

'WE ARE A PARTY OF YOUTH'--LENIN

"We Need Special Program for Youth," National Secretary of Y.C.L. Declares

By GIL GREEN

IN 1906, when Larin (at that time a Menshevik) attacked the Bolsheviks for bringing into the revolutionary movement wide masses of youth and receiving support from these youth, he received the following reply from Lenin:

"Larin complains, for example, that there is a prevalence of working youth in the Party, that there are few married workers in our ranks, that they leave the Party. This complaint of a Russian opportunist reminded me of one place in Engels (I think it was in the 'Housing Question'). In refuting some disgusting bourgeois professor Engels wrote:

"Is it not natural that youth form the majority of our ranks, in the Party of the revolution? We are the Party of the future, and the future belongs to the youth. We are a Party of innovators most willingly. We are a Party of self-sacrificing struggle against the old rotten system, and it is the youth above all who enter into self-sacrificing struggles."

Lenin never tired to emphasize the importance of the youth, realizing that from the ranks of the youth, especially the working youth, the Party could get its greatest support and most active fighting forces. In the days before 1905 Lenin, witnessing the rapid growth of the revolutionary upsurge, especially emphasized the need for improving the work among the youth. He appealed to the active leading people of the Party in the following words:

"I assure you that among us there is some kind of idiotic, philistine, boorish fear of the youth. I beg of you to fight against this fear with all your strength."

And further:

"Wider and more boldly, more boldly and wider, still wider and still more boldly recruit the youth, not fearing them. These are war times. The youth decide the outcome of the struggle, both the student youth and still more the working youth."

Some thirty years have passed since Lenin gave these words of advice to his Party. They were well taken. For seventeen years now the Party of Lenin has been the Party of the victorious Russian Revolution. From stage to stage of the struggle for power and for socialism the Bolshevik Party remembered and followed the teachings of Lenin. And today more than ever before the Bolshevik Party of Lenin, under the leadership of Stalin, receives the support of the entire Soviet young generation—a generation which participates enthusiastically in the fulfillment of the words of Engels, "We are the Party of the future, and the future belongs to the youth."

Applies in U. S.

In the United States, we must also learn and apply the teachings of Lenin on the youth, if we are to follow the footsteps of the Bolshevik Party. The words of Lenin in 1905-06 have special bearing for our Party today as by no means have we as yet "a prevalence of working youth in the Party." While we have made considerable headway in the past year in building the Young Communist League and improving our mass work among the youth, this field of work still remains extremely weak.

We, too, have in our ranks some who have an "idiotic, philistine, boorish fear of the youth." Although we do not have any Larins who openly speak against work among the youth, we have these same views and fears expressed in a more cloaked fashion. This cloaked underestimation of the youth question is reflected throughout our Party in the tendency to believe that work among the youth is no different than work among adult workers, it does not require special activities, special demands and special organizational forms.

This tendency, of course, finds its sharpest expression in an underestimation of the importance and role of the Young Communist League. What is the root of this

tendency? In an article written in December, 1916, Lenin answers this very question. Lenin said:

"Frequently representatives of the generation of the middle aged and old do not know properly how to approach the youth, who of necessity are compelled to approach socialism by a different path and not in the same form and the same conditions as their fathers."

How important is a full understanding of these words of Lenin today! Do we not also have representatives of the middle aged and old who do not know how to approach the youth because they come to Communism under other conditions?

Especially is this true of the United States. Here, we not alone have the general problem as stated by Lenin, but the additional fact that a large portion of the adult working class population are foreign born workers. These foreign born workers, especially, find it difficult to understand the youth of today. In most cases these adult workers went to work at nine and ten years of age. They did not go through an intensive school system which feeds the youth the special American brand of patriotism and chauvinism. They were not influenced by the powerful American organizations built by the ruling class for winning the youth—the "Y," Settlement Houses, etc. They, as youths, in the main did not go through a long period of unemployment, etc., etc. In other words these workers cannot understand the American youth because they grew up under entirely different conditions. It is not surprising then that they brand youth as frivolous and irresponsible. They cannot or will not see the growing radicalization among youth—their tremendous revolutionary potentialities.

Must React to Problems

This, in the main, is the reason why often good revolutionary workers find it impossible or difficult to win their own sons and daughters for the revolutionary movement.

If we connect this correct observation with the fact that our Party, despite its progress is still greatly a Party of foreign born workers, we can better understand why it has been especially difficult to win the whole Party for a correct understanding of youth work. But this makes it all the more necessary for our Party to learn how to approach the masses of youth on their own ground. We must react to the special demands of the youth and must give them such organizational forms as will permit them to develop their initiative to the fullest extent.

Lenin, in the same article written in 1916, says on this point:

"For that reason (the reason that youth must travel to Communism under different conditions than their parents.—G. G.), we must unconditionally support the organizational independence of the youth leagues, not merely because the opportunists are afraid of this independence, but because it is necessary in itself; for without complete independence the youth will be unable to train themselves into good socialists, or train themselves for the purpose of carrying socialism further."

This is why we need a Young Communist League and a special program for the youth. This is why we favor the building of youth sections in unions and mass organizations. We favor these, not because we want to divide the youth from the adult workers, as say some comrades, but because we want the youth who are coming to Communism "not in the same form and the same conditions as their fathers," to have the opportunity to discuss their own problems, formulate their demands, organize their own activities and in this way break down the artificial barriers between the old and new generations of the working class.

The enemies of our Party try to utilize the special conditions and problems of youth to divide them from their class. We must utilize these to tie them to their class.