

Towards Youth Unity

By GIL GREEN

SIX months have passed since the January Conference of the Young Communist League worked out a policy for building a united youth organization to include in its ranks not only Communist, but also Socialist and non-party youth. It is now necessary to evaluate the developments and experiences of the past half year and on the basis of these to concretize further this policy and intensify the work for its realization.

In order to do this, let us briefly re-establish the general approach adopted at the time of the January Conference. The National Committee pointed out that such a united organization would be an outgrowth of activities simultaneously conducted along three specific fronts. This was stated as follows:

"If throughout the country we can broaden and enlarge our Young Communist League, if around our Y.C.L. we can build hundreds of youth clubs and organizations of a non-party character, if at the same time we can improve our relations with the Young Socialists and gradually convince them of the need for organic unity, then, in the near future, these three channels will merge into one mighty stream."

This statement being applicable to the Y.C.L.'s of nearly all capitalist countries, the National Committee therefore made a number of other observations based on the special conditions in this country which are different from those in Europe.

In the first place, in most European countries the level of class consciousness is higher and the extent of working class political organization is far greater than in the United States. Secondly, the Socialist Youth Leagues in Europe are in most cases large organizations with great influence among decisive sections of young people.

The problem of building united youth organizations in Europe, therefore, hinges in most countries first and foremost on the question of achieving organic unity between the Communist and Socialist youth organizations. Such unity does not in itself end the process of development of these organizations, but is its first and most important prerequisite.

Let us take Spain as an example. The Socialist and Communist youth organizations decided to merge. They then followed this up by making concerted efforts towards winning Syndicalist and other

youth for the united organization. That they have been quite successful can be seen by the fact that while prior to merging both organizations had a combined membership of about 50,000, two months later the united organization already had 150,000 members.

In the United States, however, the Young People's Socialist League is a small organization, far weaker than even the Young Communist League. The unification of the Y.P.S.L. and Y.C.L. would not by itself lay the foundation for the mass youth organization necessary in this country, although it certainly would be a great step forward and an important incentive in that direction.

Taking these facts into consideration, the January Conference stated the following: We desire and hope to achieve organic unity with the Y.P.S.L. as soon as possible so that our united forces can proceed to reach and win the large masses of Leftward-moving youth who are as yet not identified with either the Socialist or Communist organizations. However, we at the same time recognize that in this country the problem of building a united youth organization does not hinge solely or even primarily on the question of uniting the Y.P.S.L. and Y.C.L.

This is how we posed the question at the January Conference. We were extremely careful not to work out any preconceived pattern. In fact, we stated that we "strongly warn against any attempts to work out a blueprint for this process". We did not wish to close the door to any unforeseen developments. It was not yet possible to determine definitely whether organic unity between the Y.C.L. and Y.P.S.L. would be the first stage in the development of the mass youth organization, or whether the crystallization of unity among large masses of non-party youth would take place first.

We knew that the answer to this question as well as to that of the specific content, form and structure of the united organization could only arise in the course of daily struggles and as a result of practical experience. For this reason we urged the greatest flexibility in approach. While making every possible effort to bring about the unification of the Socialist and Communist youth organizations, we at the same time urged the utilization of a variety of forms and methods in organizing and uniting the masses of Leftward-moving, but politically unaffiliated young people, at the same time we urged the broadening and building of the Y.C.L. itself.

Looking back at the decisions of the January Conference, we can say that in the main they were correct. Today, however, these conclusions and decisions no longer suffice. It is necessary to concretize them, to put them in line with new developments and to thus indicate more clearly the course ahead.

First of all, we can speak more definitely regarding the perspective of organic unity between the Y.P.S.L. and the Y.C.L. We must say quite frankly that our Leagues are not to any considerable degree closer today than they were six months ago. It is true that there have been certain positive developments but on the whole these have been offset by negative ones. The positive developments are to be seen in the successful merger of the Socialist- and Communist-led student organizations and in an increase of united front actions on such issues as the American Youth Act, the fight for peace, Angelo Herndon, Spain, etc.

The negative side of the picture is to be seen in the entrance of the Trotskyists into the Y.P.S.L. and the effect of their counter-revolutionary doctrines on the policy and practice of the Y.P.S.L. This has been expressed in an increase of provocative statements about the Soviet Union and the Communist International, and in the adoption of a more narrow sectarian policy towards the mass movement in this country, in some cases even bordering on a policy of disruption—as expressed by the activities of the Y.P.S.L. at the Third American Youth Congress.

What conclusions can we draw from these facts? Certainly it would be wrong to draw the conclusion that organic unity is impossible of achievement. But it would be just as wrong to delude ourselves into believing that such a merger is just around the corner. It will take some time for the Y.P.S.L. membership to recognize and overcome the deadly Trotskyite poison circulating within the veins of their organization.

In Spain and France the Socialist Youth Leagues went through similar developments. However, because they were healthy proletarian organizations, they succeeded in ousting the Trotskyist disrupters. It is our task to help in every way to bring about the same results in this country. This can be done by developing close comradely relations with all honest Socialist youth, by organizing united actions with them on specific issues and by intensifying our ideological struggle against Trotskyism and the narrow sectarian policies of the Y.P.S.L. leadership. Within the ranks of the Y.P.S.L. one can already see a growing feeling of disgust toward the Trotskyites and of opposition toward the suicidal policies of the Y.P.S.L. leadership. Until the outcome of this struggle, organic unity is not an immediate perspective.

How do we stand in regard to the task of building and broadening the Y.C.L.? While we have accumulated certain positive experiences which have resulted in a growth of the organization, we must admit that on this score also we have hardly begun. The best ex-

periences and the greatest steps taken in the building of the Y.C.L. were recorded in the State of New York where our League has grown to an organization of some 6,000 members. In most other states the League has no such progress to record.

Although the growth and development of the League nationally are quite uneven, it is possible to draw certain lessons from the first six months of work which are applicable nationally. First, we can say that the branch form of organization has proven itself far superior to the former small units. However, this was true only where the leading committees gave proper guidance to the branches and helped them organize both their mass work and inner life. In such cases a rapid growth was noticeable. Where such leadership was lacking the branches with their larger membership led only to greater looseness, sometimes to disorganization and sometimes even to loss of membership. Thus the central question for the branches is that of guaranteeing capable guidance and leadership for each one.

In broadening out the work of the League we must also warn against a one-sided approach. Certain comrades see the broadening of the Y.C.L. only as a problem of improving the lighter forms of activity—educational meetings, sports, socials, etc. The result of such a one-sided policy is the weakening of the mass work of the Y.C.L. in a number of places which can only result in a weakening of the Y.C.L. itself. This is true, for example, of Los Angeles. Thus we can note in a number of places a weakening of shop and trade union work, less emphasis on the struggle for Negro rights and less struggle for the immediate issues of the youth in every neighborhood.

This must be corrected if the League is to grow as the class organization of the youth. It is also necessary to say that the educational system throughout the League is still extremely weak and does not correspond with the demand for Marxist-Leninist education on the part of the membership.

The major reason for the slowness of Y.C.L. growth is the lack of attention being given by the leadership to the problems of the League at the bottom, to the functioning of the branches and to the education and training of the membership. In many Districts there is not even a conscious line towards mass recruitment.

However, this question leads to another point of great importance, a point of equal importance to that of broadening the Y.C.L. itself. While building and broadening the Y.C.L., we still face the problem of bringing together and organizing those sections of non-party youth who want a class youth organization, but who are not ready and will not join the Y.C.L.

What have been the developments among the masses of non-

party youth? These have been determined by the fact that we have entered a period of intense political ferment leading to fundamental political realignments. Large masses of people are breaking away from old political moorings and searching for and finding new ones. In the ranks of the toilers this is expressed by the growing desire for independent political action. Labor's Non-Partisan League nationally and the American Labor Party in the State of New York, are the beginnings of a breakaway by organized labor from the traditional A. F. of L. policy of so-called political neutrality. These are steps in the direction of independent political action even though hesitant and confused ones. In a number of states and localities real Farmer-Labor Parties have entered the field and a national advisory committee has been established to survey the possibilities for a national party.

At the same time the reactionary forces who have united their ranks to put over the candidacy of Landon are paying considerable attention to winning the support of young people. Not only are the channels of the Republican Party being used for this purpose, but under the inspiration of the Liberty League and Hearst the unholy trinity of Coughlin, Lemke and Gerald K. Smith is trying to ensnare the masses of youth, who are disillusioned with the two old parties, through the reactionary, semi-fascist organization of the Union Party. Smith, the self-appointed heir to the throne of Huey Long, went so far as to announce to the Townsend national convention his intentions of organizing one hundred thousand "physically fit young men" into special storm troops to fight Communism.

In this situation we must realize that the task of organizing the large masses of Leftward-moving but politically unaffiliated youth is of even greater importance than at the time of the January Conference. It is now clear that this is the main channel through which to create a strong, firm foundation for a mass youth organization. Not to see this means to leave the masses of youth who are becoming politically conscious and active but who are not yet ready to support either the Communist or Socialist Parties to the tender mercies of the reactionary demagogues.

How can we best organize the millions of youth? At the time of the January Conference we called for a variety of forms and methods. We asked our comrades in every part of the country to study carefully local developments in order to find the specific forms to be used for organizing the non-party youth. At the same time we gave a few illustrations of how to apply this policy. We pointed out to our League in Minnesota that in that state our policy implied the building and transformation of the Junior Farmer-Labor Association.

In the South we discussed with our comrades the need for building a national liberation organization among the Negro youth. For California we stressed the need for reaching the youth in and around the Townsend, Epic and Utopian movements.

The result of this flexible policy was the creation of many new clubs and organizations of youth around working class programs and the strengthening of existing organizations of a progressive anti-fascist character. While the same flexible policy must apply for the future, it is possible at this time on the basis of the experiences of the past six months to indicate the link which must be used nationally in order to create the type of organization necessary in this country for the defense of the immediate interests of the youth and for their education and training in the class struggle.

This link is the movement for independent action—the movement for a Farmer-Labor Party.

Why is this so? Because the masses of toilers who are moving away from the ideology of capitalism—from the ideology of class collaboration—are breaking away from the two parties of capitalism to which they have been traditionally bound. This is the link which we must grasp because the creation of a mass Farmer-Labor Party is absolutely essential if fascism is to be defeated. The creation of this party on a national scale will mark a decisive turning point in the life of labor and the whole American people. It will mark the dawn of the new period of political awakening and growing class consciousness. For these reasons, any broad youth organization which expects to base itself on the masses of Leftward-moving youth can under present-day conditions best be built through the stream of the developing Farmer-Labor movement.

This conclusion is borne out by experience. Let us glance over the country and see what is taking place in those regions where progressive third party movements have been developing. In Minnesota a Junior Farmer-Labor Association has existed for some time and has grown in the past months. The Washington Commonwealth Federation, which is that states' step to the Farmer-Labor Party, organized a youth section in April, which has more than 500 members already and expects to have at least 6,000 by the time of its first convention in September. In North Dakota the Non-Partisan League is building its own junior organization. In Wisconsin the newly organized Farmer-Labor Progressive Federation has discussed the matter of a youth organization. There are similar developments in many local and regional Labor Party movements.

These are not isolated examples. They prove that as the Farmer-Labor Party movement develops and grows it of necessity is faced

with the problem of organizing and winning the youth. It is only logical to believe that when these scattered third party movements come together to form a national Farmer-Labor Party they will be faced with the problem of building a nation-wide youth organization.

This conclusion has great practical significance for the work of our Party and League. It means that far more attention must be given to developing mass agitation for a Farmer-Labor movement among young people. It means that we must use every local development in this direction for the organization of larger masses of youth. It means that we must convince every local Labor Party movement of the need for building youth clubs and if possible a separate youth organization in support of its platform and candidates. It means that we must call to the attention of these local parties the need for putting forth special demands which meet the needs of the youth. It means that these local parties must nominate young people as candidates.

The acceptance of this policy greatly changes the content of our agitation for a united youth organization. Instead of basing our appeal on the abstract need for a united organization, our starting point becomes the burning needs of the masses of youth. We must explain how such an organization will help defeat reaction, help improve their immediate lot and help educate them in the struggle for a new society.

We must make clear that such an organization will be "non-party" in the sense that we use that term to mean either control by the Socialist or Communist Party. It will definitely be political and "party" in the sense that it will openly support the Farmer-Labor Party.

If a Farmer-Labor youth organization is established, will there be any need for the American Youth Congress, some comrades may ask. This question can also be answered by citing our experiences. In Minnesota such an organization already exists but it does not replace the need for a movement such as the Youth Congress. In our opinion the American Youth Congress must remain non-political in the sense that it should not support one or another political party or group.

The American Youth Congress is, and should become even more so, the medium for the collaboration of existing mass organizations of youth around specific issues as embodied in the Declaration of Rights. Such collaboration must be developed regardless of the political viewpoint or affiliation of one or another of these organizations as long as these views make unity possible in behalf of the immediate interests of the great majority of youth.

The largest organizations of American youth are those not identified with any political party and any attempt to turn the Youth Congress into a Farmer-Labor youth movement would make impossible the affiliation or collaboration of these organizations with the Youth Congress.

A word is also necessary regarding future perspectives. At the January Conference we stated that we hoped the united organization could be established by 1937. It is now necessary to revise that somewhat. The fact that a national Farmer-Labor Party is not likely to be established until after the November elections makes it impractical to talk of creating a national Farmer-Labor youth organization in 1936. The point of emphasis at the moment is the building of the local and state youth organizations which will provide the foundation for a national organization following the establishment of the national party.

What is the perspective for the Y.C.L. and what will be its relations to the Farmer-Labor youth organization? In raising this question it is necessary sharply to criticize certain tendencies expressing a desire to liquidate the League which have expressed themselves in various sections of the membership. These are most sharply expressed in the state of Washington where the comrades decided that the existence of the youth section of the Washington Commonwealth Federation nullified the need for a Y.C.L. Similar tendencies are also to be found in Minnesota, Detroit, Youngstown and Toledo.

The comrades in the state of Washington leaped ahead of themselves in making their decision regarding the Y.C.L. They tried to carry through the last stage in the process of the united youth organization before the first had been completed. We believe that when the national Farmer-Labor youth organization is established the Y.C.L. should be a part of it. But the exact manner in which such unification will take place will be determined by certain conditions.

What is important to remember that we do not want just any kind of youth organization. We want an organization that will fulfil its role; an organization that will mobilize the youth for struggle in behalf of their needs and which will make possible their education in the spirit of the class struggle and socialism. This does not mean that we wish to impose our program on the broader organization. But neither does it mean that the program of that organization is of no significance to us. We certainly want to help determine that program.

Furthermore, we do not believe the youth organization will be

able to train and educate youth unless it is an independent organization. In other words, we want an organization that will base itself on the Farmer-Labor movement but not be mechanically controlled by it. We do not believe a set-up in which the youth organization has no autonomy and cannot even choose its own leadership is conducive to the proper education and training of youth. And last but not least, we believe the organization should be based on democratic principles which will permit Communist and Socialist youth to work freely, with the right to express their own views and principles inside of the united organization. Only on such conditions will it be possible to make the Farmer-Labor youth organization the united organization of the Leftward-moving youth.

The liquidation of sections of the Y.C.L. will not help in bringing about such an organization. While helping to build the local Farmer-Labor youth organization, the Y.C.L. itself must be broadened and built. A strong Y.C.L. will help build a stronger united youth organization. A strong Y.C.L. will in every stage of the development of the Farmer-Labor youth organization be able to make its position clear to the masses of youth. In its own ranks it will be able to train youth along Marxist-Leninist lines and in this way prepare a tried and experienced personnel for the youth movement.

It would be unwise at this moment to try to determine exactly the conditions under which the Farmer-Labor youth organization will be established and the exact relations of the Y.C.L. to it. We do know that this organization, if it is to become a broad mass organization, will have to be built, not alone by young Communists, but also by young Socialists, young trade unionists, and non-party youth. This is true of Minnesota and Washington and will be true to an even greater degree as the movement develops on a firmer and broader basis nationally. The views of these non-Communist youth are just as important as ours in determining the character and form of the organization. It is for this reason that only in consultation with them can the exact process of development be determined.

Let us take an example. The Y.P.S.L. at the moment is opposed to organic unity with the Y.C.L. But the Y.P.S.L. is not opposed to independent political action on the part of the American toilers and sooner or later it must take a positive attitude towards the Farmer-Labor Party movement. Could not our two organizations under such conditions get together? We could establish an arrangement whereby both of us worked to build the Farmer-Labor youth organization and when it was established affiliated to it on the basis of maintaining our own political and organizational independence. This would not be organic unity, but it would make possible the working

together of Socialist, Communist and non-party youth within the confines of the broader youth organization. We feel sure that under such a set-up it would not take long before we could move on to a higher stage of unification, namely, organic unity.

For this reason we must not dot our i's or cross our t's before we come to them. We must be prepared to modify or change our tactics in accordance with every changed condition. Only a strong Y.C.L. with deep roots among the youth can function in such a manner.

Our Y.C.L. through its correct mass policies has won recognition as the leading champion of the American youth and the best fighter for unity. By constantly clarifying our perspectives and tasks, by critically examining our daily work, we can, along the lines indicated above, make giant strides forward in the direction of carrying through the decisions of the Sixth Congress of the Young Communist International and of our own January Conference. The struggle for a united organization of Leftward-moving youth has only begun. Through the stream of the powerful movement for a Farmer-Labor Party it will be realized.