

EXCERPTS FROM SPEAKERS BUREAU WORKSHOP

SWP Convention, August, 1973

JANICE LYNN - VIEWPOINT

The idea of a national speakers bureau originated as an outgrowth of the 1972 presidential campaign and the opportunities we saw that had opened up for getting our speakers out across the country. Setting up a national speakers bureau has three major functions. The first and primary function is seeing it as the vehicle through which an important part of our propaganda offensive is carried out. Since the inception of Viewpoint, it has been able to get national speakers out across the country at major campuses and cities on a larger scale than in any non-national campaign period in the past. There are many obvious advantages for having national party and YSA spokespeople visit an area, and we want to take maximum advantage of every speaking engagement that is arranged.

In addition to the particular knowledge or expertise that a national speaker has, these speakers fulfill the important function of recruiting to our movement. We should view every speaking engagement that is arranged for the speakers in this light, as well as those for our local speakers, and do the maximum that is needed to fulfill this function. This means taking a serious attitude toward the organizational side of meetings--making sure publicity is done well in advance, that there are posters, leaflets, paste-ups, ads in newspapers, radio announcements, phone calls to special contacts, whatever is needed to see that the meeting comes off with maximum attendance.

At the meeting itself we want to make sure that there are comrades assigned to Militant and YS sales, that there's a chairperson to introduce the speaker, that there's a literature display with a sufficient number of the speaker's books and pamphlets, and that there's a mailing list for people to sign who are interested in our movement.

This is especially true when engagements are arranged in the region, and we want to tie our speakers bureau work very closely with our regional work and make sure that the arrangements are carried out; that the speaker is not just sent out by him or herself, etc.

In addition to the propagandistic aspect of Viewpoint, it has also served another important function. That is in centralizing and coordinating all the speaking engagements for our movement. All requests for speakers, whether for forums, summer schools, socialist educational conferences, banquets, as well as honoraria engagements, are handled through Viewpoint. In addition to minimizing the confusion that would result without this, it also allows the national office to know where everyone is so that we can take advantage of events happening in the region where a speaker is going and have them fulfill other functions as well.

We have also found setting up mini-tours is successful. For example, if Evelyn Reed has a speaking engagement on the

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West Coast, we tell the other branches on the West Coast that she will be in Seattle at a certain time and perhaps she can make her way down the coast and fulfill other engagements as well.

The third function that our speakers bureau work has is the potential to raise large sums of money. However, it's important that this not become the sole end in itself and that we not lose sight of the importance and value of the speakers bureau in getting out our ideas. We're aware of the huge potential that exists for obtaining honoraria for our speakers, and we obviously want to do all we can to aggressively go after all openings to obtain these honoraria.

For the fall we want to suggest that every area set up some kind of speakers bureau apparatus to coordinate their own speakers bureau work. The exact form of this will vary from area to area. We want to encourage these local speakers bureaus to take maximum advantage of their local speakers, candidates, etc., especially in arranging speaking engagements in the region. Speaking engagements for comrades outside their areas should be coordinated through Viewpoint. Local speakers bureau work should in no way come into conflict with the work done by local areas for Viewpoint, but rather it should be complementary. We want to encourage local speakers bureaus, campus fractions, at-large comrades, teams, etc., to think of themselves as agents for Viewpoint as well as for local speakers bureaus.

Experience has shown that the best way to set up engagements is to have representatives on campus who can visit different organizations on campus to set up engagements. We want to be aggressive and innovative in approaching not only student governments but many different kinds of groups and organizations to sponsor our speakers, including women's groups, Black groups, international student clubs, debating clubs, academic departments, etc.

#### SUSIE WINSTEN - NEW YORK CITY

The New York City speakers bureau work that was done this spring is an example of the role that speakers bureau work can play on a local level, both in the financial and political gains that can be made for our movement. This includes building a periphery, making recruits, and gaining influence on campuses. I think most locals have had the experience of a speakers bureau where at best nothing happened and it didn't get off the ground, or at worst you lost a little money. This had happened in New York, and in thinking through the speakers bureau this spring we knew it was very important because a large part of the budget consisted of income from the speakers bureau for citywide and regional work. It was a very successful venture. For the first time in a year we actually made some profit.

In addition, we were able to make a number of important political gains. First of all, we were very conscious to coordinate the work of the speakers bureau with the municipal election campaign that the SWP is running in New York and to utilize the speakers bureau to help get candidates to speak on campuses in the region, to get new support for our candidates and our

program, and to get new endorsers. This was also very important in initiating relations with Black groups and in getting a periphery around us on a number of campuses where we had new comrades or where comrades were just trying to break onto the campus.

The most important factor in thinking through how we wanted to organize the speakers bureau work this spring was to have the comrades on the campuses (we organized mainly through the region, any city engagements were done through the local) actually go and set up the speaking engagements, to be speakers bureau representatives and talk to various organizations and student governments and actually do the leg work. Comrades who are on the regional campuses know them, generally know what's possible, and know where to go for the money. They know who they can talk to about getting sponsorship, and that was critical in terms of our ability to get money. Every single speaking engagement with the exception of one was set up by this method. We did send out a huge mailing, but we got almost no response from that.

Also, comrades learned that it is possible to raise money, that it is possible to get organizations to set up speaking engagements. For instance, the comrades at Yale thought that there was no money there to be raised, and when I was there once I wanted to see for myself, so I took the brochure into the Afro-American cultural center. They were so impressed that there were Black socialists on the brochure that in a few minutes we had set up a speaking engagement for Norman Oliver for \$125. That's the kind of thing that we can do when we get out on the campus and when the comrades look at the importance of a speakers bureau.

Another thing that was thought through very carefully was the question of the speakers bureau brochure. We found that it was very important and it was worth the money. We spent \$150 to get a very professional brochure done because of the fact that it makes the speakers bureau look like a legitimate operation, that we're not a fly-by-night operation, that we have real people who have real credentials in the movements that they're talking about.

We also kept other things in mind in doing the brochure. We were very careful to vary the biographies, throwing in things that would really impress people. It did have an effect because we found that organizations were impressed by our brochure.

These guidelines actually made it possible to set up a number of speaking engagements and attract honoraria. But we felt that we shouldn't just be content because we had the money in the bag, to just send the comrade who was speaking out into the region, make sure the money got collected, and that was the end of that. The other aspect of the work that was carefully organized was the political gains that can be made.

The organizations that sponsor the meetings and the students who actually come to the meetings look at the speakers as legitimate and authoritative representatives of the social struggles that they've been involved in and of a socialist point of view. They're very open and it's important that we

organize the kind of participation in those meetings that will facilitate recruitment. We were very careful to see that one or two other people went out with the speaker unless there was an established local with enough comrades on the campus to handle it. There had to be enough people to handle a literature or campaign table, to see that sales of the press were organized, that afterwards individual discussions were organized with people who were interested in the talk and in the YSA, and also to organize any other kinds of discussions or meetings that could be set up, such as classes or informal dorm discussions.

I want to elaborate on this approach around two tours that we did that were particularly successful. One was the campaign tour and one was the Olga Rodriguez tour. We decided that it would be very important to get Norman, who is the mayoral candidate, out into the region because the campaign was interested in the income that could be raised from that and also because we thought it was very important to try and increase the support for the campaign throughout the tri-state region. We set up three meetings. One was at Drew University, the other two were at Cornell and Yale, which are central campuses not only in our region but in that whole part of the country. The significant thing was that all three of these meetings were sponsored or cosponsored by the Black groups on the campus, and all three meetings, which averaged between 30 and 40 people, were attended almost entirely by Black students.

We found that there was a great deal of interest in the relationship of the Black movement to socialism and the issues that the New York City election campaign was raising. And because we had adequate participation by other comrades we were able to make some very important gains. First of all, these Black groups found out that there was a YSA and an SWP election campaign. They found out the real positions of socialists, not only on the Black movement but on a whole number of other issues. For instance, at the meeting of 30 students at Drew, seven endorsed the campaign, and at Cornell, in addition to the regular meeting, we were able to set up a dorm meeting which attracted over 60 students in a Black dorm. There were several hours of very lively debate and we were able to begin good working relations, not only for setting up speaking engagements with these Black groups in the future, but also in working with them on other political activities.

The other tour that I want to point out was the Olga Rodriguez tour. Olga's tour in the tri-state region was in the latter part of the spring, and we had initially thought that that would be a problem because most of the schools were going into finals, and it would be hard to raise money and hard to build large meetings. But as it turned out, this was a particularly useful tour for us. Although the meetings were smaller than some of the other meetings we had set up, the comrades consciously involved those people that they had been working with all spring, people who were very close to our movement.

The speaking engagements that Olga had became contact meetings where she got a chance to have lengthy discussions with people very interested in the YSA, and in many cases

these discussions were instrumental in getting people on the threshold of joining to actually join the YSA. This tour was kind of a "mop-up" tour, and we were able to recruit a number of people by utilizing a very excellent speaker who had the time to sit down and talk to some of our closest contacts in the region and in New York City as well.

#### DIANA TRAVIS - BOSTON

We wanted to make the speakers bureau as appealing as possible to the people who might be using our services. We wanted to present the speakers bureau as a professional apparatus. We had our own office, our own phone, and professional looking stationery. We had professional contracts. We gave people titles--I was the director, the comrades who went out to get engagements for the YSA were regional travelers for the speakers bureau. One thing that we found tends to interest people in our speakers--if they are candidates or others who have gotten good newspaper coverage, use a quote in their biographies.

From late February through early May we had 21 speaking engagements at 12 different college campuses. We used 10 speakers and sometimes these speakers were part of panels. I arranged about seven of these by calling up college campuses, finding out who was head of the local speakers bureau or of a particular group that had a budget. It's important to send out your brochure ahead of time, but it's necessary to make personal contact. I called and made personal appointments with them. I didn't pressure them over the phone at all. I just said, "My name is Diana Travis from the Issues and Activists Speakers Bureau. We're in the process of setting up our spring speaking engagements, and I'd like to stop by and see you and show you our brochure." More times than not the person will say to come by. Just about all the people that I had time to meet with personally took our speakers.

We charged a minimum of \$200 for our speakers, and we got it easily. Fourteen of the speaking engagements were set up by YSAers in two manners. One was they went to see local groups, women's groups, speakers bureau heads on their campuses and related to those people as representatives of the Issues and Activists Speakers Bureau. The other way was that the campus YSAs got budgets and would have speakers from the speakers bureau come in as part of that budget.

You can't just start out doing speakers bureau work and tell comrades to go out and get engagements on their campus. You have to go about it in an organized way and make sure that everyone is aware of the importance politically and financially of the speakers bureau. We had meetings with all the comrades. We had a separate point on the agenda at the regional conferences; I sat down with all the regional comrades and discussed with them the nature of our speakers bureau and how it functioned. I drew up contact sheets that they were to fill out asking for the names of different groups that they didn't have time to talk to. Also, a member of the YS team was assigned to do speakers bureau work.

Our most requested speakers had something to do with the women's movement. We offered six different women's speeches--the meaning

of women's liberation, women in history, women in literature, women in politics, the political oppression of women, and abortion--is the struggle over? And we had six separate requests for women speakers. Three of these requests were for panels. Instead of offering three speakers for \$600, we would offer three speakers on a panel for \$400, and if they wanted they could have a whole weekend--a speaker on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday for \$400. We also offered special rates for using more than one speaker spread out over a period of time.

#### CATHY PERKUS - WASHINGTON DC

Our experience last spring in Washington DC is probably more similar to many other areas around the country in that we hadn't had any extensive speakers bureau work, we hadn't sent out very many speakers, and I don't think the Washington local had ever raised any money on speakers bureaus. We assessed this last semester's speakers bureau work as very successful both politically and as fund raising.

One of the things we thought was most important to concentrate on was thinking through very carefully the titles and contents and the talks. We decided the whole speakers bureau was based on the fact that there are people on campuses all over who are interested in hearing our ideas, and if we could just communicate the fact that we have qualified and competent speakers, we would get requests. One thing we thought was important to do was to make sure that our talks were very topical. The most requested speech was on the "Trail of Broken Treaties," which turned into a Wounded Knee defense talk in the course of the semester. But Wounded Knee hadn't happened when we sent out our speakers bureau brochure. We just thought through what was topical and politically important.

The other thing we learned is that most campuses have women's weeks or Black weeks; most are in the spring semester, but sometimes they have them both semesters. For the future we are thinking of having special literature geared toward hiring our speakers for Black week or women's week.

We decided that it was politically most valuable to organize our speakers bureau work through the regional committee. We thought there was more money available in the region because there are more schools. The other reason was to involve regional YSAers in getting speakers onto their campuses, which is a tremendous help in recruiting to the YSA and in further integrating the YSAers who have just joined. We were fortunate enough to have a person who could spend almost fulltime doing it, which meant she could travel around a lot. The most important aspect of this was in supplementing regional work. She went to Baltimore with the regional organizer and worked with the comrades there and also did speakers bureau work and began to involve the comrades there in doing it.

Pulley was touring in our region in May on the YSA tour. We had just started recruiting in Chapel Hill, N.C., and in Baltimore, and we had a terrific local in Huntington, W.V. We thought it was very important that all those comrades had a chance to meet Pulley and talk to him informally, as well as having the

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benefit of sponsoring a speaker like him on their campus. We tried to raise money and we did--we covered the travel expenses and got some money for Viewpoint and for us. But the political benefits from it were very substantial. The Huntington meeting was cosponsored by the YSA and the Black student union. The Black student union paid Pulley's honorarium. We had been trying to get Pulley out there for the whole semester so it was the highlight of the YSA's work at Huntington. We arranged for Pulley to spend time with members of the Black student union, several of whom were pretty interested in the YSA.

We didn't start from we have to make the maximum amount of money, we started from 1) we want to be sure that as many of the regional comrades as possible get a chance to meet with him and hear him speak, and 2) we tried to build as big meetings as possible and of course raise some money.

We organized our educational weekend on the same premise. We made it a regional weekend conference and put a lot of emphasis on getting the regional YSAers to come to it. There was almost 100 percent participation from regional YSAers. It was very important for them to come into the center and meet all the other YSAers. The educational weekend consisted of Derrick Morrison's talk on Vietnam, (and he participated in a panel on the African liberation movements), Linda Jenness on "Billy Graham, the Pope and Feminism," and the launching of our municipal campaign. The Friday night panel consisted of Derrick, someone from the African Information Service, and a Black professor from Baltimore.

The weekend was the most successful and spirited event that our movement in Washington has sponsored. One hundred and twenty people came, we made contacts with people from the African Liberation Day Support Committee that we hadn't been able to make contact with until then. We recruited three people, plus we made \$150 profit. We think it shows that when you organize to make the most political gains, making money comes with it.

It's important to try to get as much as possible out of having national speakers come in. We even had an "eat lunch with Linda Jenness" during the weekend, which was instrumental in helping to recruit a couple of those people who joined.

CLAUDIA HOMMEL - DETROIT

On the catalog--I think it's extremely important that it be professional. One of the things that we stressed is the title and how the title is put together. It doesn't always help just to give a simple statement about the psychological oppression of women. Sometimes something more controversial gets a lot more interest. In fact, we had the most number of requests for "Is the Family Obsolete?" The other thing that has to be considered when putting a title together is not only its controversial nature but to whom it is being directed. Some topics are better directed to people you assume know nothing about the topic or have perhaps a neutral attitude. Obviously there are different kinds of audiences, different schools, different organizations; some will react to the more academic sounding topic, and some want the topic that sounds

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like it's going to really hit the roof.

Also, we had a lot of independent speakers on our bureau, and although we didn't have as many requests for them, we did have interest expressed in people like James Lafferty or someone like Abdeen Jabara who is an important speaker on the Palestine question.

We had a very successful package deal. One school ordered five speakers for \$1,000. It started with them being interested in two speakers. The approach to take is to say, "Well, glad to hear you're interested in the question of STRESS and the American Indian movement, perhaps you'd also be interested in 'How to Make a Revolution in the U.S.'" And they'd agree, and then during the discussion I'd say, "You're having this awareness series, but you don't have a woman speaker," and they'd say there wasn't that much interest in it on campus. So I'd call up a woman professor who is in with the student government. And then Andrew Pulley was coming in for the weekend, so I said, "Look, you're already planning to give us \$900, I'll give you Pulley for free if you'll just pay his travel expenses of \$100.

Another package deal of a smaller sort is having the speaker taken out to dinner, especially when the school doesn't have very much money. They always have a little extra account money, and it's sort of nice to have our speakers taken out to dinner. It's a good chance for a representative from the speakers bureau to go along and discuss how the meeting went and suggest having the speaker come back again.

Our speakers bureau work is not only financial, but is a political question, especially in terms of making contacts and recruits. In fact through our work in the many schools where we did have speaking engagements, we made very significant contacts, and in one school we recruited the student senator with whom I had the initial discussion about bringing speakers into the school. It's very important to have follow-up with the school personnel responsible for bringing in the speaker. Stay around after the talk, if they are enthusiastic about the talk, they're going to be saying that she or he should come in again and speak next year. We want to remember that and remind them.

JON HILSON - DENVER

I want to go over some experiences we had this summer orienting primarily to community colleges. Some of the larger schools had dried up and didn't have any money available so we made a real attempt to go to community colleges, and we raised several hundred dollars. These schools tend not to have much money, but they also tend to have younger and more liberal directors of student activities. We were able to tentatively set up about 17 engagements at \$60 each at five different community colleges in a five week series. We could probably have gotten one speaker for \$150 at each place, but it doesn't give us the chance to talk to people about a variety of subjects. I think this is something that comrades should look into in the metropolitan areas, especially in trying to orient to the schools politically.



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The most popular topic we found in doing this was a speech on phase four and the effects of the economic crisis. The students were predominantly fulltime students who work in the evening, who come from working class backgrounds, and feel the economic pinch more than students at a more affluent school.

At the larger schools we would ask three times more money because they can pay it. You should always ask high and be flexible. But if there's a situation where we ask for \$300 and they say they'll give us \$75, it's not unprofessional of us to say we'll take it.

One of the things we did with the community schools was offer them 1,000 leaflets for every speaker. They would stuff them in their bi-weekly paper prior to when the speaker was coming. We also printed up 100 8½ x 14 posters for the series they were having at each school. What this does is guarantee a crowd, and it doesn't leave the publicity to them, which can be mediocre sometimes. This gives us the chance to take some of the responsibility to ensure a larger crowd. It's not very expensive--we asked for \$10 to cover each engagement and we made \$5.

The other thing we've done is to tell them we're available to spend a day at a campus if they want us for a social science class, a political science class, a psychology class, etc. At Colorado College, while we're trying to set up a speech by Evelyn Reed on "Is Biology Women's Destiny?", we're also trying to set up a debate with the anthropology department about the existence of a matriarchy. We should look for those kinds of openings.

We shouldn't have a routinist attitude toward biographies or titles of talks. We're trying to bill Fred Halstead as the man who negotiated with John Dean. The preparation of our comrades to speak is very important. It's not like giving a report to a YSA or branch meeting. It's a speech we want to be tremendously exciting. Comrades have to know how to give an exciting and enthusiastic speech that can touch on a lot of points and be professional and articulate. And I think that what that means is that we should have a way that those speeches are written in advance; they can be read out loud to a few other comrades, then the speakers can get feedback, and rewrite them and go over them again. People remember we were there and what kind of job we did. Also, the training of our comrades to speak is a political task and a good thing for us to keep in mind.

Finally, getting people to sell subs to The Militant at these events and leaving back issues of The Militant and the YS around for the crowd to read is a good idea. Also, having interest lists if people want more information about where these speakers are coming from or how to talk to them. Clip articles from the campus papers where we've spoken and photostat them, and maybe clip them to mailings and say this is the kind of speakers bureau we have and identify it with the national speakers bureau. We're the local affiliate of this national speakers bureau.

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MIKE WEISSMAN - ATLANTA

One suggestion that I have about possible topics is that we can use Dick Roberts very well around this new economic situation that exists--to sponsor debates with economics departments. You go to an economics department and most don't have Marxist economists, and you go to particular economists who fancy themselves experts and say, well, why don't you get the economics department together and have a debate with Roberts. It's worthwhile approaching departments for cosponsorship of events.

Comrades have spoken about the brochure they put out, and these brochures can be very important, but areas shouldn't think that they can't begin productive speakers bureau work without those brochures. There are two ways to do it. One is directly through Viewpoint, and the other is what we did in Atlanta with tremendous success; that is by putting out one page printed biographies with maybe some articles and a cover letter, which is a lot cheaper than a brochure. If you send it out in conjunction with Viewpoint or if you call it Viewpoint, then you've got the beginnings of a very professional approach.

ED JURENAS - TWIN CITIES

We started our speakers bureau work last November with an approach which was very well planned. We did the standard things, like writing for all the school catalogs, and all the committees, organizations, and persons who should be getting our brochure. We mailed the brochure out, followed it up with a phone call, followed that up with a personal visit in as many cases as possible, and then followed that up with another phone call. And in the process of doing this we uncovered a lot of areas, not just organizations or committees, but a lot of areas where there was potential for getting our speakers out.

One thing I want to stress is professionalism. Every brochure, every flyer and every piece of mail has to be super professional. We have to appear in the eyes of all these committees as being a very serious speakers bureau, a serious educational service. We have something to provide them, in fact, we have something that they can't do without. That goes not only for the things we send out, but the kind of approach we take when talking to these people. For example, professors handle a lot of money, more money than the students do. And when we go in to talk to them we consider it important that we be neatly dressed and very courteous.

In addition to the general brochure that we sent out, we found that a good way for keeping in touch with these people is making sure that they get regular mailings and personal visits. In the process of doing this we found that there was a lot of interest on the part of a number of people we were talking to about the question of feminism. So we drew up a special brochure entitled "Women in Revolt." It consisted of five local comrades who had talks on various aspects of women's oppression and the women's movement. We sent this out going into the summer saying these people would be available for fall speaking engagements.