participated in the formation of a Wounded Knee defense committee and has endorsed numerous defense

actions, but in most cases it left the job of initiating and building defense actions, and of strengthening and spreading the defense committee, to other organizations. Few Wounded Knee defense committees and actions were initiated by AIM chapters around the country, and this summer's national AIM convention didn't even discuss defense work.

Mass support, made partially visible in numerous Twin Cities defense actions, a rotten government case, and the political climate created by Watergate forced Judge Nichols to drop the charges against Banks and Means. Despite this victory, the government remains determined to get a conviction and has announced its intention to appeal this case, while it continues to prosecute 100 other defendants. These trials and those stemming from Custer and elsewhere, continue to present a major obstacle and challenge to AIM. (See contribution on Wounded Knee defense activities by John Linder and Jeanne Stevens for more information on this question.)

AIM is a political reflection of the size and makeup of the Indian population. The small size of the Indian community and its isolation from other sectors of the radical movement (only 15,000 Indians attend college, for instance) have led to reliance upon "occupations" designed to attract public attention. It is true that nearly unanimous support for many of these actions has existed among Indians. Nevertheless, such actions are small by nature, and repression of participants in them has led to a major battle for AIM's survival.

At the same time, it is important to realize that due to the nature of the Indian struggle, occupations can have a defensive character. Because hundreds of thousands of Indians live on supposedly autonomous reservations, simple acts of self-defense or land-defense have a legal character.

AIM has come to clearly see the need for alliances both with all those fighting for self-determination and with all those willing to support the civil liberties of AIM members. This correct understanding has made some AIM leaders friendly to the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (NAARPR), as well as the YSA and SWP. To my knowledge, no left organization has any real influence over AIM. The Militant is by far the most widely read radical newspaper among Upper Midwest Indians.

Very few Indians identify themselves with the American working class, seeing its struggles as their struggles. There seem to be varying degrees of understanding among AIM leaders of the class divisions in American society. Most leaders that I have heard explain that while many white people are also oppressed, this is caused by the acceptance of materialistic values by white workers. Although I have never heard an AIM spokesperson speak of socialism, the concept of a classless society is inherent in the call for a

return to traditional ways.

AIM has avoided the trap of the Democratic Party for two reasons: 1) AIM's attitude towards who rules America is, "We just want our right to live as an independent people. What happens to your government is your problem." This position is contradictory because what happens to the U. S. government will determine the outcome of the Indian struggle. At any rate, AIM has taken no stand on electoral politics in the U. S. Russell Means did run for tribal chairman of Pine Ridge, an important but limited example of independent Indian political action. 2) The Democratic Party has made no real attempt to win the small Indian vote. McGovern is probably the most vocally anti-Indian U. S. Senator. There are few, if any, Indian Democratic Party candidates. No section of the ruling class is willing to even mouth the rhetoric of self-determination for Indians. This gives the Indian movement less political weight in the eyes of the class-collaborationist Communist Party, which has made little attempt to affect the course of the Indian struggle.

The statement, "AIM is a spiritual movement first--a political movement second" is widely used and perhaps misunderstood. In my opinion, this is primarily a cultural expression of nationalism, a necessary identification with Indian culture and religion which is a natural part of Indian nationalism. AIM understands that its spiritual goals will only be met through an uncompromising struggle for full independence. Therefore, unlike the spiritualism of the Muslims, AIM's main activities are neither spiritual nor counter-institutional, but political.

However, there are dangerous sides to this emphasis on spiritualism. Spiritualism can become an excuse for entering into a struggle with an unfavorable relationship of forces. It also hampers the creation of a clearly political Indian vanguard.

It is very difficult to determine the future direction of AIM. Its leadership is evolving, and it has yet to define itself in relation to any American left organization. This is true in part because AIM does not define itself as an organization seeking a basic change in the nature of the U. S. government.

AIM was formed as a "movement," involving numerous viewpoints and members of different organizations. It has not attempted to elaborate a full program for Indian liberation. AIM does have a three point program, consisting of:

"1. A Treaty Commission (The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations) should examine the 371 treaties the U. S. has made (and broken) with Indians. All treaty rights should be enforced. The Great Sioux Nation and other tribes should receive control of their treaty-determined land.

"2. Repeal the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934; it has been a major weapon used in robbing Indians of their land, setting up white-controlled governments on many reservations, and establishing tribal constitutions which offer no real protection against sale and wholesale lease-out of tribal lands.

"3. Remove the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the Department of the Interior, restructure it as an independent agency, controlled by and accountable to, Indian people; audit the BIA records and make reparations for the many crooked land deals; cancel BIA-sanctioned non-Indian leasing of Indian land."

These were the central demands of Wounded Knee II, derived from the 20-point solution paper presented by the Trail of Broken Treaties. They are an important beginning of a set of transitional demands for Indian liberation.

Due to the peculiar political and economic situation of American Indians--the fact that they have not been absorbed in large numbers into the working class and the isolation of a large proportion of the Indian population on reservations--a Marxist leadership among Indian activists may not develop for some time.

The YSA and the Indian Struggle

The YSA is the only multinational organization that will be able to develop an effective program for the Indian struggle. The irreconcilable nationalism and the determined demand for self-determination make it very difficult for other organizations on the left to put forward a program for Indian liberation. Although the Indian community clearly lacks the social weight of the Black, Chicano or even

Puerto Rican communities, the political weight of the Indian struggle is an important consideration.

The YSA's first extensive contact with AIM took place through Wounded Knee Defense activities. In the course of the trial, the defendants and many AIM members came to respect the YSA and SWP. The continuing Wounded Knee trials may open up new possibilities for action and education. (Again, see contribution on Wounded Knee Defense.)

Since Wounded Knee, AIM has been very open to supporting actions not specifically related to the Indian movement: against the racist attacks in Boston; for British troops out of Ireland; in support of the SWP's disclosure law fight, etc. We should approach AIM chapters for support whenever major political struggles arise.

The YSA and Pathfinder have very little literature on the Indian struggle. We should begin to write pamphlets, YS and ISR articles analyzing the Indian struggle, which can help educate ourselves and others.

The Militant is widely respected in many Indian communities due to its coverage of the Wounded Knee trials. Although this coverage has become sporadic, due to the close of Banks and Means' trial, The Militant remains our best tool for participating in the Indian movement.

Our analysis of the rise and coming fall of American capitalism is the only theoretical explanation which can answer the questions raised by today's Indian activists. An aggressive attempt to bring our ideas and activities to Indian militants can mean important gains for the YSA and the struggle for Indian liberation.

December 11, 1974

IN REPLY TO 'FOR AT-LARGE VOTING RIGHTS'

by Sally Whicker, Brooklyn, N. Y. local

The YSA's method of selecting delegates to our national conventions is designed to permit the most democratic, collective decision making by the YSA. In their discussion contribution, For At-Large Voting Rights, David Matthews, David Brandt and Richard Daw disagree with the YSA's current procedure and call for a new system of at-large representation at conventions.

They propose that at-large members be allowed to participate in pre-convention discussion and delegate selection in nearby YSA locals, or alternatively, that five or more at-large members from different areas be allowed to organize joint discussions and elect a full voting delegate. Both of these proposals would require a change in the YSA Constitution.

YSA Locals

These proposals, and all other questions of convention representation and internal democracy, must be considered first from the standpoint of the best interests of the YSA as a whole. It would be a mistake to proceed from the premise that since at-large members do not have a decisive vote at the convention, the YSA's current system of representation is undemocratic. Democracy in the YSA flows from the needs of the entire organization.

In discussing the question of democratic representation at YSA conventions, we should start from the YSA's basic political and organizational unit, the local. While all YSA members make valuable individual contributions to our movement, YSA locals bear the primary responsibility for implementing convention decisions. As a group of individuals who work together in building the YSA, local members share many collective political experiences--organizing YSA participation in various struggles, selling the socialist press, running socialist election campaigns, and developing and educating a continuous flow of new YSA leaders.

This common activity provides a framework for political discussion and delegate selection in the locals. If an at-large member lives close enough to a local to regularly attend pre-convention discussion, it is fair to assume that he or she should be a member of that local, participating in its day-to-day work and contributing to its growth and the extension of its political influence.

The centrality of the local in the life of the YSA on a national level is correctly mirrored in the way we currently determine convention representation. As stated in the YSA Constitution, it is only those delegates elected by YSA locals

who have full voice and vote at the convention. For the YSA, this is the most democratic delegate selection procedure, since it allows for the most accurate reflection of the thinking and experience of YSA members in our basic organizational units.

At-large membership

The at-large category of membership enables the YSA to expand its political influence geographically by recruiting individuals who do not live in cities where we currently have functioning YSA locals. The key objective of every at-large member or nucleus of members should be to recruit other young people to the YSA, forging a new YSA local as quickly as possible.

The formation of new locals in this way is an important part of the growth and regional expansion of the YSA. The consolidation of at-large areas into locals helps to ensure a more powerful and lasting impact for Trotskyist politics in new areas and creates a situation in which YSA members learn valuable lessons in functioning together as a team, making collective decisions and building a strong leadership.

If five or more at-large YSA members live close enough together to meet regularly for pre-convention discussion, they should be functioning together in all aspects of YSA activity. In other words, they should form a YSA local. On the other hand, if distance prohibits working together in this way, the same consideration suggests that there is no real basis for these at-large members to hold joint discussions and elect a common delegate to represent their views.

When an at-large area has grown to five members, it can apply to the YSA National Office for local status. At that time, the new local takes on the rights and responsibilities of all locals as outlined in the YSA Constitution, including the right to elect convention delegates with full voice and vote.

An Undemocratic Proposal

Under the YSA's present delegate-selection procedure, locals are allowed one delegate for every nine (or major fraction thereof) members in good standing. This ratio is necessary in order to ensure that the number of delegates at the convention is not excessively large, making a truly full and democratic discussion impossible. Given the YSA's size, a lower ratio would either mean that many delegates could not even take the floor once during a convention, or

that the speakers' time limit would be so brief that delegates could not adequately develop important political points. Even under this procedure, locals with fewer than nine members are overrepresented, receiving one delegate each, in spite of their small size. With this in mind, the proposal presented by Comrades Matthews, Brandt, and Daw would in fact make YSA conventions less, not more democratic. If the ratio were kept at one-to-nine, but at-large groups of five or six members were granted full voting rights, the overall convention representation would be even more lopsided, overrepresenting and overweighting the votes of at-large members at the expense of locals with nine or more members. Under Comrades Matthews, Brandt and Daw's proposal, members of these YSA locals--the great bulk of our membership--would become "second class" YSA members; their delegates would be elected on a one-to-nine ratio, while at-large delegates could be elected on the basis of one-to-five.

At-Large Representation

How, then, can at-large members be fairly represented during conventions without infringing on the democratic rights of the YSA as a whole? The June, 1973, plenum of the YSA National Committee discussed this question and adopted a procedure which serves the needs of at-large members and the entire organization alike. This procedure, which is contained in the 1974 Convention Call, specifies:

"Three or more at-large members in one locality, who carry out joint activities in building the YSA, are entitled to elect one fraternal delegate [that is, with voice but not vote], subject to approval by the National Executive Committee."

In addition, at-large members have always been free to contribute articles to the Young Socialist Discussion Bulletin, and they are guaranteed the right of all members to initiate or join political tendencies.

The procedure adopted by the June, 1973, National Committee plenum encourages at-large YSA members to function together as a political unit and to recruit new members with an eye toward achieving local status. While groups of at-large members are building toward a local, this procedure gives them voice at YSA national conventions without undemocratically underrepresenting local delegates. It is the only democratic, realistic and politically sound basis for at-large convention representation.

"Two Organization Proposals"

In another pre-convention discussion article, "Two Organizational Proposals," Comrade Jon Kegler proposes two other changes in the YSA Constitution: 1) the method of electing convention delegates; and 2) the organization

of discussion at the convention. While I disagree with both, I will only take up the first.

Kegler maintains that the current procedure for delegate selection is undemocratic, since depending on the geographical distribution of a political tendency's members among YSA locals throughout the country, a tendency can receive either fewer or more delegates than it is entitled to if measured proportional to the YSA membership as a whole. As a remedy to this supposed undemocratic procedure, Kegler proposes that in addition to the delegates elected by YSA locals, there be an additional category of "at-large" delegates. This "at-large" category does not specifically refer to at-large YSA members, although Comrade Kegler suggests that at-large members should be allowed to vote for such delegates.

Comrade Kegler maintains that since this new procedure would provide for nearly perfect proportional representation of tendencies, it would better serve the interests of democracy in the YSA. He bases his proposal on the supposition that unless a tendency is represented exactly proportional to its national numerical strength, its rights are not being fully guaranteed. In doing so, he treats the role of tendencies from an organizational, rather than a political, point of view. The primary goal of a loyal tendency is to win the majority of YSA members to its political views through oral and written pre-convention discussion and discussion at the convention.

The YSA provides ample opportunity for tendencies to win adherents to their views through the written discussion bulletin and oral discussion in the locals. This is true regardless of the size of the tendency at its inception, whether it is supported by a lone individual or 99 percent of the membership.

In organizing the convention, however, the YSA must ensure that the discussion reflects the true significance of a current of thought as demonstrated by its ability to win new supporters. There is no mathematical formula that can determine this once and for all.

Comrade Kegler's proposal ignores this important consideration and fails to accurately reflect the real political life of the YSA. His procedure for delegate selection is divorced from the local units, the YSA's primary organizational form. His "at-large" delegates bear no relation to the local pre-convention discussion, where the bulk of the YSA's political debate and thinking-out occurs each year.

Throughout YSA history, any tendency that has won significant support during the course of pre-convention discussion in one or more YSA locals has been fairly represented at the national convention. If a tendency is unable to win enough supporters in any one YSA local to elect a delegate--even if it has a few supporters scattered through-

out the country--it has failed the crucial political test of winning adherents to its ideas. During the next pre-convention discussion, if members of the tendency still hold to their differences, they can once again present their ideas to the YSA membership and attempt to win supporters.

Comrade Kegler's proposal aims to achieve an abstract organizational perfection in proportional representation. While this is mathematically possible, it can only be achieved at the expense of local pre-convention discussion, the shared political experience of local members, and a truly democratic and representative discussion at the convention itself. For these reasons, the proposal should be rejected.

Conclusion

The organizational procedures of the YSA reflect the

political needs and purpose of our organization. They are subordinate to, and flow from, our overall political program. These procedures will undoubtedly continue to evolve with the growth of the YSA and with our accumulation of experience. To change our method of delegate selection as proposed by either of these contributions, however, does not reflect the current political life of the YSA, but instead, circumvents it.

As the YSA grows into a mass organization, many new organizational procedures may develop, but such changes must flow from the actual needs and experience of the YSA, not from abstract formulas which in reality would make our method of convention representation undemocratic.

December 11, 1974

NEW YORK'S SOCIALIST EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE--SOME IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS

by Linda Loew, Lower Manhattan, N. Y. local

The fall and spring educational conferences that have become a regular activity of our movement are one of our best events other than the YSA convention itself to convince people to join with us in the struggle for a socialist society. These conferences are often some of the largest gatherings of YSA and SWP members in one room at the same time and give people interested in our movement an opportunity to see not only our size, but also our seriousness in approaching the most important task facing humanity today--the construction of a humane socialist society. In addition to knowing the YSA and SWP members on their campuses and in their work places, independents are able to meet many other Trotskyists and gain a better idea of the national and international scope of our work as revolutionaries. In spite of our still small forces in the U. S. today our adherence to the correct political program and the organized way that we carry out our activities succeed in making an important impact in almost every political arena that we do work.

The New York City educational conference on "Prospects for Socialism" was seen by the entire Trotskyist movement in New York as a focal point for our fall activity. We decided to hold the conference on the first weekend in November in order to maximize the attendance of all the people interested in our movement that we had been working with throughout the fall. This decision on the scheduling of the conference was an important political decision aimed at maximizing our recruitment gains, and was a major improvement over previous years when we held such events toward the end of the campus semesters, when finals were approaching and schools were closing. This year's conference was held right at the height of our election campaign work, with election day only a few days away.

The purpose of such conferences is to present our political ideas in such a way that people are convinced that joining our movement is the most effective way to fight for the changes that they also stand for. This year, while every day the capitalist system has exposed more and more of its inherent corruption and exploitation and its inability to solve the problems facing masses of oppressed people throughout the world, we felt it was crucial that our conference address itself to the major political questions on people's minds. Some questions frequently asked us on college campuses and at street campaign tables are "What will socialism look like?" "Why is there a lack of democracy in the Soviet Union?" "Will socialism be democratic?" and so on. We decided that the best way to take up all of these questions as well as involve people in discussing their own ideas was to hold four classes, each in two-part sessions

(morning and afternoon) with discussions following the presentations. This was a different format from previous years, and turned out to be quite successful in generating participation in the discussion in each of the classes. The class topics included: "What Is Socialism?" "Marxist Economics," "Marxism and the Black Struggle," and "The Soviet Union and China: A Marxist Analysis." These classes were taught by leading public spokespeople of our movement and experts in the field of study. They were Claire Moriarty, an SWP Congressional candidate at the time; Dick Roberts, Militant writer and national leader of the SWP; Tony Thomas, also a national leader of the SWP; and Les Evans editor of the ISR.

The conference was actually launched on Friday night with a keynote speech on "Prospects for Socialism" delivered by Jack Barnes, national secretary of the SWP. Attended by 400 people, Friday set not only the theme, but the pace for the rest of the weekend. Barnes gave an analysis of the major crises facing the world capitalist system today, the prospects for the U. S. ruling class to solve these crises, and how the struggle for socialism, as the only answer for the masses of oppressed, was going to make major strides forward in the period ahead of us.

At the time of our educational weekend the racist offensive against the Boston busing plan was just building up fuel, and already we were playing a major role through our press and election campaign support work in getting out the truth on Boston. We were able to use the classes and discussion as a forum for our political positions on the question of busing as well as the demand for federal troops. We were able to distinguish ourselves from the opponents who were present and clarify some very new and serious questions for the people around us.

The approach that we took to publicize the conference reflects how important we thought the event was. We started several weeks ahead of time in September to get out the word that it would be happening. We sent mailings to all the people around us who had signed up on mailing lists, endorsed the campaign in New York State, including to interested people in the region. This amounted to over 300 people. In addition we sent out a mailing and called every single comrade in the region, and made publicizing the conference a major focus of the work of the fall team, the two regional organizers, and all the comrades who traveled into the region. These efforts were well worth it as over 20 people attended from the three states around New York City, half of whom were not YSAers. Throughout New York City and the region we distributed the 3,000 posters

and 5,000 brochures we had printed on the conference. We placed articles in the campus press, as well as an ad in the Guardian newspaper, and a news announcement in the Village Voice. We also ran an ad in The Militant for two consecutive weeks prior to the conference. Most importantly, we talked to every individual we had been working with in various campus struggles, in the District 1 community control struggle, in our work to defend Chilean political prisoners, and so on. We talked to individual supporters and endorsers of the 1974 New York SWP election campaign and to people who regularly read our press, and those who had attended other events on the campuses and Militant forums. We sought to involve other people in helping to publicize the conference along with us, so that they would share our opinion of the importance of the conference, and become a part of the activity of building the socialist movement.

The figures on attendance reflect the overall success of the conference. Over 400 registered for the conference and attended the Friday night talk. Of these 117 were people who had not yet made the decision to join the YSA or SWP. Over 20 college and high school campuses were represented. At least 15 unions were represented."

At the conference we set up Pathfinder literature tables, sales tables, YSA and SWP election campaign tables and invited other groups we have worked with such as the Congress of African People to set up tables as well to maximize the political discussions at the conference and to further get our ideas out in the form of Militant subs, pamphlets, etc. We organized informal lunches and dinners during the breaks in order to carry on the discussion of our politics with the many people around us and to get to know better individuals who were just meeting us for the first time

On Saturday night there was an SWP election campaign rally that featured our candidate for governor, Derrick Morrison, and our candidate for senator, Rebecca Finch. There was a slide show reviewing the highlights of our '74 campaign in New York, which just about everyone in the audience had participated in.

From the initial discussions that took place in planning the conference to the assignments at the conference itself the work involved a team effort that imparted to others the seriousness and enthusiasm with which we build our organization. I think if we give it some thought these factors played a major role in our own decision to join the YSA.

Two people actually joined the YSA on the weekend of the conference. The conference, however, was part of a process of work that took many months and still continues in order to bring new people into our movement and then educate them as revolutionaries once they join. Since the beginning of our political work this fall over 30 people have joined the YSA in New York City. Approximately 10 have joined in the tristate region of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. There is little doubt that the consistent work we did throughout the fall in talking to people about the crucial difference each and every one of them could make in the YSA, including inviting them to our conference, is responsible for our recruitment success. Our goals for the spring should be equally high. We want to use all of our resources to carry out our considerable political tasks, and make a similar effort to make the spring conference an event that will bring more people into the Trotskyist movement.

December 13, 1974

TOWARDS A HISTORY OF THE SOCIALIST YOUTH MOVEMENT (1890-1920)
AN INITIAL CONTRIBUTION

by Peter Archer, Chicago local

It seems to me important for the YSA to begin to look more closely at its origins and traditions as a revolutionary youth group. This is particularly true in light of the political fight which has been occurring both within the YSA and in the Socialist Workers Party for the past two years. In the course of that fight the Internationalist Tendency accused the YSA of breaking from the traditions of revolutionary youth groups and of making a fetish of the existence of an independent youth organization. This article is an initial contribution towards setting the record straight on this question. Hopefully, other comrades will pick up where I have been forced to leave off.

The Youth Groups of the Second International

The socialist youth organizations affiliated to the Second International at the turn of the century were dominated by the towering figure of Karl Liebknecht. Liebknecht was, in Trotsky's words, "the genuine and finished embodiment of an intransigent revolutionary." His whole life and soul was in the revolutionary movement of the masses. To his dying hour he fought against the bureaucratic betrayers of the revolution, the so-called 'leaders' of the German Social Democracy.

Prior to the outbreak of World War I, Liebknecht foresaw the importance of anti-militarist propaganda among the armed forces to undermine the German government's war effort. To this end he naturally turned to the youth who supplied the cannon fodder for the Kaiser's war machine. He attempted to direct the work of the youth organizations affiliated to the International into mass actions against the growing militarism of the German government.

The major socialist youth groups in existence at this time were as follows:

Belgium: The National Federation of Young Guards was the oldest and most important of the International's youth groups. It had been formally established in 1894 under the direction of the Executive Committee of the Belgian Social Democratic Party. Since 1900 it had published a paper, Antimilitariste, with a circulation of over 100,000. In 1903 it began publication of an illustrated magazine, La Jeunesse Socialiste (The Young Socialist), and in 1907 began publishing La Jeunesse c'est l'Avenir, a 16 page newspaper. NFGY maintained links with a similar organization in Antwerp which published Zaaijer.

In 1904, three provincial federations of the Young Guards were in existence. The Flemish section had 1,000 members, a Brabant federation had 500 members and the Walloonian federation had 8,000 members.

France: Until 1903 each of the various French workers parties had its own separate youth organization. The trade unions also had a youth group, the Jeunesse Syndicaliste. The Young Socialists in the Yvonne region of France began publication of a quarterly newspaper in 1901.

Italy: The Federazione Nazionale Giovanile (National Federation of Young Socialists) published a newspaper entitled Gioventu Socialista (Socialist Youth). The objective of the FNGS as defined by the Italian Social Democratic Party was "to intensify anti-militarist agitation which aims at educating the Italian youth in socialism so as to neutralize the tendency of the ruling classes which wants to employ the army as an instrument of coercion directed against the proletariat." There was a strong syndicalist tendency in many of the Federation's branches throughout Italy although the Turin branch, established 1909, played a leading role in arguing against this deviation. The Federation began to recruit from the campuses in ever increasing numbers beginning around 1912-1913. Among this new influx of revolutionary cadres was Antonio Gramsci, a future leader of the Communist Party of Italy.

Other countries: Young Socialist organizations existed in a large number of other European countries including Spain, Switzerland, Austria, Finland, Denmark, Hungary, Holland, Norway, Sweden and Czechoslovakia. In relation to the last mentioned, it may be useful to quote Liebknecht's evaluation of the Czech youth movement: "The Czech anti-militarism deserves special consideration. Here, too, the Young Socialist movement plays an important part. The paper Sbornik Mladeze appears since 1st of May, 1900. The Czech Young Socialist organizations have announced that anti-militarist agitation is one of their special tasks. It is true that the Social Democratic Party Conference at Budwies in 1900 refused to sanction the formation of special organizations of young workers. This, however, was aimed only at organizations outside the Party and led to the Young Socialist organizations becoming more closely united with the general party movement. The systematic organization of the young people is making good progress. In many places propaganda committees were formed whose special task it was to carry on agitation among young workers. Since 15th of May, 1901, the Sbornik Mladeze appeared monthly. The Social Democratic Party Conference held in Prague in

1902 pronounced in favor of carrying on a special agitation among young people and of organizing them within the party." (Liebknecht, Militarism and Anti-Militarism, pp. 120-121).

It is interesting to note when most of the Young Socialist organizations came into existence. The bulk of them were formed in the decade between 1895 and 1905; that is prior to the outbreak of the First World War and in the period which we in the United States call the Debsian radicalization.

Breitman refers to this radicalization as primarily a reaction to the onset of heavy industry, particularly in the United States. But a similar reaction took place in Europe as well. The economic role of youth was given special importance. Young workers became the mainstay of the huge industrial complexes which sprang up. The radicalization which occurred affected young workers to a much greater degree than has the present radicalization which we are undergoing. Only as the radicalization proceeded did the Young Socialist groups begin to recruit from the college campuses.

The youth groups of the Second International arose from many different backgrounds. Some grew out of anti-militarist activity carried on by party youth. Others were a response by young radicals to the religious youth organizations promoted by the church in an effort to dampen the radicalization. The bulk of these youth groups were creations of the Social Democratic parties and remain firmly under the control of these parties. Few, if indeed any, had achieved the degree of organizational autonomy which prevails today between the Socialist Workers Party and the Young Socialist Alliance.

The Struggle in the Second International

As the cataclysmic upheaval of World War I relentlessly drew nearer, its reverberations were increasingly felt in the international socialist movement. The division between the right, left and center became sharper. The existence and function of the youth groups swiftly became an important issue in this struggle.

By and large, the right wing of the Social Democracy saw no need for the continued existence of youth groups. Internationalist in word and increasingly national chauvinist in deed, they rightly saw the anti-militarist agitation of the Young Socialist groups as a threat to their future collaboration with the national bourgeoisie. They sought to curtail the activities of the Young Socialists and where possible to prevent their formation in new areas. The right wing was particularly opposed to any form of international collaboration between the youth organizations and fought against this bitterly.

The left wing of the International, headed by Lenin, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, fought to expand the youth groups. They saw the consistent anti-militarist agitation of these organizations as the best guarantee against the social patriotic degeneration of the national sections of the International. Only consistent agitation along such lines could halt the increasing drive of the capitalist powers towards the coming war.

In 1907 the left wing won a partial victory with the convening of an International Congress of Socialist Youth at Stuttgart. The Congress established the Socialist Youth International, the first such international organization in history. Under Liebknecht's leadership the first congress passed a clear antiwar resolution calling for a continued campaign among conscripted youth against militarism. It also passed resolutions on education, the economic struggle and alcoholism. Delegates to the Congress returned to their countries with a firm belief in the impending socialist victory led by the revolutionary youth.

However, capitalism's course towards the war remained undeterred. The leaders of the Second International shamefully capitulated at every step and drove a knife into the back of the International. As the right wing of the International gained strength it extended its heavy hand towards the Youth International. In 1908 the youth group in Germany was liquidated as an independent youth organization. According to the leadership of the party, the chief task of the youth was now "education." The youth were pushed into the wings while the right forces occupied center stage. Similar actions against the independent youth groups were taken in France, Bohemia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Finland, Denmark, Holland and the United States. Curiously enough, the youth organizations in most of the Scandinavian countries remained relatively strong throughout this period and were able to maintain themselves as independent organizations. The Italian youth group also fought against liquidation and grew in consequence.

The Second Congress of the Socialist Youth International in 1910 marked how far the national chauvinist trend in the International had advanced. An attempt by the right to subordinate the youth organizations to the party on a world scale failed, but it left the Youth International in a seriously weakened position.

On August 1, 1914 Germany declared war on Russia. By August 3, the First World War had begun. On August 4, the socialist deputies to the German Reichstag voted in favor of war credits. Lenin wrote "Is it a fact that the principal socialist parties of Europe have betrayed all their convictions and tasks? Of course neither the traitors themselves or those who clearly realize or hazily guess that they will have to be friendly and tolerant like to talk about this."

But however unpleasant this may be to various 'authorities' in the Second International or to their fellow factionalists among the Russian Social Democrats, we must learn to look facts in the face and call things by their proper names. We must tell the workers the truth." (The Collapse of the Second International, pp. 7)

The Outbreak of the War to the Third International

The existence of the youth organizations presented the leadership of the Second International with a prickly problem following the August 4 capitulation of the German party. Prior to August, 1914, these youth groups had as their major activity, anti-militarist agitation and organization. While the leadership had discouraged such activity before the outbreak of the war, it now became imperative to stop it.

The International Bureau of the youth organizations was dissolved and support for the national sections was withdrawn by the parties. (As I have already mentioned, the Scandinavian organizations were an exception in this regard.)

Ebert, Scheidemann and the other leaders of the now defunct International evidently felt that it would be hopeless to attempt to change the orientation of the youth groups and turn them into pro-militarist forces. They had not yet had time to achieve a bureaucratic stranglehold over the forces of the youth to the point where they could do anything they wished with it.

Despite the betrayal of the Second International, the Socialist Youth International refused to play dead. Less than a year after the supposed "dissolution" of the International Bureau, an International Congress of Youth took place at Berne, Switzerland on April 4-6, 1915. The congress had been called at the initiative of the Italian and Swiss section of the Youth International. Thirteen delegates from nine countries attended. This was a sad decrease from the previous congresses of the youth. The conscription of many revolutionary elements into the military, together with increased government harassment of radicals, combined to cause this decrease.

But if the conference did not represent a numerical gain, it was a definite political step forward for the youth. From the start of the congress, sharp lines were drawn between those who favored a revolutionary position on the war, calling for the defeat of their own governments and the centrist position. The latter, while criticizing the positions taken by the Social Democrats, shrank from projecting an independent revolutionary course. The resolution finally passed by the Congress tended strongly towards this position. A counter-resolution proposed by the Bolshevik delegates was defeated.

The Congress took steps to assure some degree of continuity within the Youth International. A newspaper, the Youth International, was set up under the direction of the International Bureau. Ten issues of this paper were published. They included many articles by Lenin, Zinoviev and Liebknecht.

The Congress also established October 3 as International Youth Day, much along the lines that August 6 had been designated International Women's Day some years before. The delegates from the Berne Conference went home confident that something was being done to internationalize the fight against the war. Concerning the conference and the newspaper which it established, Lenin wrote, "Of course, the organ of the youth still lacks theoretical clarity and consistency, and perhaps may never acquire this precisely because it is the organ of the vigorous, turbulent and inquiring youth. . . for necessarily the youth must come to socialism in a different way, by other forms, under other circumstances than their fathers. Incidentally this is why we must be decidedly in favor of the organizational independence of the Youth League not only because the opportunists fear this independence but because of the very nature of the case; for 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." (Lenin, The Young Generation, pp. 23)

The significance of the Berne conference was immense. It took place five months before the Zimmerwald Conference of the Internationalists and in many respects foreshadowed many of the decisions which were to be reached at that historic gathering. It was the first serious indication on an international scale of the cracks opening up in the Social Democratic ranks and the opportunities to build a new International. And most importantly, it was a conference of youth, the most decisive force in the war. Liebknecht had written that, "He who has the youth has the army." The Internationalists at the Berne and Zimmerwald conferences helped to realize his prediction in practice.

In the next few months those who adhered to the left at Berne and Zimmerwald began to move to consolidate their strength. In Sweden on March 18-19, the Young Socialists met and took a strong antiwar position, attacking the majority of the party in the Socialist parliamentary group and calling for revolutionary action by the working class. The ultimate outcome of this move was a split in the ranks of the party and the formation of a new Swedish socialist party which eventually took a position along the lines of the Zimmerwald conference. In Norway and Denmark, the youth groups fought against the pro-war positions taken by the parties in parliament and conducted an active propaganda campaign around the positions of

Zimmerwald and Berne.

The war hampered international communications, but through the medium of the Youth International a certain degree of contact was maintained. Certainly little contact was needed to point out the tremendous significance of the events of 1917--two revolutions, the February and the October, which shook Russia and the world to their very foundations.

Students and young people generally had been a traditional component of the Russian revolutionary movement. Lenin at one point makes reference to a "general students' congress" which was convened in Odessa in 1899 "to discuss a plan to organize all Russian students for the purpose of protesting in every form on matters connected with academic, public and political life." Such conference meetings under the repressive conditions of Tsarist Russia quickly accustomed students to the rigors of underground political activity. Young people were accepted by the rest of the revolutionary movement as genuine fighters and seem to have had less difficulty integrating themselves into the movement than elsewhere. In 1905 Lenin wrote, "We need young forces. . . the youth will decide the issue of the whole struggle, the student youth and still more the working class youth." This recognition of the special role which youth could play had not a little to do with the forging of the Bolsheviks as a strong revolutionary party.

The news of the October revolution swept the Youth International like wildfire. The revolution was an inspiration to the members of the International in the same way that the Cuban revolution inspired millions of youth around the world in 1960. In the factories, schools and in the muddy trenches at the front the youth endlessly discussed and rediscussed the revolution, its meaning, its progress and its leaders.

The issue of the October revolution definitively split the Youth International between the centrists, who supported Kerensky and the "legal" provisional government, and the revolutionaries who supported the Bolsheviks. Most of the centrists were already on their way out of the Youth International at this point. They either straggled back in a long, dirty line to the remnants of the Second International or lingered on for a few years to play an "independent" role. The revolutionists moved forward to the founding conference of the Communist Youth International in 1919.

The Young People's Socialist League

The first socialist youth organization in America, properly speaking, was the Intercollegiate Socialist Society formed in 1905. As its name implies, the purpose of the Society was defined as "promot(ing) an intelligent interest

in socialism among college men and women." In accordance with this aim, the ISS never attracted any significant number of young workers to its ranks and was confined almost exclusively to the college campuses. The ISS eventually evolved into a Social Democratic grouping calling itself the League for Industrial Democracy. This in turn eventually became the parent group for the Students for a Democratic Society.

The Socialist Party, at the height of its strength and influence did not have a youth group. Young workers joined the party directly without belonging to any special organization. The Young People's Socialist League was formed in 1915, a year after the outbreak of the war, when the right wing of the SP had already begun to consolidate its hold over the party.

William F. Kruse was elected National Secretary of YPSL at its founding convention which also voted to establish a magazine. The organization did not really distinguish itself in any significant way until the formation of the Comintern in 1919 and the resulting split in the ranks of the Socialist Party.

The bulk of YPSL members were opposed to the war although not necessarily on a clearly internationalist basis. Most of them left with the left wing when it split in 1919 to form the Communist Party. However, Kruse, the National Secretary did not leave the SP for another two years, and then in the company of an amorphous left wing group which included Alexander Trachtenberg, J. B. Salutsky and others.

YPSL changed its name to the Independent Young People's Socialist League Affiliated with the Third International. It was eventually changed to the Young Communist League several years later.

Conclusion

Lack of time prevented me from carrying this study any further. Although the material for it certainly exists in the form of books, pamphlets, interviews, magazines and so forth, a great deal of time and effort is needed to coalesce it into an understandable form. For the time being, let me summarize what are, in my opinion, the major lessons of the period thus far covered.

(1) The youth organizations in the first 20 years of this century played a vital part in establishing and maintaining the continuity between the revolutionary cadres of the Second and Third Internationals. In particular their fight against the war remains an outstanding example of the internationalism of the socialist movement.

(2) Their ability to play this role was enhanced by their independent character. In fact I would go further

and say that this independence was absolutely vital to their existence during this period. Although an independent youth organization is not a principle under any and all circumstances, there can be very little doubt that it is a

tremendous asset to the revolutionary movement.

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