

Sectarian Danger In Youth Movement

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(These are extracts from a report to the National Committee of the C. P. This report is available in its entirety to all Party Clubs at the various State offices. The National Board memorandum referred to was endorsed by the National Committee.)

In the past there has been almost a complete disappearance of the close attention paid by the party to the youth movement. Our party is the vanguard of the entire working class, and therefore it is the vanguard of the youth just as of all sections of the working class and the people.

There is a definite connection between the liquidation of the Communist Party as a result of our revisionist mistakes and our abandonment of the leading role which the party must play in the fight to win the masses of the youth. We must re-establish attention to the youth movement as a prime concern of the entire Communist Party and its leadership.

"1. Aid in establishing joint action and unity of the broadest sections of youth on specific issues and a broad minimum anti-fascist democratic program.

"2. Support and build the organization and activity of the most advanced anti-fascist youth for Democracy.

"3. Develop systematic Communist Party work and Marxist education among the youth and give party guidance and direction to young Communists active among the youth."

NOSTALGIA

Do we have anything even approximating this in the party today? Obviously we have not. To a large extent, concern is expressed with the present state of the youth movement in the form of a nostalgic yearning for the "good old days" when we had a Young Communist League and in yearnings on the part of some comrades for the re-establishment of a very one-sided nostalgia, because, while the comrades express a desire to return to the good old days of the YCL, they do not, somehow or other, express any equivalent desire to return to the good old days when the party really concerned itself with the problems and activities of the youth movement.

They forget what the party used to do in those days: that there were tremendous party mobilizations in support of the issues around which the masses of the youth were struggling; that there was an extensive party training of Marxist cadre among the youth; that there was an integration of the party members in the youth movement into all leading committees of the party, that there was general and constant party political assistance to the youth.

PARTY LEADERSHIP

In order to re-establish it, there must be fundamental clarity in the leadership of the party on the character of the youth movement and on the relationship of the party to the AYD. We cannot say that there is such clarity today. In fact, this uncertainty has existed for some time. It was for this reason that, toward the end of November, the National Board, in consultation with the Youth Commission of the party formulated a memorandum which was sent to all districts.

The main questions which arose in connection with the memorandum referred first of all to the character of the AYD. What does the memorandum say? It describes the AYD as follows:

"Today the most important and effective channels for organizing and promoting effective action of the advanced anti-fascist youth is the American Youth for Democracy. It would be the crassest mistake to minimize the importance of this organization or to fail to give it effective assistance in overcoming

its present critical situation. The party, like the labor movement, must help it to develop as an organization of substantial membership and influence.

"Its program and activity should be based primarily upon militant struggle for the needs of youth which are closely linked to the problems of labor and the people generally and upon education of the youth in an anti-fascist, anti-imperialist working-class spirit."

AYD AND YCL

I think that one of the results of this discussion should be to establish clarity on what the character of the AYD is, and to put a stop to a continuation of the discussion of whether or not the YCL should be reconstituted. This demand for the reconstitution of the YCL is, in the first place, a sectarian proposal. Secondly, a continuation of such discussion has the practical effect of diverting the party from its real tasks and responsibilities to the AYD.

The National Board is opposed to the proposition that the Young Communist League shall be reconstituted.

I said that the proposal to reconstitute the YCL is a sectarian proposal. Why? Those of us who know the history of the youth movement know that ever since 1935 the constant preoccupation of the Communists in the youth movement, even during the time when the YCL existed, was with the problem of how to change the character of the YCL and how to reconstruct it into a youth organization of mass proportions which would unite in its ranks not only Communists, but non-Communists, thus putting an end to the sectarian approach of building the YCL as a Communist Party of the youth. The working class in the United States needs only one Communist Party, which leads the youth as well as the adults.

In the days of the YCL the Communists in the youth movement were confronted with the constant dilemma of how to reconcile the fact that they wanted to build the YCL in such a way that it would unite both the Communist and non-Communist youth and yet in its name, in its activity, in its program, the YCL could not help but make it a condition, in actuality, that Communism be accepted by the youth before joining. That dilemma which existed previously, grew out of an incorrect conception of what kind of youth organization the Marxists ought to build in the United States. That is why we are against a return to anything which smacks of the rebuilding of another Communist Party of the youth.

AN IMPROVED AYD

The task, as we see it, is to help build the AYD along the lines proposed, constantly improving, on the basis of the experience and discussion, the content of its work and education. The fulfillment of this task is in a direction which leads away from and makes a decisive break with any sectarian concept of the reconstitution of the YCL, of the building of a youth section of the Communist Party or a Communist Party of the youth in the United States.

The second question in connection with the memorandum on which there has been some discussion, reads as follows:

"Party young people's clubs or youth clubs should be established where advisable. Such clubs now exist in a few cities, composed largely of leading young Communists active in the youth movement. These clubs should be open to any young people joining the Communist Party if they prefer to enter them instead of the regular community clubs. At the present time, pending further consideration and experience, these clubs apparently serve a useful purpose in bringing

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our active youth forces together, in giving them guidance and Marxist education. At the same time we strongly warn against permitting such clubs to hamper the development of other new forms of activity or organizations; against allowing these clubs to become an excuse for avoiding full responsibility for youth work by other party organizations; and against a tendency to remove young Communists from mass work by involvement in party work related to these specific clubs.

ROLE OF YOUTH CLUBS

What were the reasons for the formation of these youth clubs? They were formed to fulfill certain specific needs: First, the inability of the AYD at the present time to satisfy the desire of the party members working in the AYD for Marxist education, an inability which was a heritage in the AYD of the ravages of revisionism in the party; secondly, the party, in order to make at least a beginning in overcoming its complete neglect of work among the youth, needed special forms for work among the youth and for building the party among the youth. In these respects the youth clubs of the party have proven their value in many phases of our work. They have been real spark plugs for party activity generally, and have specifically shown their value in stimulating recruitment among young people into the party.

It is not the purpose of the party to establish youth clubs to lay the basis for the reestablishment of the YCL. These youth clubs do not

represent a permanent form of organization for the party; they are established and exist for the accomplishment of a specific purpose. The real situation which must prevail in the party is that the development of the party's activity and independent role in the struggle for the needs of the youth must not be the property of a handful of youth clubs, but the property of the party as a whole. When that is achieved, then we will need new organizational forms in the party.

PERSPECTIVES

Therefore, our policy opens up two perspectives; one, that the party will become a party with mass influence among the youth, a party of and for the youth, with masses of youth joining the party, with the party really fighting for the youth; and, secondly, the party will help develop the AYD as a mass, advanced anti-fascist youth organization in which the Communists play a leading role.

These perspectives can be realized only if we succeed in bringing into the ranks of the Communist Party thousands of young people who have shown themselves to be among the best fighters in all the struggles of labor and the people. The present recruiting drive should be the starting point of our renewed efforts to begin this process. Hence special attention must be paid in all districts to include this objective, with all the political and organizational prerequisites for its attainment, in the plans that are worked out at every level of organization of the Communist Party.