

YSA

DISCUSSION BULLETIN

Vol. 9 No. 10
March 1966

CONTENTS

1. The Mellina Jones - Ron Ginther Resolution
On the Negro Struggle by Betsey Barnes
2. Memorandum from Robin D., February 26, 1966

10 cents

YOUNG SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

YSA, BOX 471, COOPER STATION, N.Y., N.Y. 10003

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THE MELLINA JONES - RON GINTHER RESOLUTION
ON THE NEGRO STRUGGLE
by Betsey Barnes

Recently comrades around the country have received two attacks on the YSA in the form of resolutions to the preconvention discussion. These resolutions are not only all-out assaults on our most basic ideas, but a slander of our participation in the antiwar movement and the Negro Struggle.

It is easy to see what is wrong with most of the ideas which the Mellina Jones - Ron Ginther resolution counterpose to the 1965 YSA resolution on the Negro Struggle and to sections of this year's Political Resolution. But, there is a difference between being able to see the flaws in the document and having a clear grasp of what our basic views are. Especially those comrades who did not have a chance to participate in last year's discussion should study carefully the literature which sets forth our ideas on this subject.

YSAers should be familiar with the 'Resolution on the Negro Struggle' passed at last year's convention. This resolution not only states many of our basic views on the Negro Struggle, but gives a picture of what the Negro Struggle was like in the period before the recent lull. YSAers should also be familiar with our 1964 resolution, "Youth and the Black Revolt" which was the first YSA resolution which analyzed black nationalism.

Other basic literature includes the Young Socialist pamphlet, "How A Minority Can Change Society" by George Breitman; the pamphlet, "Freedom Now: New Stage in the Struggle for Negro Emancipation" which is the text of the 1963 SWP resolution; Robert Vernon's "White Radicals and Black Nationalism" in the Winter 1964 ISR and his pamphlet, "The Black Ghetto."

The Marxist analysis of the revolutionary potential of the Negro Struggle and the progressive nature of black nationalism has been developed over the years. Part of the history of this development has been recorded in the Bulletin of Marxist Studies, "Documents on the Negro Struggle."

Outright Falsification

Mellina Jones and Ron Ginther are not only wrong on most basic points, but they present an outright falsification of the YSA position. In one place they write, "It is not the revolutionary, but the more conservative traditions of black unity which intrigue the YSA. The cry of 'black nationalism' has become an ideological cover for substituting a bourgeois separatist solution to the Negro Question for a revolutionary integrationist solution." And elsewhere they write, "When All-Black passes over from a tactic to a principle, proletarian solidarity and revolutionary internationalism vanish." Apparently the radicalism of Malcom X - before, during

and after his split with the Muslims - is considered by the writers to be one of the "conservative" aspects of black unity and our support to and relations with Malcolm a product of the "intrigue" his "conservatism" held for us.

For YSAers "all-black" is not a principle. Nor do we take a position on the question of separation versus integration. The pamphlet, "Freedom Now, New Stage in the Struggle for Negro Emancipation" gives a clear presentation of the Marxist position on these questions:

"But the American Negro people are in a situation with some unique aspects. They are an oppressed minority without a clearly defined geographical, language or cultural basis for differentiation from their oppressors. Negro nationalism is at this point a broad medium for "self identification," a method of differentiating a racially oppressed minority from its oppressors and of uniting it ideologically and organizationally to free itself from oppression. Negro nationalism plays a function for the Negro people here in many ways like that which class consciousness plays for the working class.

"James Baldwin's attempt at a definition of nationalism is a useful one to build on. This author said it means 'that a certain group of people, living in a certain place, has decided to take its political destinies into its own hands.' Applied to the United States, as it was meant to be, this means that large numbers of Negroes have decided, and more are in the process of deciding, that they cannot leave their future in the hands of the white oppressors but must unite with other Negroes and decide for themselves what they want in and from the United States.

"This consciousness is the basic feature of Negro nationalism today. It is expressed in various ways - most commonly in the stimulation of racial pride, declarations of independence, the desire for Negro leadership and control of the civil rights struggle, mistrust of whites - and it is present to varying degrees in most Negro tendencies, both integrationist and separationist.

"Viewed in this light, Negro nationalism, as it now exists, should not be equated with Negro separatism, the tendency that advocates creation of a separate Negro nation. The two are not the same thing. All separatists are nationalists but not all nationalists are separatists. Nationalism expresses the desire of Negroes to decide their destiny, including, among other things, their attitude toward the question of a separate nation. Nationalists want the right to decide their destiny, and to create an independent movement and other conditions that will make it possible for them to decide their destiny. But so far they not made a choice in favor of a separate nation.

"For many Negroes, nationalism is considered and may prove to be a way of uniting the mass of the Negro people and forcing

the rulers of this country to grant them equality inside the United States. They leave open the question of separatism for a future stage, neither rejecting nor endorsing it now.

"The first big task of the Negro struggle is the mobilization and unification of the Negro masses in an independent movement to fight for their equality - an indispensable condition for an eventual revolutionary alliance of the working class and the Negro people. Negro nationalism is progressive because it contributes to the creation of such an independent Negro movement. It will remain progressive so long as it fulfills that function, whether the struggle be fought along integrationist or separatist lines."

Independence, Nationalism and the Southern Movement

The "Political Resolution" gives a lot of attention to the important question of independence for protest and class movements. By its very nature black nationalism projects a lack of faith in the white power structure to solve problems, it means as it says in the quote above, "the desire of Negroes to decide their own destiny." Thus in the "Political Resolution" the decline of nationalist organizations is included among the reasons for the strengthening of coalitionism.

Independence does not necessarily accompany the fight for civil rights in all its forms. This is true of the Southern Struggle where many of the protests are aimed at achieving rights that already exist in the North, such as the right to vote. Participants in the fight for these rights can have ambiguous feelings toward the Federal government, with a lack of clarity as to whether it is a friend or foe. This was and still is a factor in the development of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Mellina Jones and Ron Ginther propose that "the YSA abandon its theory of black nationalism and recognize the central revolutionary anti-capitalist content of the freedom movement, particularly in the South." As Peter Camejo points out in his document, it is not at all particularly in the South that the struggle takes on a "central revolutionary anti-capitalist content." Racism and the super-exploitation of black people cannot be ended under capitalism. But we have already seen modifications in the Jim Crow system in the South resulting from the struggle.

Jones and Ginther state "there is not the slightest element of black nationalism in the Southern movement." Just the exact opposite is true. Especially now when the movement is coming face to face with the problem of where to go next, the ideas of black nationalism, and especially those of Malcolm X are having an impact. This is reflected by the supporters of Malcolm X in SNCC and in the debate over the question of all-black political action. So many of the ideas associated with the rise of black nationalism, especially as formulated by Malcolm X, have been absorbed by the

militant wing of the Freedom movement, North and South, that they are now taken for granted. George Breitman listed some of these in his talk at the Malcolm X Memorial Meeting in New York - "black leadership, black power, building a base in the ghetto, control of the ghetto, self-defense, racial pride and solidarity, identification with the colonial revolution and Africa, independent black political action."

Comrades will be interested in the following excerpts taken from a New York Times article which discusses the attempt of the Southern militants to come to grips with one of the basic questions raised by Malcolm X and many of the black nationalists - independent black political action. Compare John Lewis's quote to Malcolm's many statements on the subject:

"Atlanta, Jan. 22 - Two civil rights organizations are quietly committing themselves to the election of all-Negro county and municipal governments in some predominantly Negro areas of the South.

"Leaders of the Congress of Racial Equality and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee said in interviews this week that they were taking the step because of a shortage of 'responsive' white candidates.

" 'There is now the feeling among Negroes that we have to hammer out our own destiny and go for broke,' said Richard Haley, Southern regional director for CORE.

"Leaders, however, in two other organizations - the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People - remain opposed to all-Negro slates of political candidates.

"They said they were still confident that the needs of Southern Negroes could be met through the election of city and county officials of both races.

"Within all of the major civil rights organizations, leaders are watching current racial unrest in Tuskegee, Ala., where Negroes, although they outnumber registered white voters, decided during elections two years ago to leave a white majority on city and county governing boards.

"This week, leaders of CORE and the student committee were interpreting the Tuskegee unrest as an indication that 'coalition' governments of Negroes and whites will not work in areas where the Negro has long been under the dominance of the 'white power structure.'

"By contrast, leaders of the NAACP and the leadership conference viewed Tuskegee's problems as 'growing pains' and said 'some frustration' could be expected in the transition from all-white to interracial government.

"Should the NAACP and the leadership conference eventually join the other organizations in their misgivings about the Tuskegee type of government, the development could have far reaching ramifications in the South.

"Although there are now only seven Southern counties in which Negro registered voters outnumber whites, there are 71 others in which registration under the Voting Rights Act of 1965 could produce Negro voting majorities....

"John Lewis, chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, said he considered experience and training to be less important than 'being responsive to the needs of the people.'

"He said his organization was helping to create all-Negro political organizations, which are using the black panther as their political symbol, in Greene County, Ala., and in neighboring Lowndes County, where there were two civil rights slayings last year.

" 'We are doing it,' he said, 'because there is no white officeholder in the county who is responsive to the needs of Negroes, and we know there won't be any white person running who is responsive.'

"In some instances, Mr. Lewis continued, it 'might be necessary to have all-Negro government before you can have a workable interracial government....'

"Students from Tuskegee Institute started protest demonstrations against the slaying and, then, this week, expanded them into an attack on the city's interracial government.

" 'Macon County is 85 percent Negro,' read one student sign. 'Negroes should run the government....'

"Another faculty member, the dean of students, Percival B. Phillips, thought, however, that most students and many faculty members now favored all-Negro government and objected to the city's image as a 'model city in race relations.'

" 'The students have not yet seen where it paid any dividends when the Negro has held back and not taken over full political power where it is possible.'

"On the other hand, Dr. Phillips said, many older Negroes were seeing signs of change and believed that 'redress for the evils of the past may come.'

" 'The big difference between the two sides in this whole dispute,' he said, 'is the rate of speed with which change should come.' "

March 1, 1966

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Madison, Wisconsin
February 26, 1966

Since this memorandum will arrive too late to receive national circulation I would like to see it included in the packets handed out at registration:

Comrades:

I have just finished reading the documents in discussion bulletin vol. 9 no. 7 (from Seattle). I have never before seen YSA documents on such a low theoretical-political level. It also seems that these comrades are completely out of touch with both the politics and activity of the YSA at least since the 1963 Convention.

In a Leninist organization politics come first, but once general political agreement is reached on fundamental issues, secondary concerns including tactics, organization and lesser political questions should come to the fore. This should be the general orientation of our 1966 Convention. The Presiding Committee should draw up an agenda, giving minorities a full hearing, but geared to increased communication between various localities and full discussion of strategies and tactical concerns. Points, such as the constitution, which caused confusion at the last Convention, should be given adequate time.

It would be extremely unfortunate if the 1966 Convention degenerates into a concerted attack on the Seattle comrades in the style of the 1965 attack on George Carleton. This would be a waste of our valuable time and energy. Delegates should explain the rather obvious mistakes of these comrades and pass on to the important business at hand. In my opinion this would be a true expression of the actual theoretical level of our organization.

Fraternally,

Robin David