

Youth Meet After 4th, Discuss YCL Proposal

One of the advances made in the course of the Rich Off Our Backs—July 4th demonstration was a youth contingent 200 strong which brought together sons and daughters of the working class from over a dozen cities. This contingent and a youth conference that followed on July 5 were the results of weeks of organizing that represented the first steps of the Party toward building a youth movement as an ally of the working class, and towards building its youth organization—a young communist league. In some cities this work was done by already existing youth organizations while in many others this was the first systematic organizing that Party members in this work, along with other youths had done.

In the months before the July 4th demonstration, teams of youths began taking the campaign out into working class communities and neighborhoods in cities around the country. Through mass leafleting, nighttime slide shows, at concerts in parks and on street corners, these teams agitated against the conditions that young people face and the future the ruling class has to offer them—unemployment, neighborhoods that are falling apart, dying in one of their wars and a life of wage-slavery.

Activists Step Forward

Right from the start numbers of young activists stepped forward to take up the campaign as their own. Although only in their teens they'd already had a bellyful of what capitalism means for the working class and its children. They've grown up seeing their parents in a constant struggle to keep their families' heads above water and many have already been involved, themselves, in struggle in their neighborhoods or schools.

Now they were seeing the possibility of another choice—that they didn't have to accept things the way they were, that it's possible to take part in forging the future.

One youth in Tent City talked about what this meant: "This was the first time I saw a crowd on the corner and nobody was being beaten up. Instead something positive was happening. There were people talking about changing things we hated but never knew what to do about it." Sparked by the street corner and park activities along with seeing the overall work of the Coalition, the new young activists helped to go back and turn their blocks and hangouts into centers of activity—reaching out to more youths to bring them to the demonstration.

By July 1 most of the youth had come to Philly. For most, it was the first demonstration or organized political activity they'd ever taken part in. Over the four days of demonstrations, forums and meetings, they learned things they were never taught in school.

Lessons Learned in July 4th Struggle

One of the things that stood out was the unity being built among Blacks, Latins and whites, both in the contingent and in the whole demonstration. This is often a very sharp question among youth, many of whom grow up in segregated neighborhoods and who often have their anger and rebelliousness steered by the bourgeoisie into fighting one another. The four days of action and political struggle were a big inspiration and proof that people could stand together against a common enemy.

Another important lesson that came out of the demonstration was the need for organization and discipline, based on conscious unity around a working class political line, to better fight against the capitalists. Youth are trained to see discipline as meaning knuckling under to the cops, teachers, etc. and so they often rebel against it. This, along with young people's inexperience with the discipline of everyday work and responsibility, can often lead to a group of youth being on the wild side.

All of this was discussed at the youth contingent meetings, along with the importance of everyone being

united and organized when we go up against the enemy so that we can accomplish our political tasks. This caused a good deal of struggle within the contingent, with the overwhelming majority agreeing that we need to be organized and united to fight against the capitalists. Aside from electing leadership for the demonstrations, activities and their meetings, the youth contingent asked the VVAW to teach them to march in step. As it turned out, the youth contingent, marching in a united and disciplined way, chanting and singing songs, was an inspiration to all who saw—helping to bring out the political seriousness and organization of the whole July 4th demonstration.

Another important advance during the four days was the growth of the youths' understanding of people like their parents—the working class. Most sons and daughters of workers have a lot of respect for their parents and how they've struggled to keep their families together, well-fed and clothed. But youth are also taught that they face problems of housing, unemployment, school, because their parents didn't "make it"—"they weren't good enough." In Philly the youth were learning who were the real source of their problems and how it was the working class which can lead the fight against the source of their problems. The youth speaker at the rally summed it up when he said "And there's one more thing we're saying. We're so proud. We're so proud of our mothers and fathers of the working class who are out here fighting right along our side trying to build a better future for us."

Need for YCL

This kind of political discussion was a real eye opener for most of the youth. They were learning in the course of the struggle what the nature of the enemy is—what is the cause of the problems they face and how to fight it. This kind of struggle must go on to provide the understanding necessary to consolidate the active youth who step forward in the different battles and turn them into consistent organizers and communists. It also points directly to the need for a young communist league (YCL) to lead the struggles of youth.

The openness and enthusiasm which the youths showed in taking up these questions also points directly to the need for a YCL. Facing a future of unemployment, the army or a life of slaving for some boss, young people are searching for a way to live a decent and productive life. They will often bounce from one thing to another quickly in search of a way out—from trying to get into college or pick up some kind of skill, joining the army, getting a "hustle" or gimmick to get by, to dropping out and getting hooked on drugs.

The work around the 4th showed that if you go out and agitate around the conditions and struggles youth face, young activists will come forward to check it out and can be won to take up the struggle enthusiastically. But we can't leave it at that. We have to speak to youths' desire and search for a decent and productive life, offering to youth the working class "way out" of the problems around us and its historic mission, the overthrow of the capitalist class and moving on to build a new society free from exploitation and oppression. Offering this future of the working class to millions of youth will be a key task of a future young communist league.

A YCL will be the youth group of the Party open to all active fighters who are taking up the battles against the effects of the capitalist system and who see the need to learn and apply Marxism-Leninism to building these struggles as part of the overall struggle of the working class for revolution. While based mainly among working class youth from the neighborhoods and high schools, it will be open to all youth and

include the membership of the Party's student group the Revolutionary Student Brigade.

It will take up and lead the key issues facing youth: the fight for jobs, against imperialist war, etc. In the course of these battles and in addressing every aspect of the lives capitalism forces young people to lead, the YCL will have the task of bringing out to the millions of youth the future that the working class represents. The YCL will be a place where large numbers of youth will be trained to use and apply Marxism-Leninism to their daily lives and will serve as a training ground for new communists.

Conference

The struggle that got started in Tent City and the spirit of victory of the demonstration got carried over into the conference called for July 5 and attended by over 100 of the young people from the contingent. The conference was called by the RCP to discuss how to keep going in the direction the Bicentennial campaign had set and the need for a YCL.

The conference dealt with going back into the neighborhoods and communities where people were from and organizing youth to fight around key-issues. Unemployment is one of the sharpest problems youth face. The Department of Labor recently said that millions of youth who are now seventeen won't get jobs before 1980. The lack of decent jobs is also closely related to a lot of the other problems youth face, from police harassment for hanging out to getting involved in different rackets, crime, drugs, etc.

Unemployment brings out sharply to youth how their lives are wasted by the bosses' drive for profits. Other conditions that youth are forced to live with: garbage in the streets, housing and schools that are falling apart, also drive home this point. The conference talked about taking up these struggles and showing youth that we can take things into our own hands and not accept these conditions. Some of the groups from different cities laid out ideas like collecting garbage that is usually piled up in the streets and dumping it at administrative offices in unemployment centers and housing centers or the mayor's office.

In the course of taking up these struggles and in building the campaign for the 4th these different organizations have been formed to pull together all the youth that want to get involved in building the struggle. At this early stage of work among youth, these groups are necessary to give consistency to the struggle, to provide a regular place for summation and political discussion to involve new youth and get them to take up the organizing on their own. All this is playing a crucial role in building up understanding of conditions, experience and organization that will contribute greatly to forming a YCL. The conference summed up that these organizations—like Youth in Action in Philly and other forms of uniting youth in struggle, are good things and should be built everywhere possible.

The discussion around the young communist league was very lively with a good deal of participation and struggle. It was opened up by a speaker from the RCP who talked about the different futures offered to youth by the capitalists and the working class.

After pointing out the future the bourgeoisie offers youth—unemployment, war and slaving for some boss—the Party speaker went on to note "The working class and its party offers a whole different future to young people. A future, not of scrambling to find some way to get by—but standing together and fighting against the source of people's misery and problems. A future not of living from crisis to crisis and attack after attack but of standing with the work-

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Hundreds of working class youth of all nationalities marched shoulder to shoulder in an enthusiastic and spirited contingent on July 4th.

Mass Line ...

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the class antagonism between workers and capitalists.

Uniting Politically with the Advanced

Around the time of the formation of the Revolutionary Communist Party in the summer and fall, Party members began actively relating to the strike on a consistent basis. The experience of relating to the strike through UWOC helped the Party to deepen its understanding of the relationship between internal and external forces in the strike. The work of UWOC, by its nature as a fighting organization of the unemployed, could not be mainly directed toward building up rank and file organization among meatcutters. UWOC's activity had played an important role in creating favorable conditions for the decisive role of the meatcutters rank and file to advance.

But outside support activity cannot be a substitute for the development of the unity and struggle of the workers themselves, their consciousness and organization, and the arming of the advanced with the science of revolution. All of this requires that the Party of the working class enter into the struggle, apply the mass line and forge a core of advanced workers in the course of battle.

In this period, the Party began to understand that there is more to applying the mass line than listening to workers, coming up with good plans, and providing a political sum up in the pages of *The Worker*. In this struggle, it was of key importance to politically unite with and advance those workers who came forward as fighters and leaders. This was particularly important in this strike, where the Party members were not strikers. In the first few months many mistakes were made. Through summing up these errors in light of articles on the mass line in *Revolution*, breakthroughs were made in training the advanced in the science of revolution and in working with them as "levers" to advance the broad masses.

In September, communists united with several strikers to build two successful actions. One was against a day-labor agency that was recruiting scabs. The other was at the downtown office of the spokesman for the Meatpackers Association. These actions concentrated the feelings of the majority of the strikers, united them in action to advance the struggle, and because of all this they jammed the union leaders to support the two actions. (See *Revolution*, November 15, 1975.) In building for these, a group of rank and file strikers, the Meatcutters Solidarity Committee, began to meet regularly for the first time in the strike.

Departure from Mass Line

Then, dizzy with success, Party members departed from a correct application of the mass line and substituted their own ideas about how the struggle should develop. On short notice and without much political discussion, they wrote up a list of proposals for mass picketing and other actions. When the strikers handed out this list of proposals outside a union meeting with no one even bringing the proposals up inside, the union leaders saw their chance to attack the group that was forming.

They charged that the group's meetings were divisive and that the communists were outsiders looking to take over. Because most of the strikers did not yet understand thoroughly the role of the union leaders and had not been armed to see the importance of the proposals, many were confused by the attack. Some could not explain the attack to fellow workers and stopped working with the group. Through this experience and other similar attacks on the group and its members, the Party began to understand the importance of winning strikers to the political reasons for each tactic along the way. In other words, helping the strikers gain a deeper class understanding of their fight.

Through discussion of the role the union leadership had played, a small number of the most advanced gained in their understanding of the struggle. But the momentum that was developing was set back by these errors in applying mass line.

Failure to go deeply into political line continued to be a weakness. Party members too often reduced practicing the mass line to "going among the workers to fish for tactics." They tended to confine discussions on the picket line and in rank and file meetings to "What should we do next?" Instead of developing ways to fulfill all three objectives: "to win as much as can be won in the immediate battle and weaken the enemy; to raise the general level of consciousness and sense of organization of the struggling masses and instill in them the revolutionary outlook of the proletariat, and to develop the most active and advanced in these struggles into communists, recruit them to the Party and train them as revolutionary leaders." (*Programme of the RCP, USA*) The objective often was limited to, "How can we win this strike?"

Good work had been done by communists during the strike, yet if these incorrect tendencies were allowed

to grow and flourish the end result would be that the communists would be playing the role of reformists, seeing the struggle for concessions as everything and the long-term goal of revolution as nothing. Party members were failing to grasp the truth firmly that in every struggle of the working class lies the seeds of the revolutionary potential of the class. That potential must be kindled and allowed to catch fire, not smothered by condescending good intentions and a bureaucratic style of work.

Mass Picketing

An example of the error of mechanically applying the mass line as simply a tactical weapon—not using the mass line to draw out the revolutionary essence of the workers' own experience in struggle—came out around the question of mass picketing. A small core of active strikers, many of whom stood to lose anywhere from 15 to 30 years of seniority, pushed the group single-mindedly to call for mass pickets.

At this point, mass picketing did not move the struggle significantly forward. The scabs were well established, the police had shown through over 100 arrests that they would do anything to keep the lines open, many meatcutters were working other jobs, and the rest, seeing the limitations, did not mobilize broadly for the actions. Still for a period of time, Party members went out and gathered suggestions about how and

when to build mass picket lines, instead of practicing the mass line.

In this situation it was important to divide one into two on the question of mass picketing. Party members had to unite with the determination and militancy of the strikers. At the same time they had to explain politically the strengths and weaknesses of the bourgeoisie and the workers in this situation. In order to develop a correct mass line it was important to go more broadly among the workers, summing up from what they were saying and doing and using Marxism-Leninism to develop the correct line and policies to advance the struggle.

As the strike approached the one year mark, Party members and advanced workers went beyond the narrow "search for a good tactic" approach and began to work systematically to fulfill all three objectives. Broad numbers of workers had developed a deep hatred for the forces that had driven them into unemployment, poverty, and such a weak position in the strike. From the beginning, the strikers had an idea that the fight was key for the whole working class. They had gone broadly to the rest of the working class throughout the struggle, like the way they built the giant rallies or joined with the unemployed for "Jobs or Income, Victory to the Meatcutters" marches in March and September. One striker put it "Being a meatcutter is not a job, it's a battle cry."

Now as hope for victory was getting dimmer, they

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of Local 725 and the people of Sidney refused to take this lying down. The word flashed through the town like lightning, so that by the time the cops arrived at the courthouse with the arrested strikers there was already a crowd of strikers, their families and friends there.

When these people witnessed their friends, parents and fellow workers dragged handcuffed and soaking wet from horse trailers and squad cars they could not contain their anger any longer. As the crowd swelled to over 1500 people surrounding the courthouse, they began to chant "United We Stand!" over and over again. To this the police replied with tear gas and rubber bullets. The fight was on. Volley after volley of rocks and bottles went up from the crowd as a tit-for-tat battle raged through downtown Sidney well into the night.

When it was over, eight deputies had been injured, one police dog killed and numerous windows broken in the courthouse. Sixty or so people were arrested during the fighting and for the remainder of the night shotgun wielding cops patrolled the streets breaking up groups of more than two and stopping cars to search them and their occupants. A state of civil disorder was declared to be in effect and the cops were out in a show of power.

But it was the workers and the people of Sidney who had really showed their power. Under fire, Judge Frank Marshall issued a special order releasing all but a few of the arrested strikers later that evening. This happened in spite of the fact that those arrested had been told that they would be held without bond over the entire weekend. Meanwhile, 1500 union members met at the union hall to plan their next move.

Despite continuing efforts by the company to break the strike with scabs and the complicity of the union leadership in limiting picketing, it is clear that the strikers won a victory. People were more united than ever before, they had stood their ground and they had moved forward. One young picket summed it up this way, "Hell, we should have done this right from the beginning."

The battle at Copeland was the biggest thing to happen in this Ohio industrial town in fifty years. Working people in this town were welded together in struggle. As car after car passed the Copeland picket line people beeped their horns, gave the fist, and flashed the V for victory sign. One man stopped and said, "It's about time somebody did something about Copeland!" An older worker from a different plant told picketers, "Look, we're all behind you, don't let anything turn you around."

On Monday, July 19, the 25 strikers went to court to face their charges. But they didn't go alone. Hundreds of other strikers, their families, friends and supporters, along with workers from other plants, gathered at the union hall and marched to the courthouse with them. Before the march, a brother from General Motors' Frigidare plant, who was active in the IUE-GM Workers United to Fight in '76 committee (part of the national Auto Workers United to Fight in '76), was introduced. "You are up against the bosses, their courts, and the police, but you are doing right," he

said. "The only strength we working people have is in our own numbers!" A loud cheer went up from the crowd.

All along the march from the union hall to the courthouse the workers in the line of march talked about the police and the courts and the role they play in the system. Some of the strikers wanted to minimize the relation of the "riot" to the strike, which the papers had characterized as the action of hoods and vandals not associated with the strike, but others felt the action was entirely justified, and everyone agreed that the cops were "the rich man's flunkies." So complete was the unity on this point that even the union leadership had to put out that "it was the cops' fault, they mistreated our people. . ."

As the march wound up to the courthouse people were feeling stronger than ever. Everyone talked about the spirit and unity of the march and how "we have to stick together like we are today!" When one of the strikers shouted from the top of the courthouse steps, "Are we united?" the crowd on the steps and street below roared, "YES!" and raised their clenched fists into the air. ■

Youth ...

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ing class and going ahead to build a new world free from all these problems."

There was a lot of discussion and controversy over these points. For most of the youth present it was all very new and represented a serious step which they wanted to learn more about. Almost everyone agreed that things would be a hell of a lot better if the working class ran society. At the same time there were still some questions around things like "freedom under socialism" which some youths had reservations about and struggled over.

One youth speaking at a workshop reflected the sentiments of many when he said, "the first time I knew I was with communists I started shaking. But they were talking about things that were important to me. Now, after hearing the speakers at the rally and seeing how communists work—it's starting to look like a good thing."

Everyone agreed that building a YCL was something that would have to be talked about in the course of going back and building struggle over the summer. The RCP, along with some members of different youth groups being formed, will soon start putting out a Young Communist newsletter covering the key struggles of youth, the working class and all the American people as well as taking up the discussion of the need for a YCL.

Since returning home from the conference a number of youth have gone back to their neighborhoods and cities and gone all-out to build struggle and organization among youth. In New York and northern New Jersey the youth group played an important role in building for a rally of 150 at the Democratic Convention demanding jobs. In Chicago and Boston, youth groups are also getting involved in struggles going on for jobs for youth.

In addition to this a number of young people who attended the rally and conference are starting to take up the study of Marxism-Leninism and apply it to the work they are doing. Through all this, the young activists who took part in the activities of July 1-5 are bringing together more youths to fight as allies of the working class and are forming the foundation on which a future YCL will be built. ■