



**YOUNG SOCIALIST  
DISCUSSION  
BULLETIN—PART 2**

**25¢**



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The discussion articles and resolutions contained in this bulletin were written for the Young Socialist National Convention to be held in Chicago at the University of Illinois (Circle Campus) November 28 - December 1, 1968. They were written by members of the Young Socialist Alliance across the country.

Resolutions drafted by the National Executive Committee of the Young Socialist Alliance have also been circulated to the entire membership. These four resolutions, which will be voted on at the convention, are "The New International Youth Radicalization," "The '68 Campaign and Beyond... Socialist Youth Politics in America," "On the Revolutionary Struggle of Black America for Self Determination," and "Young Socialists and the Fight Against the Vietnam War."

The resolutions and contributions to the discussion are being circulated prior to the convention to assure the fullest possible discussion on political perspectives and activities before the convention meets.

Young socialists from around the country are invited to participate in the written discussion and urged to attend the convention. Contributions to the discussion and inquiries should be sent to the Young Socialist Alliance, Box 471, Cooper Station, New York, New York 10003.



# Problems of the Student Movement

by Rick Feinberg

## Introduction

During my three years of work in the student movement on the Berkeley campus, a number of important questions have repeatedly arisen before the radical community. These are problems which promise to continue facing the student movement for years to come and consequently I believe that an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of this struggle is indispensable. My comments will be based primarily on my experience in Berkeley but I am certain that problems similar to those facing the Berkeley movement are to be found on other campuses throughout the United States. I hope that some of my observations may prove useful in helping to facilitate all our campus work around the country.

My primary motivation for this undertaking is to deal with some of the important questions which the movement must take into consideration if it is to develop a coherent strategy. A secondary motivation is to attempt a political analysis of recent events at Berkeley, about which there still appears to be a great deal of confusion. Furthermore, it is my hope that if there is general agreement with the perspective which I will outline, that a pamphlet either consisting essentially of this text or a different one, containing these basic points be published in the not too distant future for the benefit and education of the rest of the student movement.

## I. Crisis Orientation or Ongoing Movement

Nothing is decried more by participants in the Berkeley student movement than its apparent "crisis orientation." Members of the radical community are deeply disturbed by the fact that while it is possible to mobilize as many as five or ten thousand students on this campus under certain "crisis" conditions, it has been totally impossible to get more than a small handful to regularly engage in the less exciting day to day activities. (This fact is seen as evidence that the movement has failed to build up a radical consciousness among the student body and consequently, that all its efforts have been futile.) As a result, one of the favorite pastimes in radical circles has become attempting to think of original ideas for how a "mass ongoing broad-based radical organization" involving large numbers of students in day to day activities between crises might be successfully established.

In considering the merits of this situation, it must be recognized that the question is not whether such an organization would be desirable — of course it would; it is always good to get a maximum number of people involved in work which is necessary to keep the movement functioning -- but whether it is possible. The movement asks why it has been impossible to get people to carry on the relatively dull work which inevitably comes between high points in the struggle; the answer is that it is not. The Y.S.A. is able to get most of its members to engage in this kind of activity. The Y.S.A. has no trouble getting people to leaflet for fund raising events, to sell The Militant, and any number of other chores which are certainly not the most exciting or inspiring of activities. The Y.S.A., however, is able to do this because it is a cadre organization. Its members are conscious revolutionary socialists who have a real sense of dedication to their ultimate goal and a recognition of the need for serious disciplined activity if this goal is to be attained.

An excellent example of the kind of difference this type of organization can make may be seen by comparing the Y.S.A. to the Peace and Freedom Party. There are several hundred times as many registered P.F.P. members in the state of California as there are members of the Y.S.A. Yet if one compares the two organizations in the number of leaflets and brochures handed out during the 1968 election campaign, the number of people doing this kind of work on a regular daily basis, or the number of campuses to which they have been able to bring word of their campaign, the Y.S.A. comes out ahead. But this is because people who join an organization like the Y.S.A. are the most conscious elements of the movement. While Y.S.A. members have a goal for which they have committed themselves to work as their major task in life, this is not the case for the five or ten thousand who might come out to a rally when there is a crisis situation. Even within the Y.S.A. it is easier to get people involved when something exciting is happening -- that is the way human beings operate -- and if this is true for the Y.S.A. it is much more so for the movement at large. It is simply a fact of life that the majority of students who at times will support our movement are not revolutionary cadre and until we reach a time when they are, no-

thing we say or do will get them to set aside their other activities and become more involved in the daily grind of dull but necessary work. When the time comes that these people understand the importance and are willing to engage in this kind of work (i.e., when we have five to ten thousand revolutionary cadre on the Berkeley campus) we will be in a revolutionary situation.

Would this be desirable? Certainly. If we could wake up tomorrow morning and find ourselves in the middle of a revolutionary situation, that would be wonderful. But we must recognize the realities of the situation as it actually exists. Anyone who deludes himself into believing that revolution is imminent and bases his strategy on this assumption when the objective conditions are clearly not right is courting disaster.

What does this mean organizationally and what are the tasks of revolutionary socialists on the campuses in this period?

Realizing that the reason why we have not been able to involve large numbers of people in the movement on an ongoing basis is their lack of revolutionary consciousness, we must do our best to build that consciousness. That means propaganda, agitation, and education. It means leaflets, rallies, and articles in the underground press and in campus newspapers. It means selling The Militant, holding forums, and speaking to people on an individual basis. And it means engaging in mass action since direct experience confronting the ruling class and seeing how it operates in practice is the most convincing argument of all as to the correctness of our analysis of society.

Do we need to set up a new organization? What would be the purpose of that? The problem of getting people involved is their lack of consciousness, not our failure to provide an organization through which they can operate. We already have a revolutionary organization through which anyone who develops sufficient consciousness to engage in the necessary kind of activity can work, the Y.S.A. And if they do not like the Y.S.A., there are plenty of other ongoing organizations on campus, from the Independent Socialist Club to the Community Party (at least in a few areas) to the Progressive Labor Party, S. D.S., and many others. This should not preclude the formation of united front coalitions around specific questions such as the anti-war movement or particular campus issues, but our primary task as revolutionary socialists should be to win as many people as possible to our program and to bring them into a revolutionary socialist organization. We must build a disciplined cadre capable of leading the working class in a revolutionary direction and

not allowing them to be misled down the same class collaborationist road they travelled in the 30's under the guiding influence of the "Communist" Party. In this period, tens or even hundreds of people may join such an organization but we will simply not be able to mobilize thousands except in periodic crises.

## II. Strategic Retreat or Lost Opportunity?

Another fact which is poorly understood and which consequently leads to a great deal of frustration among campus activists and often severe and unnecessary casualties is that you cannot build a mass militant action around every single issue, no matter how just the cause. It sometimes happens that even on the most popular of issues, events develop in such a way that it is impossible to mobilize masses of students to engage in militant action. Without this realization, however, the movement becomes disturbed over the fact that "we had such a good issue" and the opportunity for action around it has been lost. The leadership starts blaming itself and the way it handled the situation for the fact that no mass action has taken place and they conclude that the reason for this is their own cowardice. They conclude that they are lagging behind the rest of the student body when just the opposite is in fact the case and you end up with the paradox of the left sitting around and talking about what they can do to have a confrontation, almost as if our goal was confrontation for its own sake. The result is that the movement goes ahead with an action for which the campus is not ready and quickly finds itself isolated from the vast majority of the student body. The administration then takes repressive measures against those who participated in the action and there is not sufficient support to mount a significant defense. I believe that this can be made clearer, however, by studying some concrete cases in which this has happened, so I shall now discuss the two most prominent examples from the Berkeley campus in recent years.

The first is a series of events which took place in the spring of 1966. United Nations Ambassador Arthur Goldberg was scheduled to speak to an audience of more than ten thousand people at a Charter Day ceremony. The movement felt that it would be a travesty for a representative of the Johnson Administration and a leading spokesman for the United States' policy of aggression in Vietnam to appear as the keynote speaker at an official university gathering and determined to mount a large militant demonstration. To plan this demonstration an ad hoc organization called the Peace Rights Organizing Committee (P.R.O.C.) was established and two non-students were elected to the steering committee of eleven.

At this point the campus administration began to enforce a regulation stating that a student organization could not have any non-student officers and unless P.R.O.C. got the two non-students off its steering committee it could not be registered on campus. This meant that it could not use university facilities such as classrooms for meetings or Sproul Steps for rallies, and most importantly, P.R.O.C. was not permitted to set up a literature table with all the other organizations on Sproul Plaza.

The administration told P.R.O.C. that its registration would be immediately approved if it would only state that there were no non-student officers, and even went to the length of letting it be known that they would not object if we set up a front group which would conform with campus rules but would not affect our functioning. P.R.O.C., however, took the principled position that students who had recently graduated or dropped out of school to do full time political work had the same right to be part of a campus political organization as a student who happened to be registered at that particular time, and that the administration had no right to deny an organization campus status on those grounds. A P.R.O.C. table was set up every day in defiance of the administration's ruling and every day the cop who had been hired by the dean's office to keep tabs on political activities would come by and cite people who were sitting there.

In response to the citations, all sympathetic groups placed P.R.O.C. signs on their own tables. As soon as "Dean Fuzz" determined which one was really the P.R.O.C. table and a student was cited for sitting there, another would immediately sit down and take his place. The solidarity of those concerned about the issue was tremendous, but unfortunately, it did not extend beyond a hard core. The mass of students did not support the goals of the movement because they believed that our aim was to prevent Goldberg from speaking and this would interfere with the ideal of free speech. In addition, they gave considerable credence to the administration's argument which was essentially that outside agitators should not be permitted to come in and dominate what was supposed to be a student organization. Consequently, a large number of students (and even one professor) were cited and many were placed on disciplinary probation for their activities. The demonstration consisted of a few thousand people carrying anti-Goldberg signs and a walkout of possibly as many as a thousand -- not a bad showing, but certainly not a mass militant action. And no defense could be mobilized on behalf of the students upon whom university discipline was imposed.

The second example is an issue which still awaits final resolution; the case of Eldridge Cleaver's right to lecture on a University of California campus for credit.

Over the past summer, a student-initiated course on racism was planned and set up, in which Black Panther Party Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver was to deliver a series of ten lectures. The course was approved by the appropriate faculty committee, but the Regents responded by passing a new university regulation that no guest lecturer (i.e. someone without an official university title) could lecture more than once in a single course during any given academic quarter.

This ruling not only abrogated students' freedom to hear what Cleaver had to contribute and Cleaver's right to speak on campus but it directly contravened against the faculty's long established right to determine the content and credit status of courses and it put in jeopardy the whole concept of student-initiated courses in the University of California system. The campus community, needless to say, was outraged and almost two thousand people attended a mass meeting to begin the fight for those rights which had been taken away by the Regents.

At the meeting the demand was adopted that the course, Social Analysis 139X be given on campus, for credit, as planned. It was impossible at this time, however, to go into action because the Academic Senate was scheduled to meet the following week and students were unwilling to take any action that might alienate the faculty before it became crystal clear that they would not support our demands. If we took militant action before the Academic Senate meeting most students would have felt that we did not give the faculty the chance they deserved and that we were to blame for their failure to adopt a good position. Therefore, despite the fact that no one in the leadership expected anything worthwhile to come from the faculty meeting, any disruption before the meeting was out of the question. Our strategy was based on the assumption that the faculty would blatantly sell out the students' cause and that this would arouse sufficient indignation to bring the whole campus into action.

Then the Academic Senate surprised us and while passing a resolution which fell short of our demands, did adopt a position which was far better than we had expected. While the lengths to which they would go to insure the implementation of their resolution remained uncertain, they did support the principle that the course should be given. Students sat back to wait and see what the faculty would do, and the likelihood of confrontation began to sharply decline. The Center for Participant Education, the student group which initiated the course, applied for "a course of instruction following the substance of Social Analysis 139X," without specifying whether or not it was for credit. The administration granted a room

specifically stating that it was for a non-credit course and C.P.E. announced that the course was entitled to university credit, for which they would continue to fight.

Social Analysis 139X was now being taught "on campus, as planned," with Eldridge Cleaver being able to give his scheduled ten lectures -- two thirds of our demands -- but still no credit. Soon, however, even this obstacle began to disappear. The faculty, to everyone's amazement, continued working in their own way to procure credit for the course, and among the concessions they won were a decision that study lists of people taking 139X would be accepted with seven units rather than the usual twelve, the selective service office would write letters to local draft boards stating that people taking seven units plus the Cleaver course were carrying a full load, students would actually be able to get credit by taking special independent study courses and using 139X as the subject of their independent study, and for students who did not do this, five units would be waived toward graduation.

The campus community saw all the concessions which had been won by going through "legitimate channels" so they were in no mood for confrontation. Although they had not yet procured credit formally for the course, there were sufficient gains to convince a large number of people who might otherwise have supported our movement that by relying on the faculty, who had already won most of our demands, and by just giving them a little more time, they would obtain victory on the one remaining issue, official credit status.

Campus radicals saw the rapid erosion of support for a militant confrontation with the Administration and concluded that it was their own fault. They saw that there were two thousand people at the first mass meeting and concluded that there were many thousands anxiously waiting for action at that time. The decline in support, they felt, was a function of the time which had dragged on without there being any action to involve these people. They felt that the campus wanted action and that it was only the opportunist attitudes of the leadership which had held things back.

At the movement's lowest ebb, during a co-ordinating committee meeting of about thirty-five people (the average was upwards of a hundred), it was decided that since the leadership's indecisiveness had immobilized and demoralized the movement, they would create a new spark of life by simply announcing a militant action (most likely a sit-in) for the following Monday. This action, it was decided, would be carried through regardless of how many people would be willing to support it. (Our earlier comment about people who cannot tell when the objective conditions are not right was never more appropriate!)

It was determined that a major reason for our failure to mobilize people was our primary concentration on the issue of credit which made it possible for the university to cut the heart out of our issue right out from under us. As an alternative, it was decided that the movement should redirect its main area of attention to the broader question of racism at the university, and, to facilitate this change in focus, the body abandoned its role as a co-ordinating committee, responsible to constituent small groups, reconstituting itself as "S.O.U.R.C.E." (Students Opposed to the University's Racist Corporate Elite). Its purpose was defined as leading militant actions, beginning with the one proposed for the following Monday, around the issues of university racism and credit for Social Analysis 139X.

There was a firm resolution at this meeting that the Monday action would occur come what may, by a mass meeting was called for Sunday in an attempt to draw as many people as possible into this action. It was called specifically for militants who wanted to act, with the attitude that moderates who just wanted to sit around and talk could reserve a separate room and have their own meeting. The general sentiment, however, was so overwhelmingly against militant action that only about 150 people ended up coming to the "mass" meeting. In a straw poll only thirty-three people said they would be willing to sit-in and the meeting was adjourned before any vote on the question of action was taken.

Frustrated and demoralized at the lack of action the students in the course met Monday night and voted that they would sit-in the following day if credit was not granted. Shortly after noon on Tuesday, they announced that they were going to the registrar's office to sit-in and invited others to join them.

About 150 students joined the sit-in, and 122 remained to be arrested that night. As the sit-inners were taken into custody, a crowd of three thousand people gathered outside to show their support and a few tried to stop the police vans from leaving with the arrested students. The police finally got us out by going the wrong way on a one way street and all cops were then immediately cleared from the area. Left with no focus on which to vent their feelings and no reason for remaining in the street, the crowd quickly dispersed.

The next day, a group of four hundred students took over another building. About seventy-five remained and barricaded themselves in. At various times during the night the crowd may have been up to two or three thousand milling outside the building, but the police waited until six o'clock in the morning when the crowd had

dwindled to around five hundred before moving in an approximately equal number of police and arresting those inside. During this night as well as the previous one, the police were careful to utilize a minimum of force.

At some point in the evening professors' files, personal papers, and the like were destroyed or stolen, and the administration played this to the hilt. By focusing on the vandalism they were able to obscure the basic issue so that while virtually the entire campus sympathized with the demand for credit, the movement became totally isolated on the basis of its tactics.

Much more important, however, than the specific details of what actually transpired was the general attitude of the campus toward any kind of action. During Stop the Draft Week in Oakland last fall, students engaged in actions which were far more militant than anything that happened in either of the sit-ins. However, in this case they saw that they were making progress on their demands without any disruption and saw no reason to assume that this progress would not continue. The feeling of most people toward disruption was that it would not be likely to help win credit for 139X and that if anything, it would simply cause persons in a position of influence to become more rigid in their stance. The attitude of most people on campus was indicated by the turnout of only 150 people to a mass meeting which was to decide on action for the following day. By taking it upon themselves to go into action, the students in the course forced a confrontation onto a campus which clearly did not want one. The presence of police and the arrest of students on campus made many people feel that they should do something to defend those who had put themselves on the line and to show their solidarity, but since they did not agree with the action that had brought the police onto campus in the first place, they could not work up any enthusiasm. When the issue of vandalism was then brought up it gave people the excuse they were looking for and at that point all possibility of further mass action ceased. The chancellor announced that the students who had taken part in the second sit-in had been placed on interim suspension and would probably be expelled, and that university discipline would also be taken against participants in the first action. By this time, however, the movement had become so isolated from the rest of the student body that it has been impossible to mount any kind of defense.

Seeing that there was no possibility of engaging large masses of students in active disruption such as a sit-in or occupying buildings, the movement called for a strike. They recognized that they lacked sufficient support for a successful

strike but felt constrained to do something and knew that if a strike failed they would not be subject to arrest or to university discipline.

The strike was voted up at a noon rally but most classes proceeded pretty much as usual and the action was called off at a mass meeting the following night. Plans at that meeting were to resume a week later, after more organizing had been done to convince people of the need for a strike, but so far the amount of support for an action has done nothing since the meeting but decline and still the leadership appears to favor calling a strike. What finally will happen remains to be seen and it is always possible that something may occur which totally changes the entire picture. But still, I think that there are some important lessons to be gained from this experience.

One of the movement's major problems, as I indicated earlier, is that it has no long range perspective. It tends to look upon each issue that appears as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and that if successful mass action which wins the movement's demands does not occur, this is almost the end of the world.

Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. Periodically the Regents or the campus administration or a local politician, or some other representative of the ruling class does something which so enrages the student body that thousands are willing to take militant action. This happened during the Free Speech Movement when virtually all political activity on campus came under attack, during the days of the Vietnam Day Committee when the Oakland City Government would not permit an anti-war march in that city, during Stop the Draft Week when an injunction was brought down to prevent the organizers of the demonstration from using the campus as a staging area, and on any number of other occasions. This is essentially what happened when Eldridge Cleaver was prevented from teaching for credit at the University of California, but as this issue happened to develop, sentiment for a disruptive action quickly dissipated. However, despite the objective developments, the movement, with its short term perspective, felt it had to make good on this issue and tried to force students into an action for which they had no desire, with the natural result that the action was a flop. If they had only had a slightly longer range view they would have recognized their lack of support among the student body at the time of the sit-ins and they need never have occurred at such an unpropitious time. And when the sit-ins did occur, at the very least, they might have recognized the lack of support for any further actions and would have refrained from the futile exercise of calling an action which, from the beginning, was ob-



viously bound to fail. As it happened, the dismal failure of the strike only served to increase and prolong the already pervasive demoralization and indicate to the administration and the Regents that the demand for credit for 139X had far less support on campus than was in fact the case. Whereas it may sometimes be better to mobilize your forces and go down in a tremendous battle than to capitulate without a struggle, it is absolutely insane to enter a struggle against a powerful enemy without being able to rally any forces to your side and this is especially true when you are not in a do or die situation.

To put things in a more positive light, the movement should have announced that the concessions it had won constituted a substantial though not a complete victory, continued to propagandize about all the things which were still wrong with the university, and waited until something new occurred to arouse the students. This something may have been closely related to all the preceding events, such as the firing of a teaching assistant for his part in the actions leading to an A.F.T. strike around which a real student strike could have been called that would completely shut down the university for a protracted period or it could have been a new regential or administrative "atrociousness" on an entirely unrelated issue, but something of this nature was bound to occur in the near future -- as it always does. The movement, however, felt that the Cleaver issue merited a disruption and set out to create one despite the reticence of the rest of the campus. Rather than waiting for an issue that could have united the campus in a common struggle against a common enemy as has happened many times in the past, by forcing the issue we only succeeded in dividing the campus and isolating ourselves. This is not something from which the Berkeley student movement will be unable to recover, but many good activists will have been needlessly sacrificed because of this lack of foresight.

In short, then, this experience should teach us that when we have an unpopular issue, rather than making our major fight over it, we are often better off to do nothing but propagandize and wait for a more popular one which inevitably comes up and around which it is possible to mobilize large masses of people in the struggle.

Another error we made during the sit-ins was to predicate our whole strategy on the blunders of the police. It is true that in the past, during the F.S.M., the strike during the fall of 1966, or the events at Columbia last spring, the presence of police on campus and their brutal treatment of peaceful demonstrators has done more than anything else to radicalize the student body. On all of these occasions, the movement was dragging along without involving tremendous numbers of people until

the entry of the police which caused thousands of uncommitted individuals to rally to the side of the demonstrators. Even during the recent events, had the police beaten their way through a crowd of thousands of students to get to a building full of demonstrators, whom they brutally beat and dragged to their busses in plain view of those outside, they could have saved the day for us. However, to base everything on the assumption that they will do this leads to a number of problems.

The major problem, of course, is that they might not act in this way and this is in fact what happened during the sit-ins. They made a conscious effort to avoid giving us any possible pretext for claiming police brutality and just in case any of them messed up, they made sure to act when the number of witnesses was at a minimum. But even if there had been more people to see the presence of club-swinging police on campus there might have been problems.

During Stop the Draft Week, everyone saw the action as basically legitimate. It involved an anti-draft and anti-war demonstration at the most feared and the most despised symbol of U.S. imperialism from the point of view of an American student, an army induction center. The demonstration had come under attack from local officials and from the university before it had occurred and before definite plans had even been formulated. And when the police broke up the demonstration with more force and brutality than anyone in the white middle class community had ever seen, especially directed against themselves and their friends, this was the last straw. Some thought anything short of guns and explosives was justified.

During the 139X sit-ins, on the other hand, we did not have that overwhelming support; the campus community did not recognize the tremendous legitimacy of the initial action, and it was even looked upon by many as out and out provocation. Che Guevara observed that people will not be willing to follow a revolutionary course until it has been made perfectly clear that there are no other channels of redress open to them, and if this is true of a Bolivian peasant, it is certainly true of an American college student. In the case of 139X the vast majority of students did not feel that all the normal channels had been exhausted, and if there had been a little police brutality many would have felt that we had provoked it and had it coming, especially after the vandalism of the second night. Certainly the amount of brutality they could get away with and not stir the campus to act in our support would have been limited, but the less legitimate and the more provocative our actions appear, the higher that limit becomes.

There is one more dilemma which the movement will continue to face as long as it goes from issue to issue without having any long range perspective, and that is the promise of constant demoralization since students are bound to lose the majority of their battles as long as the working class is not moving and they have no direct access to power. A few thousand transit workers go on strike for a week and the largest city in the country is effectively immobilized. If a hundred thousand students struck for a month and nothing else (i.e. they did not get support from other segments of the population) this society would continue to function and the striking students would be hurt more than anyone else.

This does not mean that it is impossible for students to win any concessions. The victory of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in 1964 was very significant and the Mexican American Student Confederation at the same campus won a long list of demands just a few weeks ago by merely having eleven students sit in at university Presi-

dent Charles Hitch's office. However, as it becomes apparent that the movement cannot be bought off with concessions, the ruling class becomes increasingly loath to grant victories, and there is little that students alone can do to force them. Consequently, if our criterion for victory is winning demands, in the majority of cases we are lost. If, however, our major goal is to educate people to the workings of the system and the role of the university, and ultimately, to recruit them to the revolutionary socialist movement, we can win and usually do. By continuing this process of education through action as well as propoganda, we will be able to continue building a movement which will reach out to bring in other segments of the population — black and white workers. And it is this combination of students and workers, black and white, under the leadership of a revolutionary working class party that will eventually overturn this whole capitalist order and create the kind of society for which the student movement has already begun to struggle.

November 2, 1968

## Our GI Work

### by Mike Maggi

American GIs have begun to radicalize on a mass scale and to enter openly into mass actions against the Vietnam war in every part of the country. This new ally of the antiwar movement can give it the driving force it needs to mobilize hundreds of thousands more people in demonstrations against the war and to completely expose the aims of imperialism in Vietnam. While the document is quite correct in saying "the U. S. Army is not the Tzar's Army of 1917", we can find little reason to be pessimistic or conservative on the possibilities and opportunities before us now and on those which will unfold shortly.

The tasks before us in our work as citizens -- in or out of uniform -- are immense, serious, but also exciting. The rising political consciousness is a result of the material fact that GIs are forced to fight a war which is not in their interests and which they do not believe in. Heightening this consciousness further is the fact that the official rationale of the American capitalist class and its government has at once popped as a soap-bubble before the world and exploded as a bomb in the minds of those Americans that had believed the war to be "necessary to fight the spread of Communism" and for "Freedom and Democracy" in South Vietnam. The GIs are looking for answers to the questions they have in their minds about the history, nature and purpose of the war. They see mass antiwar sentiment and demonstrations at home and the incredible heroism of the people of Vietnam

To build any kind of base within the Army for the antiwar movement it is necessary to build cadres within the Army itself. When our comrades are drafted they do not work as disciplined members of our organization, but as citizens with the right to protest against unwise, unjust, or illegal (even by bourgeois law) policies. They serve as centers for discussion around the war and can give other GIs answers to their questions. There are many men in the military with the skills necessary to build the antiwar movement, and we must reach these men and draw them into active participation in all phases of the work. There may be none of these people at a given base, within a given company or an individual platoon, however, and our first task will be to mount a full educational campaign to reach all GIs concerning the facts about the war.

This educational task is the most ur-

gent because it is a necessary prerequisite to involving great numbers of GIs in actions. This task must be carried through by a campaign of rallies, teach-ins, and literature distributions. We have to spend long hours discussing all the political questions involved with individual GIs just as we had to do so a couple of years ago with students.

Antiwar GI papers exist in several parts of the country. Each paper that conducts an educational campaign in its own right is important. Task Force is the major national paper that is published in San Francisco that can be used for supplementing local papers. Task Force is published for three major reasons: first, to give GIs the facts about the war; second, to build GI participation in mass antiwar demonstrations; third, to build defense committees to give GIs the protection of having an organ that can publish the facts about the harassment and victimization that violates their civil liberties. The distribution of these papers must be massive, well organized and continuous.

Much of the propaganda now distributed by the antiwar movement skips over some of the fundamental questions of the war that is taken for granted they are aware of. We should be careful that leaflets, papers and our discussions deal with the questions GIs are most concerned with. What was the role of the French in Indo-China? How and why was Vietnam split into two zones? What about the Chinese Communists? If we stop the bombing will it result in more GI deaths without the chance of ending the war? We cannot leave any question unanswered. We must patiently explain.

The other aspect of developing political consciousness within the ranks of the military is to impress upon the GIs that they have the legal right to formulate and express their opinions on the Government's policies -- particularly those policies which affect them most directly and which the entire society and world are concerned with -- U.S. Policy in Vietnam. Their legal right to dissent must be explained and defended by the entire antiwar movement.

The second task, but not second in importance, is to develop a working coalition with GIs wherever possible. This can take some organizational form such as the

GI-Civilian Alliance for Peace in Seattle, the Students-Soldiers Action Committee at San Francisco State College, college campus chapters of Vietnam Vets for Peace working with SMC such as in Los Angeles, or something like the Columbia Committee to Aid Antiwar GIs. The organizational forms should remain flexible in order to bring as many active-duty GIs as possible into active participation at all levels of the antiwar movement.

GIs will of necessity learn the organizational skills of the movement: writing, printing, and distributing antiwar materials. They will have to take on the task of organizing GI participation in antiwar demonstrations.

Within the civilian antiwar committees we must guard against any ultra-left formulations that will subject GIs to victimization or the antiwar movement to attack. We no longer have to concede this question to other political tendencies and it has become so important that we must not. Organizations that carry on illegal activities or confrontation with the police may, of course, join in the united front effort to end the war, but we should not broaden the scope of these activities to advocate violation of the law or of direct orders by GIs. We are not advocating desertion, "turning their guns on their officers," nor draft resisting. We are against individual acts which do not build the antiwar movement or increase its effectiveness. We encourage GIs to exercise their constitutional rights to formulate and express their opinions on the war and to demonstrate those opinions along with the civilian wing of the movement.

The movement within the armed forces gives the antiwar movement an important

opening in approaching the unions, militant caucuses, and other working class formations for the purpose of seeking broad support for the antiwar movement. GIs are overwhelmingly members of the working class in uniform, and when they leave the Army (as tens of thousands do each month) they go into the unions (with a substantial minority going first onto the campuses). Whenever possible we should attempt to get these working class organizations into active support of the antiwar movement.

Clearly the antiwar movement is objectively anti-imperialist. In the civilian and especially the student sector of the movement, more and more people are developing into conscious anti-imperialists and anti-capitalists. We should take advantage of every opportunity for reaching GIs with our socialist ideas. We should not underestimate the opportunities to reach GIs through forums, classes and discussions especially directed toward GIs. We should give high priority to building these forums and talking with as many GIs as possible. If we cannot reach GIs with our ideas now, during a radicalization in the midst of an imperialist war, we will never reach or recruit workers.

The spring antiwar actions will be called at the December 28-29 antiwar conference called by the Student Mobilization Committee and various GI organizations and newspapers. These actions may well be the largest in the history of the anti-Vietnam war movement. We should look forward to building coalitions with GIs in every part of the country and involving them in all the work of the movement. This may well be the last stage in forcing an end to the imperialist war in Vietnam.

November 19, 1968



# The Organizational Concepts of the YSA

## by Mary-Alice Waters

### Introduction

During the last year and a half the YSA has experienced a rapid growth. Hundreds of new members have joined our ranks, new locals have been formed in many cities and on campuses across the country, and our influence has grown rapidly. The pace of the radicalization, accelerated by the Vietnamese revolution and the Afro-American struggle, has also greatly increased the size of the entire radical left wing in the United States, relative to the late '50s and early '60s. It has brought new recruits to almost all of the existing radical organizations, and helped create new organizations -- all the way from SDS to the Affinity Groups.

YSAers are in daily contact with, work with, cooperate with, and often compete with all these various organizations. When we agree on certain activities we build together. When we disagree, we argue out the politics and try to convince others that we are correct. Our areas of disagreement and agreement are constantly shifting, but one question over which we disagree with all the existing youth groups and radical formations is that kind of organization needed to successfully lead the struggle for the social transformation of the United States. The other youth organizations all have at least one common feature -- they are not organized along the same lines as the YSA.

As the YSA expands, and works out new ways of maximizing the growth of the revolutionary socialist youth vanguard in the United States, we of course look around at what other organizations are doing and see if they have anything good that we can also utilize. We have no qualms about borrowing good things from other sources. At the same time, it is important that we have a clear conception of what kind of organization the YSA is, and what kind of organization we want it to be, so that we know how to take advantage of the opportunities we have for unparalleled growth and expansion.

This contribution to the discussion is not intended to be a thorough or exhaustive study of our organizational norms and concepts. It is written more in the hopes of clarifying a few ideas and discussing a few of the questions that we are all thinking about.

### Where Do Our Organizational Concepts Come From?

The debate over organizational forms has been going on in the revolutionary movement for more than a century, and it has never been considered a minor or insignificant debate. Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders of the Russian social-democracy were willing to split their party over the question of what kind of organization was needed.

Like the other major questions facing the revolutionary movement, the differing theories of organization -- small secret bands versus a mass party, politically all-inclusive discussion groups versus a politically homogeneous combat party, democratic centralism versus anarchism, etc.-- have been tested in practice over the years, and many lessons have been learned. Many lives have been lost due to unnecessary mistakes and incorrect policies, but a wealth of experience has been drawn together throughout the world revolutionary movement, including our experiences here in the United States.

Organizational questions are not abstract. An organizational form is not an end in itself, but derives from the political goals, the program of the group, and the organizational question is itself a political question of the first order. No organizational form is immutable; it must correspond to whatever is needed at any particular stage of the struggle, in order to advance the political goal of the group. But, at the same time, our organizational norms are as important as our political program, and we do not change them lightly or without thought.

The YSA is an organization that strives to win the new generation of radicalizing American youth to the political perspectives of revolutionary socialism, to the struggle for the socialist transformation of the United States and the world.

Secondly, we participate day by day in the political struggles of our generation, working to advance those struggles in a socialist direction, and attempting to train ourselves as revolutionary politicians who are politically solid and tactically adept at avoiding the errors of opportunism or sectarianism. Thirdly, we recognize that as

youth organization we alone are not capable of organizing the vanguard of the American working class and Afro-American national minority leading to a successful conclusion in the struggle for socialism. For that historic task a workers combat party of the Leninist caliber is necessary, and our work is aimed toward helping to facilitate the building of such a party. To that end we collaborate with and have fraternal political ties to the Socialist Workers Party, the only revolutionary Marxist party in this country, and the only organization that shares our political goals.

To accomplish our primary goals the YSA has decided to organize itself according to the principles of democratic centralism, the organizational form developed by Lenin in building the Bolshevik party in Russia, and adapted to U.S. conditions by the Socialist Workers Party.

### What is Democratic Centralism?

Democratic centralism is not a static concept and does not lend itself to rigid definition and application regardless of time, place and circumstance. In its 40 year history, the Trotskyist movement in the United States has forged its own form of the Leninist concept in the heat of struggle under concrete American conditions. The YSA, as a youth organization, has adapted this form to its needs.

The YSA is a combat organization, in that we do not discuss and debate for the intellectual titillation involved, but to decide how to act, to fight to achieve our goals. In order to be effective we have to fight in a unified way, and for that reason we strive for political homogeneity, i.e., not for a monolithic organization that eliminates all differences and tolerates no disagreements, but for an organization based on a concrete political program around which there is fundamental agreement. As a youth organization that recruits many members through its activities, we don't demand that everyone who joins be able to expound and defend a revolutionary Marxist position from A to Z. We've never recruited anyone like that yet. But we are proud of our organization, and we expect members to have a basic loyalty to the organization and want to build it, and through the process of building our own organization, making our own mistakes and correcting our own mistakes, we learn a great deal about revolutionary politics.

Fundamental to the concept of democratic centralism is the principle of majority rule. That is, after a free and open democratic discussion in which all opinions are expressed, a vote is taken. The position of the majority of the organization is the position that is implemented in action. The minority is free to maintain its disagreements, but a single face

is presented to the public. The centralist aspect of democratic centralism is expressed in the fact that a democratically elected leadership is empowered, and instructed by a convention, to ensure the implementation of the decisions of the membership, and has full authority to act and speak in the name of the membership between conventions. Obviously, the decisions of the leadership are subject to approval or disapproval by the conventions of the organization, and the leadership is subject to replacement.

These practices maintain the internal democracy of the organization, and still safeguard the organization's ability to act in the most effective manner, i.e., with unity.

### Why Democratic Centralism?

The need for an ideologically homogeneous and democratically centralized organization flows from the perspective and actuality of deepening social crisis and sharpening class conflict which makes imperative the revolutionary solution of basic social problems. If only a Leninist combat party is capable of organizing and leading the working class and its allies to the conquest of power in the main fortress of world imperialism, then everything we do must be aimed toward helping to build such a party. This is one reason for the democratic centralist organizational form of the YSA — to show in practice how to fight for and build toward the revolutionary transformation of society. We educate others by our example, and we learn ourselves in the process.

Secondly, democratic centralism is the organizational reflection of our revolutionary politics. It is a revolutionary form of organization, as there would be no need for both centralism and democracy unless a revolutionary fight were envisioned. On the other side, a democratic centralist organization with a reformist program is a contradiction of terms. The degeneration of the Russian Bolshevik party from a democratic centralist organization into a bureaucratic centralist party paralleled the abandonment of a revolutionary program by that same party and its adoption of the reformist course of "building socialism in one country." In a similar way, the history of the revolutionary movement is full of examples of individuals whose rejection of Marxism rapidly entailed a rejection of democratic centralist norms. And for good reason. If you reject the revolutionary potential of the working class, and the need for the socialist transformation of all society, you have no reason to subordinate even the most infinitesimal differences of opinion to that of a majority of those other individuals with whom you are working toward that common goal.

To illustrate the organic connection between organizational forms and the purpose for which an organization exists, it may be helpful to look at a few other examples.

Trade unions are the basic economic defense organizations of the working class. They have to wage difficult battles against the ruling class in order to even maintain the standard of living of their members, and are often faced with violent measures taken against them. Their main weapon is their unity in action and strength in numbers. From these factors the mass industrial union arose, embracing millions of workers and winning significant union battles.

They were organized along basic industrial lines. They demanded total unity when the majority decided to act (i.e., no scabs), but in principle no one was supposed to be excluded for political views, race, religion or any other similar factor. In the best of the unions, full internal democracy was assured, and democratic control over the leadership was guaranteed. Those were the organizational norms that provided for the greatest unity and strength in action, and assured that the leaders would lead the fight in the best interests of the rank and file. The norm that exists today, a union that is highly bureaucratized, centralized, and undemocratic, corresponds not to the needs of the working class, but to the narrow interests of the labor bureaucrats. New upturns in the class struggle will automatically entail internal fights against the union bureaucrats and the creation of a new leadership that represents the interests of the rank and file. The emergence of DRUM, the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, is a good example of this.

A second example of the relationship between organizational form and political purpose would be the antiwar, united front type coalition formations that have played a central role in the fight against U.S. aggression in Vietnam over the last four years. Their purpose is to mobilize masses in action in the streets around the single issue of an immediate end to the war in Vietnam. No one is required to agree on any other question, not even how to bring about an end to the war, and in fact the strongest coalitions have been those in which there has been the fullest freedom to express diversity of opinions not only on how to end the war but the goals and tactics of planned actions.

The norm of non-exclusion has been the keystone to the strength of the antiwar movement because, with such enormous diversity of opinions on every issue but the war, exclusion on the basis of any other issue would wreck the coalition.

A third example, on the other end of

the spectrum from a democratic centralist type organization would be a socialist discussion club. In such a group there need be agreement only on the desirability of debating socialist ideas, and the willingness to set the time, place, and topic for discussion. To demand agreement on any other question or discipline in any action would negate the purpose of the organization.

For instance, SDS, while not a socialist organization, has many members who consider themselves socialist. They are engaged in the "struggle for human freedom." But they have no internal agreement on what will guarantee human freedom or what means are necessary to achieve it. Thus there is only limited range for unity in action, and of course no basis for any disciplined action. The result is that even when SDS agrees to sponsor or call some activity, only a small proportion of the membership normally participates. And visa versa, when a big section of the organization wants to do something like participate in antiwar actions, the leadership, acting on its own, abstains totally or expresses an opposite point of view.

#### How Is the YSA Organized?

To start off on the most basic level, membership in the YSA is a free individual decision on the part of each person who wants to join. Thus, the YSA, as a voluntary organization, has the right and responsibility to define the conditions for membership in the organization. The provisions for membership are outlined in article III of our constitution, and set forth very clearly. First and foremost, membership is based on acceptance of the program and agreement to follow the politics of the YSA and engage actively in its work. In other words, membership is a function of fundamental agreement with our program. This is quite different from SDS, for instance, where anyone can be a member even if the person disagrees with everything SDS stands for and does. Fundamental agreement does not mean that every individual must agree 100% with everything the YSA has ever done or said. But if an individual disagrees basically with very many aspects of the YSA program he or she will find it very difficult, over time, to loyally build the organization and participate in the activities which derive from our basic program.

Membership also supposes a level of significant activity and financial support to the organization. Those not actively engaged in the work of the organization are not really qualified to make decisions on political perspectives or the implementation of these decisions. We are not arm-chair socialists, and we discuss in order to decide and then act. Nor are we an organization with two classes of citizenship -- thinkers who decide and activ-

ists who implement their decisions.

Financial support is considered a basic condition of membership because the organization cannot function without funds. A revolutionary organization cannot basically rely for money on any source outside the membership since it risks being cut off at any crucial juncture. Support coming from non-members is a bonus to be used but the financial base of the organization cannot be built on such bonuses. The degree of financial commitment to the organization is always a measure of political seriousness.

Membership is based on willingness to carry out the democratically arrived at decisions of the organization, even if an individual doesn't agree totally with those decisions. This is an aspect of our organizational norms that is often most difficult for radicalizing students to understand. They sometimes feel uncomfortable with it because it cuts across "individual freedom." But in an organization where membership is based on fundamental political agreement, and whose purpose is to help lead the American working class and its allies to a socialist victory, there is no more democratic form of organization.

Democracy is not a 'good' for some abstract, moral reason. Both democracy and centralism are essential for practical political reasons. Democracy -- the democratic process of collectively thinking out and formulating policy -- is the only way to maintain a correct revolutionary position over a period of time since no individual or small group of individuals will always be right and always evolve the correct positions. Democracy is no absolute guarantee that an organization will remain revolutionary, but without democracy it is guaranteed the organization will degenerate. Secondly, democracy is the only way to realistically maintain centralism which is ultimately based on the political agreement and commitment of the membership.

But if every individual is free to act as he wishes, even after the majority has decided a course of action, then in reality the concept of the democratic rule of the majority is being flaunted. Votes would be meaningless except for the abstract value of knowing what someone thinks about something, since everyone would do what he or she wanted to do anyway. An organization without internal discipline is fine if its purpose is to knit booties for poor children. But if your purpose is to be part of the leadership of the working class battles for victory over the most powerful, ruthless and centralized ruling class in the history of mankind, then an organization that does not base itself on the principles of democratic centralism is simply not serious about the task before us.

Another item under the membership section of our constitution outlines the procedure for every individual who joins the YSA to be voted on by either the local he or she is joining, or, if an at-larger, by the NEC. While this may seem unnecessary, especially since virtually everyone who wants to join is accepted, there are good reasons for it. Membership confers certain rights and obligations that we consider serious. Most importantly, membership confers the right to participate, on an equal basis with every other member, in making political decisions and determining the program and policies of the organization. The organization has the right to prevent individuals or groups of individuals who disagree with the basic ideas and purpose of the YSA from determining our policies and actions. The most democratic method of doing this is to determine by majority vote who are members and who are not, who has the right to vote on YSA decisions and who does not. Furthermore, if membership is not controlled by the members of the organization, we have no grounds to ask for disciplined activity from someone who never wanted to be a loyal member in the first place and never agreed to accept any of the obligations of membership.

#### The Local

The basic unit of the YSA, the normal functioning group, is the local. The overwhelming majority of YSAers belong to one local or another, although we also have a growing number of at-large members who live in areas where there are too few members to form a local. At the present time the size of the locals ranges from five to about 100 members, so each local has maximum flexibility on how best to organize itself. At one time, the constitution set a limit of 50 on the size of any local, but we changed that in 1966 as we realized that many locals would rapidly grow beyond that without necessarily wanting to divide.

Each local elects its own executive committee and organizer and they are responsible to the local as a whole. The local determines its own membership, decides on local implementation of national policies, and carries out all the normal responsibilities and functions of the organization, such as literature sales, education, fund raising, and other activities.

In several areas of the country there are clusters of locals springing up close together, which keep in close touch with each other and coordinate many of their activities. The larger locals have usually been able to free some comrades from other activities in order to spend time traveling to new campuses helping to recruit at-large members and establish new locals. This type of activity has been instrumental in the growth and expan-



sion of the YSA in the last months and has helped many new locals get on their feet and start functioning, and it is essential that we continue and increase this kind of expansion.

At the same time, however, it would be a mistake at this time to shift from this less formal kind of area-wide collaboration and cooperation to a more formal regional apparatus. A formal regional structure presupposes several strong locals and a developed and experienced political leadership in each region of the country. There must also be the resources to maintain a regional organizer, and regional executive committee, to hold regional conventions -- in addition to maintaining the high level functioning of the locals themselves and the national organization. To move too fast in the direction of establishing formal regions might, rather than help maximize recruitment and growth, turn out to be an organizational albatross, draining so many resources that it hindered our expansion, and if done prematurely, hindered the normal development of local leadership.

The most important next step is to increase the size and functioning of the national office, so that national field organizers can be on the road a high percentage of the time, supplementing and reinforcing the comrades who are concentrating on trailblazing and recruiting in each area, and helping to strengthen the national cohesiveness of the YSA.

Especially as we grow it is important that each new local see itself as an integral part of a national organization and in fraternal solidarity with the international revolutionary socialist youth movement. The YSA, unlike organizations such as SDS, is not a federation of local units, each with its own position and each carrying out its own political line and balance of activities. We are a national organization which decides policy on a national level at each convention and at National Committee meeting between conventions, and the same national policy is implemented by all locals. There are, of course, tactical variations in the application of our policy from one area to another, but our strength lies in our national cohesiveness and unified action. Just as one individual carrying out his own policy is isolated and relatively ineffectual, so one group on one campus or in one city can have only negligible effect, as compared to a national organization.

We have seen this many times in our own recent experiences. When the YSA decides to help build an antiwar action or conference we do so as a national organization, implementing the same policy everywhere in the country. When simultaneous actions take place everywhere, from Atlanta to Seattle, each one reinforces the

other and the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts.

Another concrete example of the tremendous effectiveness of a national organization was the work we did to build the Committee to Aid the Bloomington Students, to defend our comrades under attack at the University of Indiana. By acting nationally, and focusing all our work on defending our members, we helped build one of the best defense committees in recent U.S. history and succeeded in winning a total victory over the witchhunting prosecution of Bloomington, and setting an example for our entire generation. Needless to say, no one local of the YSA could have accomplished that task.

By extension, of course, the battle against world imperialism is an international task, and international fraternal collaboration among revolutionary socialist youth organizations is very important. The strength of the antiwar movement on an international scale, spearheaded by precisely these organizations, is but one example. One of the key tasks of the YSA as an organization is to increase our knowledge of the international socialist youth movement and strengthen our fraternal relations to groups like the former JCR, the German SDS, FUPI in Puerto Rico, the JGS in Belgium, the YS/LJS in Canada, and many others.

### Conventions

The national convention is the highest body of the YSA. It settles all questions in dispute and its decisions are binding on all members of the YSA between one convention and the next. While the convention is in session it can make literally any decision it wants about the character and policies of the YSA.

We have learned over time and through practice that it is unwise for national conventions to try to set tactics or discuss the minutiae of various campaigns or projects as in such a discussion the more general political questions tend to become obscured rather than clarified. Thus, the job of the convention delegates is first and foremost to set the over-all political direction and outline the main tasks to be accomplished in the various areas of activity being carried out.

Conventions are delegated bodies, elected on the basis of one delegate for every five members in each local. In that way even the most distant locals from the convention site are assured of voting strength proportional to their weight in the organization nationally, and every member of the YSA is equally represented. Secondly, the delegates are elected on the basis of political positions, so any political disagreements in the organization are proportionally represented. If, for

example, two opposing antiwar resolutions were submitted to the organization nationally, one outlining a perspective for building antiwar coalitions and mass actions in the streets against the war in Vietnam, and the other condemning mass actions and the building of antiwar committees, and stressing community organizing instead, those two opposing line resolutions could constitute the basis for a political division in the organization. Both resolutions would be discussed and voted on in each local. If in some local the members were split 50-50 or 60-40, between the two perspectives, the local would divide into two caucuses and each would elect the number of delegates it was entitled to.

It is also entirely possible for a counter-resolution to be submitted by a single individual, or one or two individuals, who have no significant support in the country. If the resolution fails to win enough votes in any local to gain a delegate to the convention, then the counter-resolution need not be considered by the convention. If this were not the case, any individual, or a whole series of individuals, representing nothing but themselves, could dominate the convention's time and prevent the organization from taking up the serious business before it.

Every point of view is assured a fair hearing at the convention. However, the delegates are not mandated to vote at the convention the way they voted in the local. If, after hearing the arguments at the convention, a delegate changes his mind, he can change his vote. If this procedure were not followed there would be no point in holding conventions because everyone's vote would be determined before the discussion began.

In addition to setting the political perspectives for the organization nationally, it is the responsibility of the convention to elect a national leadership, the National Committee, with responsibility for implementing the decisions on a national scale. The National Committee is the highest body of the organization between conventions, and meets periodically to review the work since the last convention and discuss plans for the coming months.

The National Committee is not simply a body that is primarily geographically representative. It is a body that represents the political leadership of the organization. The convention, in selecting the National Committee, tries to assure adequate representation of leadership in all the various areas of work being carried out by the YSA.

Our concept of leadership is that of a team, functioning together despite individual peculiarities, strengths and weak-

nesses. Our attitude is the opposite of the "new left" anti-leadership mythology. We elect our leaders and assure they are responsible to the organization. If a leadership is not selected and elected, that does not eliminate leaders. It simply means that they emerge under conditions where they are responsible to no one but themselves, and subject to no democratic control by the organization. If no leadership responsibility has been delegated, then no one can ask for an accounting from those who really have been responsible. A good example of this is the way SDS operates. Even though a position paper on the "new working class" was rejected by the delegates to last year's SDS convention, SDS leaders still frequently push this line of analysis publicly.

The newly elected national leadership meets immediately following the convention to determine the best division of labor within the body. That is, only a portion of the national leadership can be freed from responsibilities in one local or another in order to devote full time to the national needs of the organization, such as the press, and day to day national political direction. The National Committee elects an Executive Committee to function in this capacity of day to day leadership, and elects the national officers of the organization who are directly responsible to the National Committee.

The national conventions of the YSA, and their discussion periods, are structured and organized to provide for the greatest democracy possible. Between conventions, the centralist side of the democratic centralism concept takes on greater weight.

Before going on to compare our organization's forms with those prevalent amongst our opponents and the "new left," it might be helpful to briefly define a couple of other terms that are part of our day to day organizational vocabulary: fraction and committee.

A fraction is exactly what the term implies, i.e., a fraction or percentage of the local, encompassing all those who are involved in a certain area of work. For example, most locals have antiwar fractions, bringing together people from different campuses, high schools, and areas of work, all of whom are involved in the antiwar work of the local. The fraction is not a policy making body, but rather discusses the implementation of policy decided by the local as a whole. The head of the fraction is elected by the executive committee (like other executive committee actions, this is subject to approval by the local as a whole) and is responsible to the exec for the fraction as a whole. The fraction can make recommendations to the executive committee for action, but cannot determine political

orientation by itself.

A committee of the local, such as the education committee or financial committee, is different. It is a selective body, not automatically composed of all individuals involved, but of those designated by the executive committee and the local to be responsible for that area of work. A committee elects its own chairman, and makes policy decisions, which are of course subject to approval by the local, and it may also be responsible for implementing the decisions. On a national level, the best example of a committee is the national antiwar steering committee, which is responsible to the National Executive Committee for directing the antiwar work.

### Opposing Organizational Concepts

Many of our organizational concepts become somewhat clearer if they are compared to the norms of other organizations, such as the Communist Party, the social democracy, or SDS.

The Communist Party or Stalinist model, which also bears certain resemblances to the Democratic Party method, is one of centralism minus democracy. The degeneration of the Soviet Union brought with it also the political and organizational degeneration of the party that had led the revolution, and was the leading force in the Soviet state. Internal democracy was eliminated as political tendencies and factions were permanently barred. The expression of views different from those of the leadership meant immediate expulsion from the party and, in the '30s in the Soviet Union, also frequently brought a death penalty. Leaders, while still formally elected, were in reality appointed from the top down and the material privileges of the party bureaucracy gave added incentive to conformity. The Communist parties outside the Soviet Union rapidly followed suit as the Third International was dragged down by the Stalinist under-tow.

While critics of Leninism often try to equate Stalinism and democratic centralism, the one is the antithesis of the other. The Bolshevik party of Lenin and Trotsky was a party designed to lead the working class to power in Russia; Stalin's party was designed to strangle the spreading world revolution and protect the interests of a narrow bureaucratic caste.

The classical model of the social democratic party is the "all inclusive" organization, in which numerous near autonomous factions vie with each other in a permanent contest for organizational control as each goes its own way in public political action. There is no programmatic unity, and no discipline. Rather each tendency is free to publish its own paper or maga-

zine, engage in its own actions, and try to recruit to its own faction. While in principle all factions are welcome, in practice any revolutionary tendency that develops is rapidly excluded in one fashion or another.

Organizationally, SDS is a variant on the social democratic model, but with some interesting adaptations in the anarchist direction. It is the place where you see many of the anti-authoritarian attitudes of the "new left" carried to anti-organizationalism, even if it is their own organization. The premise on which SDS participatory democracy rests is that any leadership is bad because it tends to smother individual incentives and prevent each person from fully expressing himself. Thus, meetings without chairmen or agenda are considered preferable because they supposedly assure the greatest individual freedom of expression. While the excesses of the early days of "participatory democracy" in SDS have in most cases been overcome, the underlying premise remains.

As most of us who have sat through such meetings know full well, "participatory democracy" is neither participatory nor democratic. While everyone may be able to speak, the meetings are usually dominated by one or two articulate individuals who have some position they are pushing. As far as the democracy is concerned, since no votes are taken the consensus is established most often by the same articulate individuals, or by those who are interested enough (or able) to stay until the bitter end of the meeting. Far from guaranteeing each individual the greatest voice in making decisions, it insures that decisions will be made and implemented in the most undemocratic fashion, with no one being responsible to anyone for what happens. Participatory demagogy is a more accurate description of the SDS method of organization.

There is another premise underlying SDS's organizational concepts that is worth commenting on because it is a common error. That is the idea that somehow, those of us living in the heart of world imperialism in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can escape that environment completely, that we can construct an organization which is unaffected by that environment and which will be an embryo of the future society where human freedom will expand to dimensions which are to us almost inconceivable.

However, the basic fact is that our organizational concepts must be conditioned by the enemy we are fighting. If we disregard the nature of the enemy, we will never be able to destroy him. Secondly, anyone who begins by rejecting the fact that being determines consciousness, and not visa versa, has a long way to go

before arriving at revolutionary conclusions, much less a revolutionary organization and strategy.

As Che Guevara pointed out, socialist man is an ideal that we all strive toward. We believe that the norms of relationships in socialist society will be superior to those which exist today and we work toward implementing those norms as

rapidly as possible. But that is quite different from thinking that the revolutionary organization under capitalism is the embryo of socialist society, of the socialist state. Its character is determined not by the future society it hopes to build, but by the present system which must be destroyed before that future can become a reality for all mankind.

November 16, 1968



## Introduction to the Revised YSA Constitution

### Adopted at the 1966 Convention

The first constitution was adopted at the Founding Convention in April, 1960. The delegates to this convention came from many different backgrounds in the socialist movement, and many of them had no experience with the way in which a revolutionary-socialist organization actually functions. Consequently their constitution was an educated guess at what would be workable--the errors of which the new constitution attempts to correct.

The changes in the constitution have been based on our concrete experiences. They are part of the process of growth of the YSA. The 1962 YSA Convention amended the constitution to include an age ceiling. At the 1963 Convention the YSA took a step forward by changing its Statement of Purpose. The timeliness of this particular change was driven home by many of the experiences of the witch hunt in Bloomington. Without changing our principles, we adopted a new statement which reflected more accurately the national as well as international roots of our political heritage. The new statement was also more appropriate for public use and for our campus units trying to get official recognition.

The experience of the YSA in dealing with specific problems related to the constitution led to another major alteration at the 1965 Convention. On that occasion we eliminated references to proportional representation of minorities on the NC and the NEC. The experience of having a disloyal member of the Robertson minority on the NEC taught us that this provision was a foolish obstacle to a responsibly functioning national center. In several instances the disloyal Robertsonites passed along internal matters to opponent organizations. Consequently a "dual NEC" developed with the majority NECers meeting separately to discuss the major problems and carry out the work. The sections on proportional representation had left the door open to putting the organization in jeopardy and to a necessary "winking" at a section of the constitution to prevent this.

These changes, however, did not eliminate many of the extraneous sections or correct all of the faults of the founding constitution.

At last year's Convention, the constitutional commission pointed out that many more amendments were necessary. Not

only were there several sections that the commission thought to be wrong, but there were many that simply did not belong in the constitution if it was to serve its major purpose, that is briefly and clearly define membership--its requirements, rights, and basic duties--and define the relationship between and the responsibilities of the various bodies of the YSA. The incoming NC was instructed by the Convention to rewrite the constitution. In order to accomplish this task the drafters of the new constitution began by pruning--that is deciding what a constitution is not and what problems are not within their province to solve.

1. A constitution is not a statement of principles or a codification of our traditions and procedures.

For example, in drafting the new constitution the provision for granting fraternal votes to National Committee members at conventions was deleted. Fraternal votes to NCers is a tradition that we have practiced and undoubtedly will continue to practice, but it is not a defining feature of membership or of the relationship between YSA bodies. It is a procedural matter for the convention to decide.

Likewise, it will continue to be the norm for the YSA to have representation of political minorities on the NC and NEC. This is a good tradition, but it is foolish--as we found out in 1964 and 1965 --to make it part of the constitution as a formal requirement.

2. A constitution is not a collection of tips for organizers or locals; nor should it be a substitute for any needed local by-laws.

One section of the old constitution states that chairmen of all meetings and committees shall have voice and vote and that the nay vote shall be taken first in calling the question. Clauses of this type do not set the boundaries on membership or define the relationship between bodies. They more appropriately belong in a local organizer's handbook than in the constitution--although the concept of taking the nay vote first is probably too weird to belong in either.

3. It is not the function of a constitution to foresee all types of future needs of the YSA.

For example, the founders of the YSA included two sections on district and regional organization apparently expecting rapid growth of the YSA. Regional and district organization will eventually be necessary but details like these are better left to a future convention to add when the pace of growth makes it necessary and the outlines of what a region and district would be and what functions they would carry out emerge.

4. A constitution is not a listing of actions that individuals and bodies may do.

If the constitution were to list all of the activities that comrades are allowed to do the list would become infinite and would mean turning the constitution into a manual of our organizational traditions. An attempt was made to include only provisions defining what comrades must or shall do. If an action is not contradicted by the constitution that means it is not unconstitutional. It may be wise or foolish, right or wrong, but that is up to the bodies concerned to decide, not the constitution.

The draft also deletes sections that were too rigid or formal. Experience has demonstrated, for example, that there is no necessity in outlining specific duties for the National Chairman and the National Secretary. In fact it is an obstacle to a rational division of labor within the National Office. Also it is too easy to violate provisions like this. The National Secretary, for example, has not always been the person responsible for the administration of the national office as specified by the constitution. It is much better to eliminate irrational provisions and abide by the constitution than it is to keep these provisions and continually violate them. It is important that the YSA have a constitution that we do not take with a grain of salt. The NEC tried to draft a document that is simple enough to be understood, flexible enough to be workable, and rational enough to be treated seriously.

No constitution will solve any more than a small handful of the problems an organization of our type faces. It cannot do the impossible--that is solve major political and organizational problems or be beyond the need for interpretation. But a good constitution is an important part of the YSA's structure.

YSA National Office  
January 26, 1966

# Constitution of the Young Socialist Alliance

## Article I Name

The name of this organization shall be the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA).

## Article II Statement of Purpose

"The Young Socialist Alliance is a nationwide revolutionary socialist youth organization, uniting young workers and students around the banner of socialism and dedicated to the building of a revolutionary movement which can lead the working people to socialism. The YSA bases itself on the principles of Marxism as developed by Lenin and Trotsky, and on the traditions of the American people represented by such leaders as Sam Adams, Frederick Douglass, Wendell Phillips, and Eugene Debs. We believe that socialism can be initiated only as a result of struggle of the working class and its allies against the capitalist exploiters, which culminates in the creation of a new type of state, a workers' state. Socialism will mean that for the first time in history, man will control his own creation--society--rather than be controlled by it. The dynamic of socialism involves a continual expansion of human freedom in all spheres: in politics, economics, culture and in every aspect of personal life."

From the "Where We Stand" Declaration of the YSA adopted at the 1963 Convention.

## Article III Membership

1. Membership shall be open to anyone under the age of twenty-nine who accepts the program and agrees to follow the policies of the YSA and engage actively in its work.

2. An applicant for membership shall be voted on by the local unit of the YSA in the area where he resides. In those areas where no unit exists, an applicant shall apply to the National Executive Committee (NEC) and if accepted shall become a member-at-large. A former member of the YSA shall apply to the NEC for readmission. The NEC has the authority to make exceptions in individual cases to the 29 age limit.

3. Every member shall belong to a local unit if such exists in the area. Exceptions to this policy may be made only by the NEC. Members-at-large shall be directly responsible to the NEC.

4. Each new member shall pay one dollar

initiation fee which shall be forwarded to the National Office. Membership dues are a minimum of one dollar a month, all of which shall be sent to the National Office.

5. Any member more than one month in arrears in dues ceases to be a member in good standing. Only members in good standing may vote or hold office in the YSA. Any member more than three months in arrears may be dropped after notification.

6. A member desiring to leave one locality for another must apply to his local unit for permission. A National Committee (NC) member desiring to leave one locality for another must also apply to the NEC for permission. A letter of transfer must be sent to the local unit of the locality to which the member moves. If no local unit exists in the new locality, the member shall also apply to the NEC for member-at-large status. A member-at-large wishing to transfer must apply to the NEC.

## Article IV Local Units

1. Five or more members in a locality, upon application, may be chartered by the NEC and become a local unit of the YSA.

2. Each local unit shall elect an organizer and such other officers as are necessary to carry out the financial, secretarial, and educational functions of a local unit and to circulate the YSA press.

3. Each local unit shall elect an executive committee to act with the full authority of the local unit between meetings, and undertake such other work as assigned by the local unit. The organizer of the local unit shall be a member of the executive.

## Article V National Convention

1. There shall be a delegated National Convention of the YSA at least once every two years.

2. The National Convention is the highest governing body of the YSA and its decisions shall be binding on the entire membership.

3. The National Convention shall be called by the National Committee which

shall provide for a pre-convention discussion period of at least 90 days.

4. The National Executive Committee shall issue a call at the start of the pre-convention discussion period. The NEC shall also issue internal discussion bulletins containing resolutions and discussion material that are submitted by members and bodies of the YSA. The NEC may set a deadline for acceptance of such material.

5. Local units have the responsibility to provide adequate time in meetings for discussion on resolutions submitted during the pre-convention discussion.

6. The election of delegates to the National Convention shall be conducted by the local units. A member must have joined the YSA prior to the convention call in order to vote. The ratio of delegates to membership shall be determined by the National Committee.

7. In the event of a political division, delegates shall be elected on the basis of a proportional representation system as set by the NC in the convention call. A political division exists when there is a division of the vote on conflicting resolutions.

#### Article VI National Committee

1. The National Committee (NC) shall be the highest body of the YSA between conventions and shall have jurisdiction over all YSA bodies and publications. The NC shall be elected by the National Convention. The National Convention shall also elect alternates to fill vacancies in the NC in the order decided upon by the convention.

#### Article VII National Executive Committee

1. The NC shall elect from among its members a National Executive Committee (NEC). The NEC shall act on behalf of the NC between meetings of the NC and be responsible to the NC.

2. Among the normal functions of the NEC shall be the supervision of the National Office, national publications, and the appointment and supervision of the national staff.

#### Article VIII National Officers

1. The NC shall elect a National Chairman, National Secretary, and such other national

officers as it finds necessary.

2. All national officers shall be directly responsible to the NEC.

#### Article IX Discipline

1. All decisions of the governing bodies of the YSA are binding upon the members and subordinate bodies of the YSA.

2. Any member or body of the YSA may bring charges against any member for violation of the Constitution, program, or policies of the YSA.

3. Written charges shall be presented to the accused member in advance of the trial. Charges shall be filed in the local unit where the accused is a member and shall be heard by a committee it sets up for this purpose.

4. Charges brought against members of the NC or members-at-large shall be heard by a committee the NC or NEC sets up for this purpose.

5. The NC or NEC may decide to act directly in a case in which event its intervention shall supercede any local proceedings.

6. Any member subjected to disciplinary action has the right to submit a written appeal to the next higher body, up to and including the National Convention. This appeal must be filed with the NEC within fifteen days after the action being appealed. Pending action on the appeal, the decision of the disciplinary body remains in force.

#### Article X Miscellaneous Provisions

1. All decisions of the YSA shall be made by a majority vote.

2. Amendments to this Constitution shall be made by majority vote at the National Convention.

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