

EDUCATIONAL OUTLINE NO. 2

LESSONS OF THE MARXIST  
YOUTH MOVEMENT

PART II

THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE ( 1919-1929)

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PRICE 5 ¢

Published by:

Education Dept.  
Provisional National Committee  
for a SOCIALIST YOUTH LEAGUE  
114 W. 14th Street  
New York, 11, New York

" The Future Belongs to the Youth" ..Karl Liebknecht

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This educational outline is the second in a series on the Lessons of the Marxist Youth Movement. The first outline discussed the origin of the revolutionary youth movement, the growth of the Young Socialist International, the militant struggle of the youth against reformist leaders in the Party and against the imperialist war, and finally the split in the socialist movement after the betrayal of the Second International.

(All mimeo work contributed by the New York S.Y.L.)

## HISTORY OF THE MARXIST YOUTH MOVEMENT

### PART II THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE (1919-1929)

#### A. BACKGROUND

The betrayal and collapse of the Second International at the outbreak of the World War did not fail to leave a deep imprint upon the working class youth movement. Although the social patriots of France, Austria, England and Belgium exhorted the working class to support their native capitalists in the war, the best elements of the youth movement remained loyal to internationalism.

The Young Socialist International, as early as April 1915, when one year of war had already stained the fields of Europe with the blood of workers, convoked the first anti-war gathering in Berne, Switzerland. Working in close association with Lenin and the exiled Bolsheviks, the revolutionary youth was destined to become one of the firmest supports to the coming Russian Revolution.

The new Third International received a mighty impetus when the Bolsheviks took power. Both this historic event and the war served to cut a sharp division in the socialist movement between reformist servants of the ruling class and the conscious revolutionists. In every country in Europe the two divisions began to take clearer shape.

Hardly anywhere was the birth of the Communist movement disassociated from the work which the youth, fresh and uncorrupted by opportunist poison, contributed in every country.

In the tradition of Liebknecht, undiscouraged by the betrayal of the old social democratic leadership, drawing strength from the victories of the Russian working class, the young communists became one of the chief pillars of the new international movement.

This was the background of the formation of the Young Communist League. On November 20, 1919, at 3:00 P.M. in the back room of a beer house, guarded by sentinels and pickets of the Berlin youth, the first congress of the Young Communist International was held. There were present delegates from fourteen countries, representing twenty thousand members when Willi Munzenberg<sup>al</sup> opened the Congress. Thus was the Young Communist International organized.

READ:

WAR AND THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL.....V.I.LENIN

Q U E S T I O N S:

1. What position did the young communists have towards the war?
2. How did this differ from the position of the social-democracy?  
From the centrists?

.....

1. For a short biography on Munzenberg see educational outline no. 1

## B. FORMATION OF THE Y.C.L. IN THE UNITED STATES

In May 1919, the first national convention of the Young People's Socialist League proclaimed a revolutionary policy and denounced the Second International. A special conference of the Y.P.S.L. in Rochester December 1919 overthrew the official Socialist Party group. The revolutionary sections won a solid majority and the convention advocated support for the Communist International and for affiliation to the Young Socialist International (which was meeting illegally in Berlin to form the Young Communist International).

The Y.P.S.L. at Rochester finally broke off all relations with the Socialist Party and declared itself "independent" of all existing parties. From this tactic, the Communists hoped to win over even more members of the Y.P.S.L. to the communist movement.

However, the cruel Palmer raids of 1920 hindered this direction. Thousands of communists, young and old, were arrested, imprisoned, or deported. The entire movement was hit badly. Many who had never dreamt that communism would put them to such severe tasks, dropped back into the comforts of private life. Others converted their groups into purely social clubs secluding themselves from the rigors of the struggle. Only a few held on tenaciously and proceeded to build a youth movement. Although there were two communist parties (The Workers Party and the Communist Labor Party) and although both maintained youth leagues,

they were quite small.

During this period, the army of unemployed steadily grew in spite of the many attempts of state and national authorities to provide employment. Ex-soldiers (all of them young) often became thieves and beggars because they were given no work. The American Legion, organized by the ex-officers on behalf of the capitalists sought to retain the militaristic spirit of war and to intimidate all workers and working class organizations which threatened to rouse the masses to action.

Because of the political situation at that time, the two Communist Parties had to function illegally; hence their minute youth organizations also were underground. The unity of the two parties in 1920 gave a new impetus to the revival of the revolutionary youth movement. However, it, like the Party continued underground. In the mean time, through the medium of two Young Workers League delegates to Moscow, Gus Schulenberg and Oliver Carlson, connections were established with the Young Communist International.

The legalization of the Communist Party at the December, 1921 convention (after a bitter internal dispute- the minority desired to remain underground) helped to make the Young Workers League a reality. The convention set up an organization committee to call the conference of the Young Workers League and to help organize it. "Youth" the organ of the New York "Independent" Young People's Socialist League (which was in communist hands) was taken over by the organization committee and renamed "Young Worker".

Youth memorial meetings were held under the banner of International Youth Day from coast to coast. By the time the first convention met there were already in existence between thirty to fifty groups in the country ready to participate in launching the new organization.

It is important at this point to interject some of the proposals of the Young Communist International on the structure and role of the organization, for the Y.W.L. in the United States and the Trotskyist youth movements were built upon this basis also.

#### C. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE.

On November 1st, 1920, the Russian Young Communist League proposed to the Executive Committee of the Y.C.I. a change in the relation between the youth leagues and the parties. The proposal called for the POLITICAL SUBORDINATION OF EACH NATIONAL LEAGUE TO THE RESPECTIVE PARTY ORGANIZATION: WHILE EACH LEAGUE WOULD RETAIN ITS ORGANIZATIONAL INDEPENDENCE. The Party in each country would determine the general politics of the entire communist movement, its strategy, tactics ( in agreement with the line and leadership of the Communist International) and the youth leagues would be guided by these decisions. However, the Party could not interfere in the internal organizational problems of the youth league except in an advisory capacity. Hence, the youth league would enjoy organizational autonomy.

The Executive Committee of the Y.C.I. could not at that time agree with the proposal. It held the view of the independence of the leagues and the cooperation on a basis of equality between each party and league.

The political subordination of the Young Communist League to the Communist Party was finally adopted at the Second Congress of the Y.C.I. after a long struggle which was later carried on in the Leagues. At that time (1921) such a decision appeared to be absolutely necessary although it met with great resistance from many leaders of the Y.C.L. who were still swayed by the "vanguard ideology".

The "vanguard" ideology was a carry over of the former role of the revolutionary youth. While in the imperialist war of 1914-1918 practically all of the Social Democratic Parties went over to the side of the bourgeoisie, most of the socialist youth organizations and the youth international remained true to the principles of revolutionary class struggle. By the very nature of the situation, the youth international played a vanguard role. There were in most places no revolutionary parties; those parties that did exist, for the most part, betrayed the working class. The youth organizations were converted into YOUNG PARTIES which attempted to lead the entire working class, carry on independent struggles against the boss class, against the imperialist war, etc. Thus, the youth, to a large extent, paved the way for the formation of the revolutionary working class parties. This vanguard role, that is, the leadership of the working class, existed as far along as 1919. Even in the early stages of the communist movement, the youth groups were acting like young parties. Therefore, at the second congress of the YCI,



with the political subordination of the Y.C.L. to the C.P.; the youth recognized that the Party was to become the vanguard of the working class; the League was to become the leader of the toiling youth.

The organizational structure of the communist youth movements were arranged so as to correspond to their revolutionary role in the class struggle. The social democratic organizations which gave up the revolutionary method of class struggle, created an organizational structure adapted to the reformist standpoint and particularly to parliamentary elections. The fact that the structure of the social-democratic organizations were not based on centralism and discipline and at the same time did not further inter-party democracy was in accordance with the whole reformist conception of organization. The Y.C.L. discarded these obsolete forms and attempted to create an organization capable of rallying the widest masses of toiling youth, capable of leading them in the class struggle, and capable of preserving the League (or Party) despite the repressions from capitalists.

The Y.C.L. was based on the principles of democratic centralism. It combined the maximum independence and activity of the members of the organization with strict discipline. On the basis of the internal democracy, all members participate in the life of the League and had a share in determining the League's policy. This was achieved (when strict illegality doesn't prevent it) through the election of leading bodies, the organization of League conferences on a large scale, and the holding of internal discussions for the purpose of

preparing the League's decisions on various questions. The lower bodies were subordinate to the higher, the leadership was centralized, and all members were under obligation to carry out the decisions of the organization and do their duty towards it. It was only as a strictly centralized organization that the Y.C.L. in conjunction with the C.P. could carry out a revolutionary struggle for the interests of the working youth and the general communist aims.

The democracy which reigned in the early period of the Y.C.L. was in glaring contrast to the bureaucratic rule in the social democratic organizations. In the Y.P.S.L. since the various leaders and the various committees were not responsible to any particular group, since each leader was permitted to carry out his own political line (even though it contradicted the political line of his fellow members on the executive committee and the opinion of the rank and file) like its parties, the social democratic youth organizations were somewhat bureaucratized.

Although the Y.C.L. was ORGANIZATIONALLY INDEPENDENT, the closest connections existed between it and the C.P. This connection was effected through the mutual representation on all rungs of the organizational ladder. To secure the political oneness of the League and Party, there were cadres composed of dual members, i.e. members of both the Party and the youth.

The Y.C.L. did not limit its activity to the frame work of "legality" as ordained by the boss class. In its struggle against capitalism, the Y.C.L. was continually compelled to

combine its open legal activity with illegal and semi-legal work, and therefore, often overstepped the limits laid down for it by capitalist legality. Since it recognized that it was surrounded on all sides by its class enemies and that it must expect to be driven to illegality at any time, it formed an underground apparatus through which it could be able to continue its work in case of enforced illegality. The main thing was to ensure the leadership and development of the Y.C.L. and preserve its existence.

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why should a revolutionary youth organization be politically allied to a Party?
2. What is the significance of a youth organization's maintaining its organizational autonomy?
3. Of what importance is the exchange of representatives between the Party and the youth?
4. What is "vanguardism"? Of what significance and/or correctness was it when practiced by the youth in 1914-1918? After the formation of the Communist Party? In the S.Y.L. today?
5. How is democratic centralism geared as an organizational form towards the seizure of power? Towards meeting capitalist repressions?
6. Discuss differences between: Democratic centralism; decentralism; bureaucratism; and monolithicism.

#### READ :

WHAT IS TO BE DONE ..... V.I. LENIN

#### D. ROLE OF THE Y.C.L. AND DIFFERENCES WITH THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC YOUTH.

The Young Communist League was a training ground for the Communist Party. The C.P. needed a reserve which would assure a new cadre of young forces for its ranks. The Y.C.L. was to serve as a preparatory school which would train the young generation of workers for the Communist Party.

There were fundamental differences in the concepts of the role of the youth and youth organization between the social-democrats and the communists. Social democracy, for the most part, declared that the role of the youth organizations should be "purely" educational or cultural. It said that youth were not capable of participating in the class struggle. Since the social democrats often placed class collaboration in the place of the class struggle, it sought to train the youth also in class peace. They didn't want the young workers to acquaint themselves with the real conditions in class society and with the facts of the class struggle. In conformity with this, the social democracy indulged in talk about "youth in general" without regard to class differences. Hence, they set the youth organizations the utopian task of creating the "new man" by means of cultural work within the youth organization to be undertaken in the conditions of capitalist society, that is, divorced from all relation to class society and reality itself.

The Young Communist League repudiated the hypocritical slogan of the social democracy to the effect that the youth must not participate in politics. The energetic participation of the young workers, who are an important factor in social production,

in the political struggle of their class, signified an increase of forces for the working class struggle and served as a medium for training young workers to communism. The Y.C.L. was a political organization which trained young people for the class struggle. It based itself on the Leninist concept that stated theory could not be separated from practice. Hence, its educational work was of a dual nature: education through studying theory and education through struggle.

"Without revolutionary theory, a revolutionary movement is impossible"- V.I.LENIN. This statement of Lenin formed the basis for the Y.C.L.'s work. The special educational work was intended to gather the working youth's experience in fighting practices, and to present them in a ready, logical and supplemented form. It had to train from the ranks of the young workers, educated and persistent class fighters against capitalism. The educational work was therefore, simultaneously, agitation and propaganda; agitation in the sense of dissemination of various slogans among the masses, and propaganda in the sense of a deepened education of the young workers with regard to the aims and principles of the Y.C.L.

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why must militant youth participate in politics if they intend to work for socialism?
2. Describe through concrete analogies what is meant by "education through struggle".
3. In what way is a youth organization "a training ground" for the Party? Find out how many Party members in your local Party branch were formerly in the youth movement. Find out the number of former youth members who are primary and

secondary leaders of the Workers Party. This term will then acquire a greater significance to the inquirer.

4. Discuss the differences in the future prospects, and lives of youth born of working class parents and those born of parents who are members of the capitalist class.

#### E. THE FIRST YEAR OF THE Y.W.L. IN THE UNITED STATES

On May 13, 1922, the first convention of the Young Workers League met in Brooklyn to formally unite the revolutionary youth organizations throughout the country, to affiliate to the Young Communist International and to acknowledge the political leadership of the Workers Party (C.P.) However, the principle struggle at the convention, with its more than forty delegates representing more than twenty cities was the question of "independence". The genuine party elements were for political subordination of the youth to the Workers Party. The supporters of "independence" came from two camps; remnants of the Independent Y.P.S.L. who found it more convenient to stand aloof from the genuine communist movement, and the ultra-leftists, organized into the United Tailors of America, who had opposed the formation of the legal party (they wanted to continue functioning underground) and advocated "independence" as a maneuver to prevent the youth from affiliating with the party. The delegations voted overwhelmingly against the "independence" advocates. A manifesto and program were adopted together with a constitution and a resolution on relations with the Workers Party. A National Committee was elected with Martin Abern as National Secretary.

The year between the first and second conventions was marked by functioning based on propagandistic activity. The "independents" disappeared completely from the scene, particularly after the United Toilers liquidated their organization and joined the Workers Party. In this period a number of new groups were organized and a functioning League was established as a distinct organization. But it was only at the second convention (Chicago, May, 1923) that the League's attention was directed away from the purely propagandistic activity of spreading the general ideas of communism amongst youth, and more in the direction of winning the young worker to the communist movement by organizing them on the basis of their daily struggles and their immediate interests. This turn which has always come as the second stage in the development of the movement, was achieved with the assistance of the Y.C.I. but not without some internal dispute. The swing towards active participation in the daily struggles of the working youth and the adoption of the organizational forms best suited for such activity was resisted by many of the middle class students. This turn to the masses was introduced at the Second and Third Congresses of the Y.C.I.

Q U E S T I O N S .....

1. During the first year, the Young Workers League existed as a "propaganda sect" and did little mass work. Why was it important that it exist as a propaganda sect at that particular time; that is, when newly formed from the social democratic youth?
2. Why would it have been incorrect if the Y.W.L. remained purely a propaganda sect after it formed its basic cadre and

hammered out a program?

#### F. WORK OF THE Y.C.I. PRIOR TO THE SECOND CONGRESS

Prior to the second congress, the Y.C.I. proceeded to win over sections of the centrist youth. Hence, by the end of 1920, the young socialists in Czechoslovakia (two youth leagues) the Young Socialist League of France and Finland, League of the Socialist Proletarian Youth of Germany (Independent) and the Independent Y.P.S.L. in the U.S. were won over to the YCI.

Simultaneous with the organizational development that progressed during this period, the Y.C.I. began to consolidate its central apparatus. Numerous pamphlets and periodicals were published including the two organs, YOUTH INTERNATIONAL and INTERNATIONAL YOUTH CORRESPONDANCE.

The popularization of the ideas of the YCI was discussed at a series of international conferences, in internal discussions within the various sections, and in the Youth International. However, little was done to orient the Y.C.L. towards the masses until the second congress.

#### G. SECOND CONGRESS OF THE YOUNG COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

The Russian Y.C.L. wanted to hold the Second Congress in Moscow in the throne room of the Kremlin citadel of the former Czarism. However, this was defeated in favor of Jena, Germany. The Congress opened in the latter city on the 6th of April, 1921, but moved for reasons of illegality (on April 10) to Berlin.

The resolution on the political situation adopted at the congress revealed that the differences on the organizational question (vanguardism) had other political roots: the majority supported the "theory of the revolutionary offensive" which



held that despite the defeats of the workers in 1919-1920 and the renewed offensive of capital, no partial retreats were necessary in the struggle for state power; the working class (according to this theory) had to continue frontal, direct attacks against the capitalist governments. This theory was defended by such "ultra-leftists" as Bela Kun and Brandler plus others at the Third Congress of the Communist International. Lenin and Trotsky actively opposed this schematic conception of the "permanent revolution".

On the advice of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, the Y.C.I. Congress "continued" in Moscow from June 9 to the 23rd immediately preceding the Third Congress of the Comintern. The latter almost split over the theory of the revolutionary offensive when a majority appeared to be in complete agreement with it. Lenin and Trotsky, who recognized the need for winning a decisive majority of the workers in the various countries before a direct bid for power could be made by the vanguard, urged the struggle for partial and immediate demands as a means towards this end. They finally succeeded in winning the delegates to their views. The Third Congress of the C.I. issued the slogan "To the Masses" as a summary of the immediate tasks of the communist parties.

The Second Congress of the YCI was held under the political influence of the Third Congress of the CI, in which the youth delegates actively participated. The youth, too, finally rejected the "theory of the revolutionary offensive" and in their turn to the masses began to hammer out a specific youth program. Questions connected with the economic struggle, relationship between the youth and party,

and anti-militaristic work were thoroughly discussed. Other youth questions were left in abeyance until the Third Congress.

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. What was the "theory of the revolutionary offensive"?

Discuss

2. What is the significance of a youth movement's having a specific youth program?

#### H. PRIOR TO THE THIRD CONGRESS

The transition at the Second Congress from issuing slogans of the Party to the adoption of a specific youth program was done for the purpose of building a mass youth organization. However, the transformation of the small youth leagues into mass organizations was never achieved outside the Soviet Union. The progress of the leagues necessarily were dependent on the growth of the parties and the special attention paid to the youth leagues by the parties. In the brief period from the Third Congress of the C.I. to Lenin's death, the problems of the Party itself, its elementary organization, strategy, tactics, overshadowed the problems of the youth. The internal difficulties in the communist parties-with currents in the parties who had not as yet broken politically with centrism as well as the more radical, ultra-left elements who rejected the struggle for partial demands - hampered the development of mass young communist leagues.

Despite this shortcoming, the period following the second congress showed the necessity of this shift in

emphasis. During this time, the boss class of America and Europe, taking advantage of the ebb of the revolutionary wave, went on an all out offensive against the working class. Working hours were lengthened; wages were reduced. Since the main interest of the working class was their immediate economic gains, the result of these reverses was a diminuation of political interest among the workers.

Among the working class youth too, a strong diminuation of political interest was evident. Hence, the Y.C.L. had to transfer its work of propogandizing the general political ideas to the defense of the immediate vital interests of the working youth.

As a result of the capitalist offensive both the C.I. and the Y.C.I. issued a call for the "united front". A united front is the unity and collaboration of different organizations on some particular issues. Each organization within a united front retains its own political identity, program, leadership, etc. It retains the right to criticize the other organizations within the front. (Ex. the collaboration of differing organizations say on a strike action, civil liberties case, etc. are some examples of a united front)

For the Y.C.L., the establishment of the united front took a two fold course. First: It attempted to align the working youth in the general struggle of the working class. This was needed to prevent the bosses from playing off the working youth as strike breakers against adult workers). Secondly, it attempted to coordinate the work of the youth in the enforcement of its elementary youth demands.

The Y.C.A. began negotiations with the other youth internationals to hammer out a united front program together and to form a Young Workers World Congress. However, these efforts failed for the Second International youth induced the Vienna Youth International (which was a Marxist centrist group) to refuse to cooperate.

In the meanwhile, the Y.C.L.'s slowly began to participate in the industrial struggle. The YCL in Germany initiated a campaign against the 54 hour working week for the working youth. This reached its climax in a large mass demonstration on March 26, 1922.

In Sweden and Denmark, the YCL initiated a campaign for the economic protection of young workers. In Austria they fought for the improvement of the position of students in technical schools and for the enforcement of legislation as applied to apprentices. In this work, the YCL convinced the "centrist" youth to work with them, finally winning them over to the YCI. In France and Czecho-slovakia, the YCL organized illegal nuclei in the army as a method of carrying out their anti-militaristic activity.

The YCI also organized children's movements (known in the United States as the Young Pioneers). The children's movement developed fairly rapidly in Germany, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries. Here they attacked the non-political "humanitarian" education as found in the social-democratic children's schools.

Despite all these events, the transition to youth tasks was not successfully carried out. The Third Congress of the

YCI was to take this question up again with an aim to intensify the new course.

#### Q U E S T I O N S

1. What were some of the factors which hindered the transition of the YCI to special youth tasks?
2. What is a "united front"?

#### I. THE THIRD CONGRESS OF THE Y.C.I. AND THE TURN "TO THE MASSES"

At the Third Congress of the YCI, Dec. 4, to 12, 1922, in Moscow, little progress could be recorded in the growth of the leagues. As against about 600,000 claimed at the previous Congress, it was now reported that the YCI had 750,000 members. This was primarily a result of the increase of the Russian League which had 38 YCL sections as against 36 at the previous congress. While some of the leagues had been engaged in economic activities of the young workers and in anti-militarist work the resolutions record: "Education work was limited mostly to the members". "The Young Communists Leagues have not yet become mass organizations."

The Congress adopted a draft program for the YCI and a program of economic demands for young workers "up to 18 years of age."

After an analysis of the work accomplished since the Second Congress it became clear to the Third Congress that "the Young Communist Leagues have not yet become mass organizations in the sense of having close contact with the masses of young workers; of the participation of their branches and individual members in the daily struggle of the young workers for the betterment of their conditions and in

the sense of the improved revolutionary enlightenment of the masses by means of an interesting communist educational work conducted on a mass scale." (Resolutions and Thesis of the Third Congress of the YCI)

Hence the YCI proceeded to change further the organizational structure of the YCLs . The basis of organization prior to the Third Congress was a territorial one and it is just in this that its main weakness existed. The new form of organization adapted itself to the demands of modern industry. Wherever there were a number of young YCL workers in a factory, they formed a shop nuclei. The object was to build up an organization which acting as a complement to the Party would place the YCL in the strongest position to struggle for the revolution. The shop nuclei would combine the young communists at their place of work and would be in direct contact with the masses of the working youth in their daily struggles. Hence, it could recruit them, guide them, and persuade them to participate in all the fields of the league work.

In the schools, the members of the YCL were combined into fractions. These like the shop nuclei were basic organizational units and were combined into branches with the shop nuclei of the particular district in which the school was situated. As the economic activities of the school are by their very nature limited, it was necessary to establish a definite connection between members in their places of work and the branches in the districts in which the shops were situated. The unemployed members entered the branch at their place of living. At the labor exchanges, the unemployed League members formed into fractions to work among their fellow unemployed.

The League nuclei were to work in the closest contact to the Party nuclei. Representatives between nuclei were mutually exchanged.

The purpose of the cry "to the masses" and the change in organizational structure was both to increase the strength of the League and to build the social composition of the League on the working class elements. This form of organization, based on the Russian Y.C.L. and C.P., was accepted in theory by all the leagues, but was never completely carried out by the non-Russian organizations.

In the United States, with this turn, the face of the League was directed towards the young workers and every effort was made to win them. In the two main centers, New York and Chicago, the League began to participate in strikes and other struggles as a distinct youth organization. Campaigns were begun to reach into industries where the young workers were concentrated. The "Young Worker", under Max Shachtman's editorship, was changed from a "refined" magazine into a fighting newspaper which sought to reflect the life of the members and to educate them in the struggle.

This period, in the U.S. was one of the League's soundest and healthiest growth. It was free from the corrupting factional and clique strife which undermined it later on, and hence reached a membership of more than 3,000. It did not fail however, to participate in the inner life of the Party.

The organization along the lines of industrial fractions and branches instead of the territorial basis, as was first set forward in the thesis of Trotsky and Varga at the Third World Congress of the C.I. is the general pattern of organiz-

ation of the Workers Party.

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why was it necessary for the "Young Worker" to change from a propaganda sheet to an agitational organ with the turn to the masses?
2. What is the value of fractions?
3. How does a fraction operate? If you have a school or factory fraction in your unit, discuss the method of improving its efficiency, its relationship to the unit, its relationship to other S.Y.L. fractions, etc.
4. Why is it necessary for a revolutionary youth organization to recruit among the working class youth and to base its activities on them instead of the petit-bourgeois youth?

J. THE BEGINNING OF THE END - DEGENERATION

From late 1923 onward, the beginning of the degeneration of the YCL began to take place, until in 1925 the organic process of the youth movement was brought to an abrupt halt. The youth became a factional pawn, first by the Zinoviev-Stalin faction against Trotsky and then by Stalin against Zinoviev and Trotsky.

In late 1923, Leon Trotsky wrote in his "New Course": "It is wholly inadequate that the youth should repeat our formulas; it is necessary that the youth should take the revolutionary formulae fighting, transform them into flesh and blood, work out for themselves their own opinion with that courage which comes from sincere conviction and independence of character. Passive obedience, mechanical drill, characterless, obsequiousness, careerism, - away with these things from the Party!"



Trotsky was accused of "pitting the youth against the old Bolsheviks". Young workers who accepted Trotsky's advice (or his political criticisms of the ruling regime) were treated as opponents of Bolshevism and later expelled from the YCLs (in Russian, the treatment was much more severe).

The Young Communist League in Russia, in 1921 adopted the position that Russia "can arrive at socialism only through the proletarian revolution, which epoch of development we have now entered". However, after 1924, when Stalin first introduced the theory of "socialism in one country", it was not long before this was also adopted by the League.

On July 13 to 25, 1924, the Fourth Congress of the YCI opened up the international campaign for "Bolshevisation" (simultaneous with the campaign of the Fifth Congress of the Comintern) Since Trotsky was the outstanding spokesman against the bureaucratization of the C.P. and the theory of "socialism in one country", the YCL in every country was made the tool of the dominant faction in the party in the struggle against "Trotskyism" or alleged "Trotskyites". The slogan of "Bolshevisation" was used to effectuate the struggle against the left-wing. In every country, critical education of the young communists became impossible; factional obedience and loyalty were the tests of youth leaders, who in turn transmitted these traits to the ranks.

In the United States, the American party had been handed over to Ruthenberg and Lovestone. Their youth supporters were presented with the leadership of the League in the face of the overwhelming opposition of the membership at the 1925 convention. That marked the retrogression of the League, the degeneration of its leading elements, its conversion into a factional instrument, the mis-

training of its membership, its bureaucratization.

An outstanding leader of the Third Congress of the YCI, a follower of Zinoviev, Vuyo Vuyovitch was removed from the international leadership and later expelled and exiled to Siberia because of his support to the United Opposition of Trotsky and Zinoviev.

At the Fifth Congress of the YCI, August 20 to Sept. 18, 1928 (following the Sixth Congress of the Comintern) the old formula on the character of the YCL was repeated in resolutions and in the program: Trotskyism was condemned and Stalinism endorsed. No real progress could be noted in the development of strength or influence of the League.

From the growth of the bureaucratic seed to the warped monolithic movement today, the YCL had gone through many changes, not only at the top where leaders were manufactured and smashed, but in the ranks where the terrific fluctuation of the membership expressed the failure of the YCL to fulfill its purpose of training revolutionists for the party. At a time when the Party was distorted and undermined by Stalinism, the official youth movement, untrue to the traditions that were incorporated into it at its foundation, simply went along with the stream.

It was the youth of the Fourth International which again raised the banner of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, which again proceeded to build a youth movement based on the principles of revolutionary socialism..... but that is for the next outline.

READ

THE NEW COURSE.....LEON TROTSKY

THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL AFTER LENIN.....LEON TROTSKY

Q U E S T I O N S

1. What did Trotsky mean when he said that the youth must "take their revolutionary formulae fighting?"

2. How does factionalism in a youth movement destroy its healthy life? Under what circumstances can internal struggles serve as a good educational medium?

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

- Thesis and Resolutions of the various congresses of the YCI  
The International of Youth (organ of the YCI)  
The Fundamental Problems of the Young Communist Movement (1922)  
The Draft Programme of the YCI (1922)  
Programme of the YCI (1929)  
History of the YCL in the Soviet Union...A. Afonin  
From Isolation to the Masses.....R. Gyptner  
Where to Begin.....Fuernberg  
From a Third to Fourth.....YCI  
Problems of Socialist Youth Movement ....YPSL  
The Young Worker (1922-1929).....YCL organ  
Young Spartacus.....Dec.1931-1935  
Minutes of the National Committee of Young Workers League(1922-4)

(Very little of this material is now available)