

# YSA

## DISCUSSION BULLETIN

Volume 11, No. 5  
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20 cents

**YOUNG SOCIALIST ALLIANCE**

**YSA, BOX 471, COOPER STATION, N.Y., N.Y. 10003**

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## ON MARXIST EDUCATION IN THE YSA

Submitted by Fernando Guerrero,  
Roger Filene and Dave Augustine

As the YSA goes into its eighth year of functioning as a revolutionary socialist youth group inside the strongest capitalist country in the world, it finds itself in a very favorable situation.

Today, in the midst of an ever increasing radicalization of young people, the YSA is the largest and most influential socialist youth movement in America.

The YSA and its members are in the forefront of defending the Vietnamese Revolution and of building the largest antiwar movement in the history of the United States. The YSA has defended consistently and unequivocally the right of self-determination and advocated independent political action for the Afro-American people. The effective work that the YSA has done propagandizing the accomplishments of the Cuban Revolution has done much to create interest in and support for the Cuban government and for the colonial revolution. Our consistent work in publicizing political persecution in Latin America and elsewhere has been of great service to international revolutionary socialism. Last but not least, in the last eight years our press has grown not only quantitatively but to an extent qualitatively. Today we find that the YOUNG SOCIALIST is the leading revolutionary socialist periodical for young people. The YS, along with our other press has done much to popularize socialist ideas and recruit many of the new young militants to the YSA. These are only a few of the many achievements of the YSA since our founding convention in 1960.

In the last two years alone we have doubled our membership. In the last six months we have equalled the net recruitment of the last two years, a most remarkable accomplishment. It is imperative for the YSA to continue to be actively engaged in the antiwar movement, black liberation, and all other fields of socialist activity. This to enhance the struggles against capitalism, and to recruit and educate into our movement.

In the last eight years our successes have been many and our future looks even better. When we speak of the accomplishments and projects of the YSA, one thing becomes very clear. The YSA success cannot be attributed to any one individual, or to any one group of individuals, or to fate, or to some divine force. Our success is due to the correctness of our program.

Our political program is the essence of the YSA. Our program dictates the structure of our organization (i.e. democratic centralism). Our political program also dictates the kinds of action the YSA will be involved in. The YSA does not act for the sake of action. It does not recruit for the sake of recruitment. Nor does it exist for the sake of existing. In the last analysis, the YSA program has one goal, and that is the transformation of capitalist America to socialism.

In the last analysis it is the only reason for the existence of the YSA. The main function of the YSA is to help educate and train potential communists. The political education of YSAers is the foremost task of the YSA. It is an essential part in bringing to realization a socialist America.

At the present time the radicalization of students on campuses throughout the U.S. due to the Vietnam war has enabled us to recruit on a scope never possible in the past. This new phenomena has given new impetus to the American Trotskyist movement. It has enabled our movement to expand in all areas of our work. This increased recruitment has led to a more effective intervention in the antiwar movement. It has also enabled us to expand our press and to get our ideas across to a broader section of the American left. It is without question that this new increased level of recruitment has been greatly advantageous to the YSA. However, in general, this recruitment has been on the basis of a minimal level of understanding and acceptance of our program. Furthermore this recruitment has been from a predominantly middle class milieu. Although this set of circumstances has created a much larger and more active YSA and has helped our movement tremendously, we must also be conscious that these circumstances may create certain problems for the YSA in the coming years. It is imperative that YSA discuss all aspects of the possible difficulties that may arise from recruiting on a very minimal level of our program. We must discuss locally and nationally the best methods of retaining and developing YSAers.

The bulk of the students that we have recruited have joined on the basis of their participation in the antiwar movement. This antiwar movement, however, must be recognized as a transitory phenomenon. There are innumerable possibilities as to how and when this war may end. A negotiated peace could be concluded, such as was the case in Korea, in which the United States could maintain its military bases, and political control of half of South Vietnam. The U.S. could also escalate the war by using atomic weapons against the north, and thus imposing a military settlement.

A coalition government could be arranged wherein power would remain in the hands of the Ky puppets, and in which only nominal NLF participation would be allowed. The NLF, and/or the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam which after all, both have a Stalinist leadership, (witness the new program of the NLF released late last year, calling for preservation of the property of South Vietnamese capitalists unless they openly side with the US., and for the neutralization of South Vietnam after the war--not a word about socialism in their program), could easily capitulate to American imperialism through a bureaucratic maneuver behind the backs of the fighting Vietnamese workers and peasants.

We must recognize the likelihood that any settlement of the war, other than a victory for the NLF and the withdrawal of the U.S. troops, will have a dampening effect on the entire left in

this country. Even a complete NLF victory will, of course, signify the end of this antiwar movement. What will become of the YSA when the antiwar movement, the prime area of our activity and recruitment, becomes past history? What will keep YSAers in our movement when we can no longer offer them the excitement and glamour of a mass movement. What will happen to the morale of the YSAers if the NLF is defeated either on the battlefield or at the bargaining table and the antiwar movement dissolves into various and sundry demoralized particles? Will the YSA follow the same path as the antiwar movement?

Many new recruits to the YSA see our future through rose-colored glasses. Their conclusions are strengthened by continuous reports heralding our growth in size and influence. The new YSAer has, in general terms, the following conceptions. The war in Vietnam will radicalize more and more American students. We will recruit hundreds of these to our movement. As the war continues, the U.S. economy will suffer from a continued rise in the cost of living. The rise in prices will continue to outstrip the increases in wages and the gap will widen. The union bureaucrats will refuse to fight for contracts which would maintain the workers real wages at the present level. This will bring the working class into play again as a radicalized element in society. The radicalization of the working class will take place, then, in the not too distant future. These circumstances will force the U.S. to get out of Vietnam. If this radicalization doesn't bring about the revolution, a future radicalization, brought about by another U.S. intervention against the colonial revolution such as in Latin America, will provide the impetus.

Thus the average YSA recruit, if he doesn't state it explicitly, projects in his mind a unilinear rise in the fortunes of the movement, from student radicalization, to working class radicalization, culminating in revolution, the whole process accompanied by a continuous geometric growth in the size of our organization. His anticipation is possibly correct. However there are other possibilities also.

Trotsky always remarked that as Marxists we cannot prepare for the happiest of all potentialities, but on the contrary, we must make our plans contingent on the worst conceivable circumstances.

There is a famous analogy used in our movement, comparing students to leaves on a tree and workers to branches, the point being that just as a breeze stirs the leaves first and then the branches, students who have time to intellectualize are stirred by the currents of change before the workers, and their radicalization is a sign that a deeper radicalization will follow. Unfortunately for the analogy, there is no certainty that the breeze will turn into a hurricane. The whole of the 1880's, by way of example, was taken up with the Russian Narodniks, the sons and daughters of the intelligentsia, going off to live

with the peasants who were to be the base for a possible Russian brand of agrarian socialist society. Unfortunately the breeze never became a hurricane and the last frustrated Narodniks spent their final efforts in futile terrorist tactics. By 1890, Russia's political climate was as stagnant as it had been before the advent of the Narodnik movement.

We must ask what would happen to new recruits if they discover that their rose-colored glasses have cracks, if they discover that there are not only hills, but also valleys. What will they conclude if the war ends without radicalization of the working class? We must recognize that this is an unpleasant possibility.

Consider Korea's effect on the U.S., or Algeria and Vietnam's on France. It was the ruling class of both the U.S. and France which decided to negotiate an end to those wars when they concluded that the cost of carrying them out was becoming prohibitive. They were able to sense the likelihood of domestic repercussions if they continued to wage these expensive wars, and they had enough maneuverability to forestall such a crisis.

In the Vietnam war, the U.S. capitalists could reach similar conclusions. Already businessmen for peace groups are springing up around the country, and congressional dissension is growing, two occurrences indicative of a growing rift over the war in the capitalist class. A settlement negotiated by the capitalists would practically scuttle the whole antiwar movement and nip any labor militancy in the bud. All of these possibilities of the war being ended with other than an NLF victory, plus the end of the antiwar movement which would accompany it, make it urgent that we firmly weld new YSAers to our movement so that all the adversity ahead of us on the way to a socialist America will not dislodge them. Education is the key to this process of retaining people in our movement through periods of stagnation in the mass movement, as has been historically shown.

In the early years of our movement, from 1928, when we were expelled from the Communist Party, until the Minneapolis Teamsters Strike of 1934 there were virtually no opportunities for us to intervene in the mass movement. In fact, since we still considered ourselves -- at that time we called ourselves the Communist League of America -- as a faction of the CP, and protested our expulsion, our appeal was directed exclusively to the Stalinist party, still regarded by us at that time to be the vanguard of the working class, and not to the masses. We functioned as a propaganda group appealing to the class conscious workers in the CP to reconsider the line of the Comintern which had embarked on Third Period Stalinist adventurism and continued its violent polemics against Trotskyism, unabated.



The original adherents to our movement have made possible its continuity in the U.S., the heartland of world capitalism, from the time which Cannon termed the Dog Days of the Left Opposition. They did not join our small propaganda group on the basis of activism. We couldn't offer them any. They didn't leave the CP with this in mind. As Marxists they were able to understand the objective conditions of the 1920's and 30's. Those who were interested in activism and disregarded theory, were the ones who stayed in the CP and comprised the rank and filers who carried out the Popular Front betrayal of the American labor movement in the late 1930's at the behest of "national socialists" in Moscow. The independent thinkers who questioned every decision and accepted nothing on faith, split with the Comintern line in 1928 and bucked the Stalinist tide throughout the 30's when the CP was "the thing" for radicals, as the New Left is today. It was the "Third International After Lenin" which attracted people to our movement and it was the "Third International After Lenin" which kept them loyal to it throughout the depression when the CP provided much of the leadership to the organizing drive of the CIO and had hundreds of thousands of workers and intellectuals in their milieu. The fact that our comrades valued theory as the basis for all their actions, and never engaged in unguided or misguided activity, is the reason why we have a movement in 1968, unblemished by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Purge Trials, and World War II social-chauvinism. The uncritical individuals, those who with naive faith, left theory to others, were the Joe Stalin worshippers of the 1930's and the LBJ supporters of 1964.

What realm of activity existed in the 1950's, what mass movement in which we could intervene? The ranks of all left-wing organizations were being pruned by HUAC and McCarthyite witchhunts. Older comrades have related how they would come to meetings week after week and have no one to talk to but themselves. Their isolation was complete. Not only was the labor movement quiescent, but just those movements which inspire us with hope now, and form the main arenas for our work, the student and black movements, were dormant. In the deadening, stifling atmosphere of mid-century, bourgeois America, and America in the grip of the cold war anticommunist hysteria, only those souls remained in our ranks whose commitment was grounded in something which transcended activism. Those who understood the transitional program and recognized the nature of our era as the epoch of capitalist and imperialist decay realized the temporary nature of the conservative mood of the 1950's and projected the next period of radicalization. They understood the inter-relationship of events around the world and knew that none of them take place in isolation. Because they were Marxists they could foresee the coming impact of the new Africa on the American black people. Because they were Marxists they anticipated the eventual impact on students and then workers, of America's role of international gendarme of counterrevolution. They enriched our movement with new theoretical insights. They expressed the continual solidarity of the American Trotskyist movement with the struggles of the colonial peoples then breaking out in force on three continents. They were confined to giving

the colonial peoples moral support, to applauding from the sidelines as it were, but they remained Trotskyists and insured that the chain of continuity of our movement would not be snapped. They were the ones able to withstand the isolation and the persecution. The rest left.

It goes without question that the YSA has orientated itself to American campuses throughout the country in order to recruit young student radicals. We recognize that the radicalization in the 1960's has so far not extended to the broad layers of the American working class. It has, however, radicalized students, by way of such issues as the Cuban Revolution, the black struggle, and most especially the Vietnam war. Therefore, we have made a conscious turn in the direction of the recruiting radical middle class students. We have tried to recruit the most dedicated of these student activists in order to educate them in our theories and program and train them in our activities. Our task in the last analysis is to build revolutionary cadres that will be able to effectively intervene in the working class radicalization. This is our main reason for being on campus. We aren't on campus simply because of the amount of activity to be found there. There is a good amount of activity in the Peace and Freedom Party campaign but we aren't participating. Our campus orientation and activities flow from our program and vice versa.

Certainly the YSA has not played a leading role in the antiwar movement simply because it has mass support. We didn't support the King-Spock ticket, even though it was antiwar and had a mass movement behind it. Our political program lays out the ground work for our participation in the antiwar movement. Today we are building a single issue antiwar coalition held together by periodic mass demonstrations in the streets and based on non-exclusion. Our political program and experiences have shown that this is the only effective way to build a viable objectively anti-imperialist movement of protest against the war without allowing it to be channeled into electoral politics. These are our foremost political tasks within the antiwar movement. Our activities in this area of work, as in all others, flow from our political program. Though this seems a basic point, it must be constantly reiterated and stressed.

Our political program allows us to perceive reality as it really exists. It allows us to view and analyze different movements and tendencies within capitalist society. This is why it was not an accident that we were the first socialist organization to recognize the revolutionary potential of the Black Muslims and to foresee the development of Malcolm X, their most effective spokesman. It was not chance that enabled us to cooperate with Malcolm X and his Organization of Afro-American Unity during his lifetime, while all other radical tendencies must be content with praising him after his death. We supported the right of black people to self-determination in the 1930's. Most



other leftists had to be caught up in the dynamics of the black power movement to understand the progressive nature of black nationalism.

Many of those who support black power and black nationalism have no precise definition of these terms and therefore no yardstick to evaluate what constitutes black power. When someone asks us if Carl Stokes, black Democratic mayor of Cleveland is an example of black power, we can explain to him that a black man heading up the white capitalist administration of Cleveland is no more an example of black power than Ky, heading up the south Vietnamese government is an example of Vietnamese power. We can say this because we do have a definition of black power and can explain how to achieve it politically. All our activity in the black liberation struggle flows from our program going back to Lenin's "Right of Nations to Self-Determination," and Trotsky's discussion on the right of self-determination of black people in the U.S. in the 1930's.

We must assimilate the basic point on the relationship between program and activism, and the necessity for learning our program thoroughly. This point is crucial because we have to always be conscious of the class basis of the YSA, that being predominantly middle class students.

The YSA must be very conscious of its social base and must recognize the difficulties that this presents to it. As Marxists we are aware that in the last analysis it is not a person's background that will determine his contribution to revolutionary socialism, but rather his political perspective. How one attains his political perspective is what is at stake. Lenin said that "consciousness is derived from being."

Obviously the truth of the axiom of Lenin's creates a certain obstacle in our political development. Students, to begin assimilating revolutionary socialist ideas and to start the long process of proletarianization must begin on educational basis. Students cannot develop revolutionary socialist consciousness through empirical experiences, like the working class. Students do not experience the every day antagonisms between workers and bosses. Students will not have to bear the brunt of the economic contradiction of capitalism. Students in the last analysis can only recognize class struggle and the economic contradictions of capitalism on an intellectual basis. This is not to say that student socialists cannot develop a working class perspective. nor become an integral part of the working class movement. But middle class students will never go over to the working class on the basis of the consciousness of their environment. Their initial step towards the working class will come from studying, learning, and applying the politics and dynamics of the working class movement.

This is not an appeal for us to become armchair revolutionaries. Theory is useless if it is not implemented. There is no such thing as a Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist who doesn't implement his ideas. Nor is it acceptable to have YSAers be all activity

and no theory or be all theory and no activity: It is not acceptable to have some YSAers be theoretical and some just activists. The YSA does not accept the principle of activity for the sake of activity, and it does not accept the principle of theory for the sake of theory. These two principles by themselves are useless to us but together they make the YSA what it is today and what we hope it will be tomorrow.

In the last few years the YSA has made a very conscious effort in recruiting students from college campuses on the basis of the most minimal understanding and acceptance of our program. This has been a correct and highly effective recruiting policy. Witness our work in the antiwar movement and the Afro-American struggle. With the conscious effort of broadening our recruiting, we are also consciously broadening and stressing our educational program, which are essential for the coming political period.

In the last analysis, education is the most important aspect of the YSA. Education is fundamental in retaining and developing YSAers. You cannot, as history has shown, retain and develop socialists on the basis of activities. Political education is essential. Furthermore, how effective our participation in the antiwar movement and our other areas of work is, will depend largely on the political understanding of our program by the YSAers involved in these movements.

When we speak of political education we do not mean necessarily the reading of Das Kapital or Lenin's Collected Works. Political education in the YSA has two phases. The obvious one is learning our politics and our program, and being able to articulate them as well as possible. The second phase is the practical aspect of education. Our work in the antiwar movement and in other areas must be consciously approached as an educational process as well as a political task of building an anti-imperialist mass movement. Our work in the antiwar movement and in other areas are giving YSAers practical experience in working in a mass movement and developing their leadership capabilities and learning how to work as a disciplined member of a political organization. We must recognize the fact that when the objective conditions change and make it feasible for us to intervene on the behalf of the working class movement, we cannot assume that we will be able to exert our leadership immediately. We will not become leaders of the working class because of our leadership role in the antiwar movement. We will have to earn the right and respect of the working class in order to influence them with our ideas. Our work now is giving us the experience in order to influence them with our ideas. Our work now is giving us the experience and developing the talents that will help us earn that respect and leadership role from the working class.

We in the YSA must recognize that you cannot force people into internal educational classes nor in the last analysis make them learn our program. But we must be conscious of creating a tone, or if you will, an atmosphere in the YSA that will convey the seriousness and high priority that education has in our

organization.

Older comrades in the YSA must continue to make new YSAers, through their example, recognize the necessity for learning Marxism. We want YSAers to be disciplined to study on their own time in addition to participating in classes, but this must be an internal discipline within each YSAer. We don't have state power. We are a voluntary organization with no bosses, and no cops standing over our people to punish them if they err, and after we take state power we want to abolish just these oppressors forever. We must instill in younger comrades a pride in our Trotskyist movement. This pride can come only from thorough knowledge of and exposure to Marxist education. Only in this way can we insure the continuity of the Trotskyist movement whether the next historical period be one of working class radicalization or one of continued working class quiescence.

Our internal classes should never be considered the most expendable part of the week's agenda, but a part around which the rest of the week's events are built. New comrades should be expected to read assignments for these classes and to attend them regularly. A class shouldn't be the event one goes to if no other activity is scheduled, but an activity at which it is essential to be present unless one has a very good excuse. This is how we treat YSA meetings. If new YSAers are expected to sit through YSA business meetings which can be very tedious, they can certainly be expected to attend internal classes regularly.

Assignments to these classes should be taken at least as seriously as assignments to the various fractions. The best educators in the movement should consider it their duty to teach these classes. Younger comrades should partake of the accumulated wisdom of older party comrades who have come to us, by and large, from the trade union battles of the past. In addition to their experiences gained through years in the movement, they can give new YSAers a feel for what the working class in motion is like, and a feeling for the working class traditions of our movement.

In light of the period we are in, it would be advantageous to have a panel on education at the National Convention in February to go along with the customary panel on recruitment. The report on educational activities in locals around the country which the NEC is putting out this year should become a yearly tradition in our movement.

The YSA will continue to show quantitative growth in the months ahead as antiwar sentiment deepens. Let us work hard to insure a qualitative growth to go with it.

A PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Submitted by Milton Chee and  
Steve Meisenbach,  
January 23, 1968

Article V, section 3, states as follows: "The National Convention shall be called by the National Committee which shall provide for a pre-convention discussion period of at least 90 days." (Emphasis added)

The convention call issued for this, the seventh annual convention of the YSA, was dated November 27, 1967. The first discussion bulletin issued by the NEC, the political resolution, was dated December 12, 1967. From the date of the call to February 9, 1968, the beginning date of the convention, totals 84 days.

If the pre-convention discussion period is considered to be the period between issuance of the convention call and the beginning of the convention, then the NEC provided for a period of six days short of the constitutional minimum; a technical violation, but not a gross one. If, however, the pre-convention discussion period is more realistically defined as the period between the issuance of the first document by the NEC, then we have been provided with a period of fewer than 59 days.

The NEC has committed a dangerous violation of the constitution. Our protest is not over a mere formality. We object to a dearly dangerous and potentially disastrous violation of democratic procedure. The shortened pre-convention discussion period we have had has made impossible a full discussion in all locals of the documents submitted thus far.

The purpose of the pre-convention discussion is to clarify and crystallize thinking, questions, alternative proposals, and/or objections to the line proposed by the NEC. This purpose has been negated by the inadequate and unconstitutional pre-convention period allotted by the NEC.

New comrades should and must have the opportunity to participate in a full and complete pre-convention discussion in each local, an indispensable part of their education and the education of all of us. Only through such full discussion--an essential part of democratic centralism--can they clarify such questions as they may have, gain a fuller appreciation of our politics, and contribute to the discussion.

Therefore, we call upon the seventh annual convention of the YSA to repudiate and renounce this inexcusable violation of the minimum 90-day pre-convention discussion required by our constitution.

We further call upon the convention to amend the YSA Constitution, Article V, section 3, to read as follows:  
"The National Convention shall be called by the National Committee which shall provide for a pre-convention discussion period of at least 90 days, which is defined to be the period between the issuance of the first pre-convention discussion document and the first day of the convention."