

YSA

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- Marty May 2014

EXCERPTS FROM THE REPORT ON YOUNG SOCIALIST PERSPECTIVES
TO THE YSA NATIONAL COMMITTEE PLENUM

By Steve Wattenmaker

The general line of this report was adopted by the National Committee plenum on June 10, 1975

Taken together, the progress we have made in learning to use the Young Socialist and projections for the fall outlined in this report, lay the basis for an optimistic estimate of what we can do with the YS in the coming period.

As the next step forward in expanding YS circulation, this report is proposing that the YSA undertake a ten-week campaign next fall to get in the range of 3,000 new subscribers to the YS, coordinated with a fall single issue YS sales campaign of about the same scale as this spring.

In addition to subscriptions that the fall YSA teams would get, it would mean that center locals would be considering goals in the range of fifty to one hundred YS subs and somewhat fewer for regional locals depending on their size.

While a subscription campaign for the Young Socialist would be an ambitious and major undertaking by the YSA on a national scale, to be successful politically and organizationally it will have to be completely integrated into every facet of the YSA's work over the fall.

We think a sub campaign is the next logical step forward for the YS. Over the past several years the YSA has succeeded in stabilizing single-copy sales at a high level relative to our size. At the same time, our subscription base has hovered around 800 per month, and the overwhelming number of subs we do get -- about 100 per month -- come from people who have clipped subscription coupons in the YS or Militant.

But the advantage of a subscription campaign for the YS becomes even clearer when you begin to think about who we would want to approach for an introductory sub to our paper.

First and foremost, we want to ask people we are working with on a regular basis: YSA contacts, SCAR and cutbacks activists, members of MECHAs, BSUs, and the FUSP, students who regularly come by our literature tables on campus, to our campus forums and classes, young people who are interested in the Camejo-Reid campaign or local Socialist Workers election campaigns, and others who should be following the struggles the YSA campaigns for month to month. This is where locals should concentrate the bulk of their attention in getting YS subs.

This of course means that our campus fractions will be the primary vehicles for carrying out this orientation over the course of the sub campaign. We can expect the

activists our campus fractions will be in daily contact with -- those who have bought single issues of the YS or Militant, are familiar with our press -- to be open to getting a trial subscription to the Young Socialist and see it as a measure of our seriousness that we have approached them to talk about it.

We want the YS sub campaign to be a real tool that our campus fractions can use in building our base on campus.

A second area where we should approach people is in the region, and the fall YS teams will be the key to this. In most regions there are still major campuses where there aren't YSA locals and we are only able to visit once a semester. By offering subs along with single issue sales of the YS, we can generate a small but important readership for the YS on these campuses that will be following YSA activities between times that the YSA makes appearances on the campus.

A third area where going after YS subscriptions will be fruitful is on in-city campuses where we don't have fractions. Developing a regular readership even on campuses where we aren't able to send regular sales teams can be an effort that paves the way for expanding our influence and building fractions.

I know cities like Los Angeles also have campuses in the "Twilight Zone" -- that is, campuses that are between bring considered city campuses and regional campuses, which will also be an important place to concentrate YS subs for the same reasons.

In going through this list I left out high schools because we want to outline some special ideas for high school sales.

This report is proposing that our ten-week subscription campaign to the YS begin the first week in September to give locals the opportunity to carefully plan out the same kind of high school blitz that we had last September, on an even bigger scale.

We can plan this not only because we are organizationally stronger, but as we've noted, the political situation at many high schools will be very different this September, and we have begun to make inroads at many of these schools already. And even at high schools where we have not as yet done consistent work, I think it's fair to expect that socialists at most city high schools, selling their paper and talking about how to fight racism can look for a

friendly welcome.

We want to be just as aggressive in going after high school subscriptions as we will be on campus. To make it as easy as possible for high school students to get a subscription and to encourage comrades to go after them, we want to propose a special high school subscription offer of six months for 50 cents.

To launch the YS sub campaign in the most effective way, it will be just as important to integrate going after subs in the blitz activities most locals plan for the first several weeks that college and university campuses are open, as well.

This will be the best possible time to go after those students we know and want to have a sub, as well as combining getting YS subs with single issue sales at registration lines, at the first YSA forums, or meetings of SCAR or students interested in fighting cutbacks.

I think we've really developed these registration week offensives into a fine art on many campuses and we will want to do some extra brainstorming this summer to see what special angles the sub campaign adds to our overall approach.

For instance, canvassing in first year dorms for YS subs as school opens could give us a direct opportunity to

discuss the YSA and the activities we think new students should get involved in -- as well as sell subs. There are many, many new ideas locals will generate for these blitzes in the fall.

This proposal for the Young Socialist's first subscription campaign can be an exciting new component of the overall strengthening of our movement's propaganda arsenal this fall.

At Oberlin, the Militant will finalize its plans for fall single issue and subscription campaigns. Over the spring, the Militant sales campaign regularized sales at the level of about 9,000 a week, carried out a successful sub drive, and really institutionalized sales in the Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican communities. As comrades are aware, Intercontinental Press is also taking important steps to make IP a more visible publication and build the unparalleled reputation IP has earned from serious militants and revolutionists around the world.

The perspectives presented for the Young Socialist in this report are bold perspectives. They embody our understanding that we want to move ahead in sharpening our propaganda weapons for the battles we are entering into and expect to escalate as we move deeper into this new period.

AT-LARGE VOTING RIGHTS

By Dave Brandt, Rochester, N. Y. . At-large

I should start with my bias. I'm from New York, which has no local and about nine at-large areas west of NYC and Albany -- which are on the far east of the state. The Upper Midwest and New England regions also have an abundance of at-largers.

What do I mean by at-large voting rights? We basically ask that after proper discussion at-largers be able to put together for a delegate at the same ratio as locals.

A review of previous discussion will be helpful:

1) Sheldon Lawrence of Brooklyn brought up some important points in "A Solution to the Regional Problem" (YSDB, Vol. XVII, No. 6). It is pointed out that a massive move from at-large areas to centers would lessen YSA influence and national base. While moves to centers experience those comrades, they rarely return and the regions are drained of their best. It is suggested it would be better to send experienced comrades to help in the region. This would help comrades and let regions grow and become more permanent. Today's emphasis on centers makes others feel less worthy. I include this to give the importance of the region and because the center emphasis is expressed in arguments against voting rights.

2) An example of opposition to voting rights is Sally Whicker's "In Reply to 'For At-large Voting Rights'" (YSDB, Vol. XVIII, No. 8). She states the delegate ratio is one for every nine members. Since we had said at-largers would get a delegate for five or more members, she concludes we would make local members second class. She ignores that the nine (or greater fraction of) rule in practice is five or more. Five member locals have a delegate. We only ask to be given the same ratio. While some accuse us of giving five at-largers the same vote as a thirteen-member local, this is a result of the present ratio system, not our voting rights. A five-member local gets the same as a thirteener. I also like to point out that thirteen at-largers get less vote than a five-man local now. If more at-largers group by five and six for votes, the results are those of the present ratios and apply the same to small locals.

She also objects that at-largers who are close enough to decide a delegate are close enough to be a local, if not a local they are too far to make a delegate. We must agree that any at-largers must have proper discussion to decide a delegate, just as local members must be involved. But letters and phones can establish points that do and don't need indepth discussion. Those latter ones could be taken care of on special weekend confer-

ences. This doesn't mean that they compose a local. This line leads me not to think we can't have delegates, but that reasonable criteria of discussion that can relate to local or at-large members should be established for delegate selection.

Another objection is this would make too many delegates, hopelessly cutting speakers time. If so many are now denied rights as to cause this disaster, is it not a tragedy itself? We'd have the same problem if we recruited so many people -- do we then oppose recruitment? This can't be the best solution. Even if inconvenient, extend convention hours or days, or change the delegate-member ratio before you deny comrades' rights!

Fraternal delegates are said to be good enough. She calls it "voice but not vote." No! At the last convention, when comrade Kirt Hill, fraternal delegate from Buffalo, wished to speak the chairperson had full delegates vote to see if he could speak -- precisely because he was not a full delegate. So then what is fraternal delegate status but reserved seating? For all the binding effect his fraternal vote has one may as well raise their hand in the audience!

3) Another point I have heard is that "the local is the base and center of YSA activity." Why it follows we can't have at-large rights eludes me. There are three kinds of at-large areas: degenerated locals where members previously had voting rights, potential locals -- a base for building locals -- where the same functions as locals occur, and areas never to be locals. This doesn't mean the member isn't knowledgeable, competent or active. Many at-largers in small places sell the press and such.

Some comrades fear that at-largers are too often inexperienced. There are inexperienced members in locals and experienced ones at-large. Discussion requirements would have inexperienced ones gain knowledge. Also, let's not forget inexperience is not reason for refusing rights. Who and how would we gauge proper experience, anyways?

While all members regardless of vote should keep up with discussion, partake in it and contribute when they can (for their and the YSA's good), it does help in morale and its effects on involvement to know they count. Also it is this involvement that will bring them experience.

4) We must be clear on problems involved here. Weekend meetings and such will be an inhibiting feature excluding some at-largers, but the point is having legitimate criteria to let us try to be first class.

To be blunt, inexperience could cause stupid arguments,

but such apprehensions don't legitimize denial of rights.

If there are enough new delegates, inconvenient changes may be needed, but that is less important than rights.

If there is trouble with the five member and thirteen member groups getting equal vote, we may change the delegate system. Maybe a six-member delegate will have six votes and an eleven-member delegate have eleven. (A three-member at-large area might be allowed a three vote delegate, but because of lack of discussion there would be no one-vote delegates.) There are problems, but it might be considered. No matter, denial of rights is not the answer.

5) Resolution: There is no reason why at-largers can't meet reasonable requirements for attaining delegates, and a just procedure should be open to all YSAers (local and at-large alike) for convention delegate selection. Present

rules exclude all at-largers -- with no recourse or criterion -- from full status delegate selections. For this reason the rules and constitution must be properly amended to allow under just requirements that at-largers can select full delegates on a basis as local members do, even though their discussion methods may differ. They will be required to inform the N. O. in writing of their names and intentions. In this respect and in the case of additional at-largers being added, the dates for informing the N. O. will correspond to those for locals. The delegate-member ratio will be the same for local and at-large members alike. Similarly, other corresponding dates and duties will apply equally to both groups of members.

September 11, 1975

REGIONAL WORK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TEST OF THE YSA

By Jeffrey Kegler, Upper West Side, New York local

Many comrades feel regional work is important because 40 percent or so of us are out in the region. But the real importance of the region is greater than and different from this.

In the region, which is essentially defined by the lack of an SWP presence, the YSA must independently evolve its organizational norms as well as its political orientation to specific situations. If the YSA is to grow into a mass youth organization, it must do this and do it well. Therefore, our success in the region is the best measure of our growth potential. We will never become the leaders in the youth movement, unless we face up to this problem and solve it.

What I call the regional problem is, for the most part, a problem of leadership. This should be no surprise since almost all the problems which face revolutionists today are problems of leadership. This problem has two sides, which complement each other.

The comrades in the region are usually less experienced than those in the center. But even a very talented and tried comrade, when stuck with a limited number of sources for advice, will make frequent mistakes. A revolutionary orientation comes from only one source in this period of decaying capitalism -- the party. And this is precisely what the region lacks -- a Leninist party.

This gap is inevitable. Or, if it were not, the solution to the regional problem would be simple -- abolish

the region. Hopefully this will eventually happen. But it is not an immediate possibility and hence we must accept inferior solutions.

Finding these inferior solutions is the task of the center, which is now carried on by only a few of its comrades -- members of teams, regional organizers, and a few specially assigned comrades.

Their work, however, is hindered by the lack of direction in our regional work. The YSA devotes careful attention to all its political perspectives and much of its routine work -- campaign, sales, recruitment. And it also devotes much attention to regional organizers and the teams. But they are not the region -- even though what most comrades mean by "regional work" is what they do. Certainly they should be the guiding force behind regional work. But they do not do "regional work" -- or where they must, it is because they have failed in their primary task. What are needed, and have been lacking, are decisions made by the entire YSA on the following questions:

- 1) What levels of loyalty, political agreement, and activity separate a comrade from a sympathizer?
- 2) What areas of work are essential for YSAers?
- 3) How should they divide their efforts?

Until these questions have answers concrete enough to guide our daily work, our growth will be limited.

September 18, 1975

WE NEED TO EXTEND DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM TO THE REGION

By Jeffrey Kegler, Upper West Side, New York local

In general our formal provisions for the structure of the region are quite good. The actual practice of regional work, however, does not give these forms life. Instead, it distorts them.

The region lacks centralism and it lacks democracy. You can't enforce one without the other.

The center should make sure every comrade has the opportunity to participate in, and control, what the center is doing in the region. Every center local should have a regional committee. This committee should make it a point to debrief every comrade who comes in from the region, asking the comrade what is going on, and giving news and advice from the center. Advice on the political tasks facing the regional comrades should be given carefully, in consultation with the regional organizer. If the comrades in the region are reluctant to seek or even accept advice, it is even more important to give it. This advice should be firm, but the comrades in the center should also emphasize that final responsibility for work in the region rests only on those comrades directly involved in the concrete situation and that they make the final decision.

The regional committee should consider no aspect of the regional comrades' work off-limits, especially finances. It should find out from every source of credit for regional comrades, how much the regional comrades owe. These creditors include the Militant, Intercontinental Press, the Young Socialist, the National Office, and the campaign. All of the creditors should send the center locals monthly statements on the accounts for "their" region, if only to protect their investment. The regional committee should find out how the regional comrades intend to pay these debts, offering advice where possible, and issuing the proper warnings to creditors, where necessary.

The regional committee should also consider itself responsible for all comrades and teams that go out into the region. It should make sure that those comrades going out there have all the materials requested or needed by the regionals, and that they know the way. It should be able to tell the regionals if the comrade or comrades did leave, if so when, and how they are getting there, in case something happens. In addition, it should see that arrangements for feeding and housing are made, and understood clearly by both sides.

The committee should act to correct mistakes in mailings from the National Office and elsewhere, wrong addresses in the Militant directory and all other breakdowns in communication. When the regional organizer travels

(which comrades on the regional committee, in general, should not do), they should take that comrades' place, answering the phone, knowing the answers to the usual questions, as well as handling mistakes and giving advice.

A regional committee will center around one or two comrades who have the time to sit around the phone at headquarters and do paperwork. It should have a total of about two or three comrades in all. Only a very large or active region will require more.

Occasionally, it should give reports to the center local on regional work. Comrades in the local could then debate some of the issues facing the regional comrades, if necessary, and the committee could then transmit the results back into the region.

I suspect implementation of these committees would mean less time and resources spent on regional work, not more. At the same time, it would raise our regional work to a level which no other radical youth organization could hope to achieve. This is because it would apply our usual Trotskyist methods, which have earned us the name "Big Red Machine," to the region.

The second need is for democracy. I have only one conviction in this regard: No comrade who tolerates the decisions of the YSA being made by anyone else for him will be worth a damn as a revolutionist. If at-largers cannot vote, it is unprincipled to admit them. They should be kept in sympathizer status.

None of the glib self-satisfied defenders of the status quo in the YSA have ever explained how to recruit militant youth into an organization where they have no voice. I would also find it much easier to do work in the region if these comrades would tell me how one builds a local if not out of at-largers.

I have submitted a proposal for at-largers to have a say in the politics of the YSA. (It appears in Vol. XVIII, No. 1, p. 22. An attempt at a reply is on No. 8, p. 13.) It is a moderate, carefully thought-out solution to a complex problem. I propose that enough delegates should be chosen at-large, across the whole YSA, to balance out any overrepresentation caused by our present methods of delegate selection. It, or some other plan to give a voice to at-largers, must be adopted or we will never grow beyond our present size. Based on the last four YSA conventions, this would add an average of two delegates to each convention.

Whether or not any proposal to give at-largers a vote is adopted, the YSA should abolish fraternal delegates.

This Mickey-Mouse non-representation has only served the purposes of tiny minorities, without respect for our conventions and willing to go to any lengths to obstruct the work of the convention. It is a sign of the stagnant non-thought that underlies this system of non-representation that these delegates are still called "fraternal." This after many years of complaints by the rank-and-file of the YSA. I would suspect the issue is decided by whoever types the convention call.

Finally, all regions should experiment with regional meetings. These are meetings of regional comrades, chaired by one of their own, but with center comrades allowed to observe, and, at least in the case of the regional organizers and the regional committees, to speak. Such meetings have been quite successful in the past in educating comrades, and in putting them in contact with others who have similar problems. The center, or the YSA national convention site, would be the best place for them.

September 18, 1975

REGIONAL WORK MUST FOCUS ON RECRUITMENT

By Jeffrey Kessler, Upper West Side, New York local

The first task for any regional local, and especially for at-largers, is recruitment. It is much more important than in the center. In the center recruitment goes along with all the other YSA activities. In the region these activities can only be undertaken after recruitment has made them possible.

There is a contradiction here. The center's method of recruitment -- integrating it with building the movements -- is far superior. Certain regional locals are large enough to imitate them and all locals should recruit in the course of building movements, as soon as they are large enough. Depending on circumstances, the turning point is about twelve comrades.

The method of recruitment while building movements is much better because it recruits activists, not talkers. At the same time, the movements help train our recruits even before they join, since building the movements will be their main concern once they join.

With on-going activity limited, the regional comrades cannot usually recruit while participating in movements. Even when it is possible, such recruitment comes at the expense of ignoring explicitly YSA work. Recruits won only through propaganda, on the other hand, may never learn to contribute actively to the YSA.

Regional comrades face quite a dilemma here. It can only be resolved by careful planning of comrade's time. The common mode of operation where a regional organizer rides in and tries to sell as many activities as possible to the regionals, with only the generalized evaluation in the latest political document as a means of establishing priorities, is inadequate. The organizer must try to guide the local comrades in determining what is important and how much can be done. Again, recruitment must be the central

focus. Any activity which cannot be justified in strict recruitment terms must be left to the larger locals. No area of our work benefits from a small YSA.

In most cases this will mean focusing on one activity important in local terms, along with explicitly YSA activity -- Pathfinder tables, the Militant, campaign. The explicitly YSA activity cannot replace our united front activity, since we would not be differentiated from the armchair socialists. Neither can the united front be the sole focus, since we must recruit to the YSA. Even where there is only one comrade, both are needed.

One united front will be plenty for up to five comrades, dependent on local circumstances. With six or more, two will probably be needed.

There should also be special consideration for the individual comrades who are closely tied to one or another area of work. When we recruit a very active Native American or gay, who does well in that activity, we should leave him there, even if the rest of the comrades have completely different focuses.

On the other hand, all comrades, without exception, must participate to some extent in the explicitly YSA work. The only Black in an area, up to his ears in antiracist work, must take some time to sell the Young Socialist, or staff the tables, or talk to recruits. His intense work in the antiracist fight makes him even more valuable as a YSAer. And after all, anyone can do antiracist work, but only a few embrace the revolutionary program of the YSA. That is why we support both organizations, each in its own right.

September 18, 1975

NO MORE "KID" STUFF

By Agnes Chapa, Austin local and Becky Scoggins, Houston local

The YSA, as a youth group, has always placed a primary emphasis on the recruitment of students, from college campuses as well as Jr. high and Sr. high schools.

Therefore, it is somewhat contradictory that on the one hand we stress the importance of recruitment in the high schools and Jr. high schools, while on the other hand, once those people are recruited they still have to deal with the oppressive conditions that they joined our organization to fight against. One being, the attitude of older people that it's OK for these young persons to carry out the same work that older people carry out and still not be regarded as equals.

One of the more blatant conditions being, the use of the term "KID." At this point it would be a good idea to show a parallel that would illustrate our point. Calling a Jr. high or a high school person a "KID" is the same as calling a woman a "CHICK." The term "KID" has bad connotations to the young person that is striving to bring about social change.

One of the ploys of capitalism is pitting people against each other. With oppressed peoples fighting over superficial issues, they aren't able to see their common foe as capitalism, and unite to destroy it.

In this society people are taught that another age bracket is more desirable than their own. In order that they

might appear older, or younger. The entire advertising industry and other related industries thrive on this concept. The cosmetic industry sells cosmetics to older people to make them appear more youthful, and make-up to young people to make them appear more mature. These are multi-billion dollar industries that profit from pitting two sectors of population against each other.

If you follow this school of thought, all people are made to believe young people do not take responsibilities and commitments seriously. To elaborate on this, the image most advertising portrays of youth is that of a care-free lot of people who have nothing more serious to concern themselves with than their social life.

There is a tendency among older comrades to carry this logic into their political work in the YSA. Some feel that these young people are not ready to make a serious political commitment to the YSA, sometimes this has a direct effect on the assignments that high school comrades are given.

If all comrades become sensitive to the everyday problems faced by high school students then after the revolution the term "KID" shall become obsolete, and will only be used in historical context.

September 25, 1975

MAOISM, THE CHINESE REVOLUTION, AND OUR MAOIST OPPONENTS

By Douglas Pensack, Detroit local

With the spreading of "detente" to the Chinese workers' state there has been an "opening up" of China to the scrutiny of the American people. Since Nixon's visit in 1972 there has been an outpouring of books and articles in the press from various people travelling to China. Such reports have generally been pretty favorable. Thus, despite the right turn in Chinese foreign policy and the hysterical attacks on the Soviet Union, the awareness and prestige of the Chinese revolution has increased considerably in the eyes of many Americans. This is both positive and negative.

On the positive side, this "softening" of the official American attitude toward China has helped break down the ferocious anti-communism still left over from the McCarthy Era. It has helped to break down the racist ideology of the "teeming yellow hordes."

However, on the negative side it has given the Maoist political current in the U. S. a shot in the arm. Despite the extraordinary sectarianism of most Maoist grouplets, which have led to endless splits and factional warfare, there has been a relative increase in Maoist political activity. This phenomena deserves our attention because (1) many students are being attracted to "Marxist-Leninism," thinking that the Chinese Stalinists are a pure strain but also be open to the Trotskyist analysis as well as the Maoist, (2) by aggressive and even provocative ultra-left action, Maoist groupings are winning sincere radicals over to the opportunism of Stalinism, and (3) many young people of the oppressed nationalities are being attracted to Maoism because of its identification of the "Third World Revolution."

What sort of attention does this merit? I'm not in favor of going overboard in orienting toward Maoist groups -- most are so sectarian and so hardened that we would not ever be able to even get close to their rank and file. However, there are Maoist sects that are involved in similar areas of work with us and which have attracted new forces that are sincerely revolutionary and not hopelessly inculcated by Stalinism. Because of the wretched position on the national question most of these groups embrace we should be particularly conscious of discussing this question with their Black members and sympathizers.

Therefore, I think that we should follow two courses of action: (1) step up our internal and external education about the Chinese revolution, the nature of the Chinese workers' state, etc., and (2) begin to do conscious contact work with the Maoists that we run into in the course of our work. Obviously, the success of number 2 depends on how

well we do number 1.

I should stress here that on any campus where the YSA is there are many students who are not conscious Maoists but are very sympathetic to the Chinese revolution and China. We in the YSA should be prepared and able to answer their questions about the history and development of Chinese Stalinism. To do this we must understand the general development of the Chinese revolution since 1912. To help accomplish this the YSA leadership should ask Pathfinder Press to seriously consider publishing some more literature on China. Unfortunately, our current stock of literature is inadequate.

Each local will have to consider how realistic such undertakings are for them. There are several regional locals that never see Maoist organizations but still might benefit by having a forum on China. There are other locals that have chapters of the Revolutionary Student Brigade on their campuses and other locals in large cities that have several groups (like Detroit, New York, Chicago, etc.) These locals will benefit from having forums on Chinese foreign policy and educational classes on the Chinese revolution. Not only will it enable our comrades to be better equipped to answer the questions directed at us by our opponents but, more importantly, it will give us the ammunition necessary to drive a wedge between sympathizers and new members of the Maoist organizations and their leadership.

We should remember that these organizational norms and therefore there is a real alienation between the rank and file and the leadership. We can -- and should -- take advantage of this alienation.

One Maoist organization that we have run across in our antiracist work in Detroit is the Communist Labor Party. Busing is a major issue for them. It is relatively large in Detroit. This group's orientation toward the desegregation struggle has put us in direct contact with them. In the few other cities where they exist I think that our comrades will run across them. At least in Detroit this group has many new members and is susceptible, in my opinion, to an intervention by us -- not just around the Chinese revolution but around the national question and the busing debate.

Since 1917 the primary question in the world working class movement has been the Russian question. This is still true; Trotsky's analysis of the degeneration of the Russian revolution is one of the most important to revolutionary Marxism in the 20th century. However, it is not only important for the developing cadre in the YSA to

understand the basics of the Russian revolution and its degeneration but also the extension of that degeneration to the world's most populace nation.

This understanding will enable us to recruit more radicalizing students to the YSA and to do effective opponent work with the various Maoist groups we come in contact with. As the foreign policy of China moves steadily right-

ward and the Chinese continually fail to grant a "franchise" to any Maoist group in the U. S., the Maoist current in the U. S. will be in constant turmoil and vacillation. This instability enables us to halt their growth and begin to recruit some of the healthy independents in their milieu.

October 8, 1975

HIGH SCHOOL CUTBACKS FIGHT IN SAN FRANCISCO

By Jon Olmsted and Val Libby, San Francisco local

The combination of inflation and cutbacks in federal, state and local funding of the schools has put many school districts around the country in a state of near bankruptcy.

Inflation in school-related costs is considerably higher than the overall inflation rate. For textbooks it is as much as 30-40 percent and it is generally higher for service and maintenance costs in the schools.

Besides inflation, the economic basis for the cutbacks in the funding for schools is due in large part to the recession. State and local revenues are declining due to unemployment and its costs in unemployment compensation and other welfare costs. These declining state revenues have resulted in cutbacks in state aid to education. At the same time the federal government has cut back in aid to education. And the cities continue to refuse to tax the large corporations for money for education. Much of the revenues for schools comes from the most regressive forms of taxation -- property taxes, sales taxes, and school bond issues. All of these hit working people the hardest. As a result, measures to float new bonds, raise property tax or sales tax rates are meeting stiff opposition.

The political basis for the cutbacks is of course to make students and workers pay the price of the economic crisis facing the rulers. The first to be hit the hardest are teachers. Teachers are now being blackmailed. When they come forward with just demands for cost of living salary increases and limits on class sizes, the school board claims that their demands are the cause of the crisis. The school board uses the proposed cutbacks in programs to try to turn students and parents against the teachers. Throughout the state of California, it is estimated that 15,000 teachers will lose their jobs. In San Francisco the school board has announced it will grant no salary raises for this year and will reduce fringe benefits by 50 percent.

The attack is now becoming generalized to an attack on the already inferior education students -- especially those in the urban centers -- have had in the past. A drop in student enrollment in the cities due in part to declining population, school drop-outs and a percentage of predominantly white families moving out of the inner city, has led a move for the closing of as many schools as possible and the raising of class sizes as high as possible.

In addition, many of the gains made by high school students in the education field are being rolled back,

Programs such as drama, music, bilingual, special education, busing, paraprofessionals, libraries, counselling, field trips, and many other "non-mandatory" programs, those not required by law and considered to be luxuries, are all being threatened.

The crisis is accelerating rapidly and generating a mass response in certain areas of the country.

In San Francisco, the schools ran on a 9 million dollar deficit in 1974-75 and are projecting a 17 million dollar deficit in 1975-76. School budgets are different than city budgets in that they cannot deficit spend, or in and of themselves raise taxes. In San Francisco they must by law balance the budget, which meant last year \$9 million in cutbacks and this year \$17 million in cutbacks.

On February 4, 1975 the school board voted to cut all overtime pay for athletic coaches and all teachers of extracurricular activities such as music, art, and drama. They also cut all remaining money for field trips, school maintenance, new books, and supplies like paper and pencils for the remainder of the year.

The response on the part of high school students was immediate and militant. Petitions immediately began to circulate, talk of walk outs spread and picketing occurred spontaneously -- some by junior high school students on their own.

The first thing the YSA did was to contact the approximately sixty students we had come into contact with through sales and last year's Socialist Workers election campaign youth support work. We drew them together to discuss the issues and a plan of action.

In the course of a series of initial meetings of high school students, an entire leafletting network was organized to build for a planning meeting and a picket line at the school board meeting the following day. Students were called and leaflets were either dropped off at students' homes at night or students were met in the morning with leaflets to cover their schools. Within two days the network was able to get leaflets into all nine San Francisco high schools and about five junior high schools.

At the next Board of Education meeting there was a spirited picket line of seventy-five students called on twenty-four hours notice. All of the students then went into the meeting and many spoke out during the meeting

in the name of Students United Against Cutbacks (SUAC). The main theme of the talks was on the incompetence of the school board in running the schools, the board's lack of concern for the real needs of the students, opposition to the cutbacks and opposition to running the schools on the basis of charity.

The board was trying to whip up the idea of a charity drive for the schools. Companies like Levi-Strauss and others jumped on the bandwagon with big contributions and sales gimmicks to give money to the schools. Bill Graham came forth with a big rock extravaganza that netted \$300,000. This was a severe attack on the concept of publicly financed, free education for all, and the students picked that up very fast.

The next day, speakers from Students United Against Cutbacks (SUAC) were all over the front pages of the newspaper and the first meeting of SUAC was held. It was held at the hall of Retail Clerks Local 1100 (Sears strike). Twenty students and as many members of the press came.

A petition was drawn up with four demands: 1. Stop the cutbacks; 2. Restore all programs already cut; 3. No layoffs of teachers and other school personnel; 4. Full funding for schools from the state, city and federal budgets. A SUAC bulletin was put out to inform students about the issues. A news conference and another larger demonstration was also planned. The students saw the need to reach out immediately and draw in both high school students and teachers, unions, and parents.

The news conference held on February 18 brought together the president of the San Francisco AFT, a representative from Local 400 (city workers union) and the VP of the San Francisco State University student government.

SUAC took the lead in building a protest for the coming school board meeting. It was known that a proposal for massive teacher layoffs was coming up. Students were stuffing the teachers' mail boxes in all the schools to come and demonstrate in defense of their own jobs.

At the meeting a picket line of 200 outside with a total of 500 parents, teachers and students was there to protest. The board began to feel the heat. The president of the school board had requested several times during the week by contacting SUACers and community activists that the demonstration be called off. At the meeting, the board opened by stating that due to charity most of the programs were restored for this year, and would all the students please leave to another room, because all the board would be discussing was teacher layoffs. None left. SUAC spoke out and also continued to build SUAC by signing up fifty more students to work and by collecting money for leaflets, picket signs, etc.

Two weeks later, the Board backed down and voted not to fire teachers for next year, but to maintain a freeze on hiring that has been in existence for two years.

This amounts to a yearly speed up for teachers, secretaries and maintenance crews in the schools, not to mention larger class sizes.

SUAC also put out a statement opposed to higher property taxes. They said, "We are opposed to further taxes on our parents. They already pay enough. If these big businesses are able to come up with the money for charity, why not tax them so that we can be sure to have adequate funding."

SUAC continued to work with the two teachers unions and the city workers union. SUAC had its own banner in the March 8, MARCH FOR JOBS in Sacramento and got many endorsements against cutbacks and layoffs from labor officials and politicians.

The last action built by SUAC last spring was a Student Board of Education. The charity campaign, the fact that teachers were not laid off, and the fact that some programs had been partially restored, had the effect of dampening the immediate outrage. What was needed was a teach-in to educate students on the fact that next year's budget which was voted on in the summer would be twice as bad. Consideration had gone into the idea of a march of the school bands, but it was decided to save that for a later date.

A Student Board of Education was proposed. Students were to constitute the board of education for one night. The S. F. Unified School Board chambers were secured for the event and a board of students from each high school was selected. A panel of representatives from both teachers' unions, the Latino Black and Asian communities, paraprofessionals and childcare centers addressed the Student Board. Resolutions were passed that covered the issues of teacher layoffs, bilingual education, childcare centers, and a police dragnet that has been harassing the students during school hours. A resolution was also passed that called on the Board of Education to declare a school holiday and organize a mass march on the State Capitol to demand funding for the schools.

Fifty people attended the student board meeting. Despite the small turnout, the meeting was successful. All the participants took it extremely seriously and saw the Student Board as a vehicle for further action especially over the summer and this fall. The meeting was covered by one of the major TV stations and the coverage they gave it was serious, viewing the Student Board as a real alternative to the regular board. An additional reflection of the seriousness with which people viewed the Student Board became clear when the joint negotiating council of the AFT and the CTA asked SUAC for a copy of the resolutions passed by the Student Board to be included in their negotiations for a contract for next year.

Some of the main lessons that we can draw from this struggle are:

1. High schools are coming to the fore as a battleground. Schools and the nearly 60 million people that in some way are related to them are becoming a major arena

of struggle as the crisis of capitalism deepens. The quality of education is deteriorating swiftly in the urban centers and what little education students have is sinking rapidly and well below what students get in private, parochial or suburban schools. High school students are coming into struggle around their own issues now more than at any other time. The experience in San Francisco was shortly followed by events in New Haven and Washington State. There have been large turnouts for school board meetings in places like Berkeley, and of course students are playing a big role in the situation in Boston.

2. We learned that we must become experts at keeping on top of issues in the schools and following the school budgets. All indications are that this year will be considerably worse for the public schools than this last year. All locals should take notice of this in their areas.

3. This experience has been a graphic confirmation of our analysis of the role of students in the class struggle. While students will suffer severely in this crisis, a heavy economic burden will fall on teachers in layoffs, paycuts and speed-ups. The students in San Francisco were the first to respond. Most realized both their own power and also its limitations. High school students in San Francisco took the lead and played a big role in getting the unions to do as much as they did--even though that was limited.

4. This was an example of a local taking initiatives in a local struggle--responding quickly and moving the struggle in a mass action direction. The whole local was able to either help in distributing leaflets to high school activists or coming to school board meetings and having discussions with SUACers. Campus comrades were able to spend extra time helping out because of their more flexible schedules.

5. There are many features of our work in the high schools that differ from campuses. Writing has to be in a different style and high school YSAers played an important role in developing leaflets that spoke to the concerns of high school students. Spending extra time talking with students about the issues and being sensitive to the

pressures that high school students are under from school and parents is important. Many high school students are reading the same distorted history and civics books that have been used since the mid-fifties. Socialists are sometimes seen a little more suspiciously and red baiting can be a problem that has to be dealt with a great deal of patience.

6. High school students have won many rights over the past years that allow for political activities in their schools. This will vary from city to city, but locals should know what the facts are. In San Francisco students have the right to hold meetings, distribute leaflets and form political organizations. It is not necessary to be a high school student to leaflet outside or post-up inside, to talk with students and hold meetings inside the schools. This is facilitated by the fact that more and more teachers are themselves affected by the crisis.

7. The entire crisis in education has a racist dynamic in all spheres of the cutbacks. The city schools are the hardest hit and those are predominantly third world in composition in many cities including the San Francisco schools which are 70 percent non-white. San Francisco schools are considered the worst in the state. The lack of concern to do anything about this lies directly in the fact that most of the students are members of the oppressed nationalities. Teacher layoffs are from those last hired which are the young and non-white teachers. Programs cut are the cultural, athletic and bilingual programs that are to the greatest advantage of non-white students, women in sports, etc. The racist attacks on bilingual education and busing get added "justification" from the economic crisis.

8. Lastly, the key to working in the high schools in San Francisco was through laying a firm grounding in sales and campaign work throughout the year. Without that our local would have been severely limited when the cutbacks struggle broke out.

October 14, 1975