

"Party Must Become Youth-Minded, Wrest Youth From Fascist Influence"

Young Workers Will Not Come to Us Spontaneously, Says Party Leader; We Must Mobilize Their Militancy to Revolutionary Ends

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

It so happens that I am able to contribute only one article to the Party discussion and I am selecting the youth question to write upon. There are many fundamental phases of the Party work that I would like to discuss, but perhaps none in the pre-convention discussion will receive less attention than that of organizing the working youth. So this article may not be amiss.

The youth question has, especially since the sharpening of the crisis, become so important that our Party must give it the very closest and most energetic treatment. And, as the crisis deepens this importance grows greater and greater. The more militant forms the class struggle takes the more decisive the role of the working youth.

Capitalism all over the world, seeking a way out of the devastating crisis, develops towards two great objectives—fascism and war. In its plans for the accomplishment of these aims the youth plays a central role. The storm troops of fascism are based upon the youth, and it is the youth especially that will be called upon to fight the approaching imperialist war. Of course, capitalism tries to corrupt with its plans the working class and petty-bourgeois masses generally, of all ages, but it devotes special and energetic attention to the youth.

This is true of the United States as well as other capitalist countries. It would be idle to cite once more the tremendous efforts the capitalists here are making to fascize and militarize the youth, especially the proletarians. In all this the government, national and local, takes the lead. The C. C. C. camps and other phases of the "relief" work are gigantic militarization schemes. Likewise the huge patriotic organizations—Y. M. C. A., Y. M. H. A., Boy Scouts, etc.—are no whit behind in these ever increasing fascist and militarist activities. The more avowedly fascist organizations, such as the Silver Shirts, Khaki Shirts, etc., with liberal support from bourgeois sources are characteristically devoting their chief attention to winning the youth. Nor does the "third party of the bourgeoisie," the Socialist Party, fail to put more and more stress on the youth. A striking manifestation of the capitalist determination to capture the youth is to be seen in the vicious campaign now being carried on in the Hearst papers against the Young Communist League and National Student League, whose activities, limited though they are, the American imperialists greatly fear as a deadly obstacle in the way of their winning the youth.

The Danger of Fascism

Now the most dangerous element in the whole situation is the manifest susceptibility of the youth to this fascist, militarist campaign. The Central Committee draft convention resolution correctly says: "Especially hard hit as a result of the crisis is the youth of the working class, farmer and middle class." Few will dispute this statement in view of the huge numbers of working class youth cast into unemployment, hobodom and destitution by graduating from the schools and by being thrown out of the industries. The young toilers of the cities and farms, entering into manhood, are denied the right to earn a living and to satisfy their natural instincts to establish a family.

The youth are greatly discontented at all this. They want to fight for better conditions. But it is exactly in this militancy of theirs that we face both a great opportunity and a great danger. If we are intelligent and militant enough we can organize and lead, for revolutionary ends, the discontented toiling youth. But if we are not we may be sure that the fascists will mobilize the youth for fascism, war and counter-revolutionary ends generally. The struggle to win the working class and farmer youth is one of the most acute phases of the general struggle between the capitalists and our Party to win the masses.

In Italy and Germany, the fascists doubtless have had much success in winning the youth, not only of the city petty-bourgeoisie, but also, to a considerable extent, of the working class and farmers. But it would be a grave mistake to conclude there from that somehow or other, the youth are fascistically inclined. All we have to do to contradict such a notion is to look about us. Signs multiply of the naturally revolutionary tendencies of these young toilers. Among such are their increased and often leading activities in industrial strikes, farmers' struggles and unemployed fights. And in every college and university in the country there is a growing radical sentiment among the students. Spreading discontent, growing class consciousness, increasing political activity, are characteristic of the proletarian and farmer youth in every place where they are to be found.

Youth Will Not Come Spontaneously to Us

But let me repeat: all these outbreaks of radicalism and militancy are by no means guarantees that the youth will spontaneously and automatically gravitate to class consciousness and the Communist Party leadership. We can win the youth only by the most relentless struggle for them against our fascist and social-fascist enemies. And if we fail to carry on such a struggle the youth, inexperienced in the class struggle and still poisoned by the capitalist school system, will fall victims in large numbers to fascist demagoguery. This would mean that instead of being the most militant revolutionary fighters in the great strikes and revolutionary up-



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heavals of the near future, they would become a deadly capitalist force against the working class in these struggles.

Our Party's immediate task is to win the most decisive strata of the workers in the basic industries. And in every phase of this work the question of the youth becomes more and more important. For example, in the trade union field: In the building of mass trade unions, due to the fact that the A. F. of L. is so weak and there are no solidly established union cadres of middle aged workers, there is no capitalist country in the world where youth play such a role as in the United States. In the unemployed work pretty much the same condition prevails—the youth are natural leaders. In Negro work, the youth are a most vital factor and also in anti-war activities; the youth are the natural link between the native and foreign-born workers, etc. In short, in the task of mobilizing the great masses of the workers the organization of the youth is of fundamental importance. We cannot successfully fight against fascism and war in which the capitalists make such strategic use of the youth, unless we win this very youth ourselves.

Has the Party Made a Determined Effort To Win the Youth?

Considering the great importance of the young workers, both from the standpoint of their great effectiveness as fighters in the revolutionary army of labor, and also from the standpoint of the danger of their falling under fascist and social-fascist leadership, can it be said that our Party and the revolutionary organizations behind it have made a determined effort to organize the working class youth? Unfortunately, the answer to this question must be a categorical NO! For proof of this, all we have to do is to consider the weakness of the Young Communist League, which is only one-fourth the size of the Party, and the fragmentary character of youth organizations and activities in the T. U. U. L. unions and other left wing bodies.

Our youth activities are manifestly inadequate. They, in no way, correspond to the possibilities before us to organize the youth. Consequently, our forces generally are being largely denied the splendid fighting spirit, tirelessness and enthusiasm of the youth, while at the same time we run the serious danger of seeing these vital forces fall under the leadership of the capitalist army. The Y. C. L. is only a fraction of the size and strength it could and should be; our youth activities represent only a shadow of our possibilities.

The chief causes for the weakness of our youth work may be briefly summed up as follows:

Our Weakness in Youth Work Our Tasks

1. A widespread and stubborn underestimation of the role of the

youth in the economic and political struggle. This underestimation manifests itself in many ways, among them the chronic and inexcusable neglect in very many instances to give life to the slogan that for every Party nucleus there shall be a Y. C. L. nucleus; the general failure to pay attention to youth activities in our trade unions and other organizations, etc. It is characteristic that in the first dozen articles of the Party convention discussion that I have read, practically no mention whatever is made of the youth question, in spite of the manifest appreciation in all capitalist circles of the importance of this question.

2. Flowing out this underestimation of the role of the youth there is naturally a failure to develop and apply the special methods of propaganda and organization necessary to organize the youth. Usually, the working class is just considered as workers in general, although the Comintern correctly considers the problems of the youth so specific that it has created an international organization and an elaborate program with which to handle them.

3. Departmentalization of the youth question: This means the relegation of the youth question simply to the Y. C. L., instead of considering it as it is, a major Party question in which every Party unit as well as the Y. C. L. should vitally concern itself. This disastrous tendency practically liquidates youth work in many Party organs.

4. Sectarianism in the Y. C. L.: This is a deep-rooted tendency in the Y. C. L. to consider its problems in an abstract and formal manner and to make the Y. C. L. a youth duplicate of the Party instead of a broad mass organization. This bad tendency partly originates in the inexperience of young workers in the class struggle, but its main source arises from the tendency in the Party to relegate the whole youth question to the Y. C. L. and thus to isolate it from the general struggles of the Party.

These wrong tendencies must be liquidated before serious work among the working class and farmer youth can be accomplished. The Party must be educated as to the true role of the youth in the class struggle in this period of developing fascism, war and proletarian revolution. As headway is made in this work, then the question of methods of youth work will take on a live interest in the Party and Y. C. L. and some real progress will be made in applying C. I. and Y. C. I. decisions on these matters. The Party will then be brought to a fuller realization that the organization of the youth is a major Party task, just as much as the building of the trade unions, the organization of the Negroes, etc., and that it is not simply the job of the Y. C. L. Then also the Party will keep the youth question to the fore in all its mass activities. With this as a fact, I am convinced that much of the sectarianism of the Y. C. L. will disappear and it will swiftly branch out into a wide organization of the youth and become a powerful contingent in the revolutionary forces led by the Communist Party.

I am glad the question of the youth is one of the orders of business at the coming Party convention. And I hope that advantage will be taken of the occasion to develop, for the first time in our Party conventions, a fundamental discussion of the youth question and the development of a comprehensive program of youth activities for the whole Party and all the revolutionary organizations that follow its political leadership. We must pay more attention to the young workers. We must quadruple our efforts to win the working youth. Our Party must become youth conscious, youth-minded. Then our progress will be greatly hastened for the winning of the broad decisive masses of the working class.

We Must Increase Our Work in the 21 Railway Unions

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ganized workers to do, infuriates many party members. Instead of placing the blame on themselves in remaining for so long outside these unions, in failing to fight side by side with the members of these unions against the roads and the union officials, in neglecting to have established unity between the rank and file in the 21 crafts, they continue to tilt at windmills because events have found them isolated and the workers leaderless.

Yes, events have found us unprepared! We have neglected to build organizations in the railroad unions. We are still talking in many important railway centers about building new unions. Many leading comrades do not know that the National Railroad Industrial League ceased to exist over a year ago . . . it ceased to function long before that. Many of us still confuse in our own minds and therefore in the minds of the workers with whom we have continued the question of the leadership of the right wing unions with the functions of these unions.

If we have no confidence in the membership of the existing unions, if we do not see that it is possible for the rank and file to force action within these unions, if we are unwilling to take the trouble to work in these unions and establish left wing leadership over these organizations to which almost half a

million workers are affiliated, how can we expect to sweep a hundred thousand scattered shop forces out of the company unions and organize the unorganized on every road into some magic union which can defy the terror of the railroads and the inroads of the A. F. of L. apparatus with organizers already in the field, funds for membership drives and the agreement for every craft?

The task of organizing class conscious fighting groups of railroad workers inside the existing unions, among the unorganized and even in the company unions is a difficult, slow and perhaps discouraging task. We have hardly made a beginning of building Party nuclei on the railroads. But this work can and must be done. The organization of unions is a serious business. We have learned this in our work among the coal miners, among the New York furriers where we already had a strong militant organized union under our leadership. The railroad workers have been confused long enough with mechanical amalgamation schemes, and dual industrial leagues. A new industrial railroad union will and must be built, but it will grow out of the fire of actual struggle in the shops, in the yards and around the grievances of the members in the existing unions. The groups which are formed today in the fight against the wage cut, to maintain conditions on the job and win unemployment insurance, must be extended and united for this task