

# ORGANIZATIONAL BULLETIN

SOCIALIST YOUTH LEAGUE

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All discussion articles for the next issue of the Bulletin should be  
sent to New York no later than the 25th of November.

July 21, 1950

Dear Don,

The question of the policy to follow in election campaigns, like all "practical" political questions is extremely complex and cannot be settled in any a priori or dogmatic fashion. This much we know, and there is no disagreement between us.

This simple statement, however, never settles the matter since every situation is "different" (especially for the SYL in its present state) and different situations obviously evoke different responses.

On the other hand, the SYL as a revolutionary socialist propaganda league, is automatically differentiated from all liberal groups by the principled nature of its political activity. By principled, of course, I don't imply "pure" "clean" or "sectarian," although a League, by its very nature, can easily fall into such a pattern.

It is the nature of this differentiation and everything which flows from it, that determines electoral policy in general. It is the specific situation and its essentially unique balance of forces which determines the form which this activity is to take.

A sectarian group, for example, (the SLP is the best I know), is especially characterized by a constitutional inability to compromise on inessentials. This course is justified by an appeal to the dirty nature of politics and the necessity of keeping the "elect" free from any ideological influences and political compromises which would--it is proclaimed--inevitably necessitate giving up the socialist goal. This, as Trotsky has often pointed out, is essentially a 19th century "rationalist" view of the social process.

To compromise on inessentials, to "support the lesser evil", is then the essence of politics. But if this is so, what differentiates a revolutionary socialist policy from a liberal or social democratic one?

Basically I think it is this: what the liberal and the social democrat by the very nature of their social position and their political ends, constantly tend to seek out -- to unearth-- lesser evils which the situation does not call for, the revolutionist is able to manoeuvre between opposing forces for his own benefit AND FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE IDEAS AND PROGRAM TO WHICH HE IS ATTACHED.

This I think can never be forgotten, and electoral activity can not be regarded as successful unless it can be shown by experience that this is the end to which it leads.

To spread the ideas of socialism and the power of the socialist party is the aim of all political activity. Electoral activity is, however, only one branch of political activity, as far as revolutionists are concerned, and, as a matter of fact, a subordinate one. Especially now, when the Korean War must once and for all separate the sheep from the goats, we must be especially clear on this point.

I would therefore lay it down as a tactical axiom at this time, THAT THE KEYSTONE OF ELECTORAL ACTIVITY BE ANTI-WAR AND ANTI-MILITARIST POLITICAL ACTION. The tone and specific demands of this activity depends of course, on the local situation: its essentially anti-chauvinistic, anti-militaristic, anti-war nature should not be obscured.

It is this which leads me to criticise your formulation as to the conditions under which an electoral bloc is possible and desirable.

Now an electoral bloc differs decisively from an united front, and this difference is not merely scholastic in nature. An united front is a temporary alliance of disparate political elements to carry out an action which is deemed desirable by all. No common program is possible or necessary and all groups have the right of criticism before, during and after the action. The action is usually undertaken because it is felt that only a uniting of forces can make it successful.

An electoral bloc, on the other hand, implies an agreement of program and the cessation of political criticism. Now when an agreement on program and electoral activity (type of speeches, points stressed, kind of education, etc.) is reached, the electoral bloc merges and becomes one in the eyes of the voter and all political differences become blurred and indistinct.

The very phrasing of the differences immediately points out the danger of electoral blocs to revolutionists. For liberals and social democrats (and opportunists in general) this type of activity is most desirable, for it is precisely political criticism which they fear the most, since they live off the illusion of being radicals. For revolutionists, on the other hand, the united front is essential, since it allows them to carry their ideas before larger groups to win away adherents to other parties on the basis of a clear exposition of the issues involved. For a propaganda league this is essentially the case.

As a general rule, then, the SYL should constantly seek out and explore the possibilities of united front activities on such issues as civil liberties, academic freedom, anti-war and anti-military issues. In such united fronts the main emphasis is always on the issue at hand, but no opportunity should be lost to press for our ideas, to advance our solution, when the situation demands it. To be politically modest, to hold back for fear of out-raging the easily susceptible sense of liberals and their fears and anxieties. About your "radicalism" (ability is the high of political naivete.

If it is granted then, that the united front is essentially suited to revolutionary politics, what of electoral activity as a political method? Under what conditions is it possible, desirable or mandatory for the SYL to enter electoral blocs with other political elements?

You have stated in a situation where the SYL is "accepted" as a more or less "popular" spokesman on local political questions and is not looked down upon as a small, sterile political sect -- that in such a "situation", to run an independent campaign would seem to be justified in one and only one situation, namely where we are the only democratic tendency among the students, or where the total democratic tendency is such a small minority that its winning an election by a majority is excluded." As an alternative to an independent campaign you propose "an electoral bloc, a common slate of candidates .." composed of various and assorted liberals, running on a very minimal program (an essentially liberal program if I understand you right.)

During the election campaign all political criticism should, again if I understand you correctly, cease and the minimum program

should form the content of the electoral activity. "That and nothing else, except agreement that caucus discipline be maintained in the Student Council, if any candidates are elected, and responsibility of candidates to the caucus."

Let us not mince words. As a proposal to be put forward in opposition to independent electoral activity on a socialist (i.e., a third camp, anti-war,) basis this must be thoroughly rejected. As a possible alternative to be used in unique and altogether exceptional cases, it is acceptable if it is reformulated to some extent.

Let me state first of all that UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES CAN AN ADVANCE AGREEMENT AS TO CAUCUS DISCIPLINE BE A CONDITION OF ENTRANCE INTO AN ELECTORAL BLOCK. This is an exceptionally fantastic proposal which it would be impossible to carry out except under the most unique circumstances. It is in addition the essence of machine and power politics and is particularly unsuited to an SYL group. That "this is essentially the type of campaign" engaged in at the University of Chicago and at Wisconsin is nothing but lamentable and should come to the attention of the entire SYL.

It is here, and precisely here, that a principled objection must be advanced. AN SYL CANDIDATE IS RESPONSIBLE TO THE SYL UNIT OF WHICH HE IS A MEMBER AND THE ORGANIZATION NATIONALLY AND TO NO ONE ELSE. A backstairs agreement on caucus discipline is to place an SYL spokesman in the hands of another, politically foreign, organization which would tie the hands of the entire organization. Since the SYL candidate(s) would be a minority in an electoral block (otherwise why seek a block?), he would be, in no wise differentiated from the liberals, and would be looked upon, essentially, as a tail to the liberal kite.

On the contrary, since the type of situation in which an electoral block is desirable is in response to an overwhelming threat by reactionary forces on the campus, and since it is precisely in this situation that the liberals are likely to make compromises AT OUR EXPENSE (by dumping us in with the Stalinists as subversives for example),--- for these reasons we must make it clear in advance that we will not be held to any discipline. (This is not to say that our candidates should make irresponsible and stupid statements.)

Is the liberals, of course, are not farsighted enough to foresee the possibility of a caucus split the whole subject of discipline and "responsibility to the caucus" need not be mentioned by the SYL. Such Machiavellianism is thoroughly acceptable as long as it does not have bad consequences, and as long as it does not become a political activity in itself. In any case, the RIGHT OF POLITICAL CRITICISM AT ALL TIMES IS THE MINIMUM CONDITION FOR ANY TYPE OF POLITICAL COOPERATION BETWEEN THE SYL AND ANY OTHER ORGANIZATION. That this right does not have to be used goes beyond saying.

If there is fundamental agreement on this point let us go on to the conditions under which the SYL should run an independent political campaign. It is obvious that the SYL could not and should not run a candidate until it has prepared the ground by participation in local political activities, by education and propaganda, etc.; on this there is agreement. You then give two conditions under which electoral activities, by the SYL in its own behalf is justified: namely, (1) when it is the only "democratic" tendency (an extremely unlikely situation, you must admit), and (2) when the combination of the "democratic" tend-

oncies cannot possibly win. This formulation, since it is flat and dogmatic is uninformative. It says, in essence, that the SYL run an independent campaign ONLY WHEN IT CANNOT WIN. This is ridiculous, and I'm sure that you do not mean it in this way. What you seem to be implying is that the fundamental criterion for SYL electoral activities be the possibility of winning. This cannot be accepted. On the contrary, THE FUNDAMENTAL CRITERION FOR INDEPENDENT CAMPAIGNING IS WHETHER OR NOT IT ADVANCES THE PROGRAM AND IDEAS OF THE SYL. That an electoral block seldom does this is reason enough to reject it as a general tactic especially in this period where the question of war is likely to take precedence over all others, and where the liberals will insist more and more on a pro-war attitude on our part.

I hope my general attitude on electoral activity is clear. Electoral blocks are never mandatory, seldom desirable and can never be looked upon as a general policy. Independent electoral activity on the part of the SYL is a goal to be striven for and must be carried out wisely and with decorum depending on the local situation.

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Just to get the facts straight, let me outline our electoral campaign in Berkeley.

The student government, which is composed of one president, one vice-president and seven representatives has been controlled by the fraternities from time immemorial. About four offices are elected at a time, sometimes five.

The student government had been particularly lax and venal with respect to the oath business. (The faculty representatives, three of them with one vote a piece also voted with the administration). The whole campus was up in arms on this point and criticism of the student council had reached agreeable proportions.

The SYL had started a united front group of student clubs and organizations to fight the oath, the ultimatum and the policy, and was recognized as the spokesman of this group, until the Stalinists took it over. Our political currency went up fast and we found ourselves surrounded by friends.

The student election came right at the end of this battle and the SYL decided, on the basis of its popularity to run a candidate.

The Stalinists, in the meantime, also wishing to take advantage of this situation, but being unable to do so in their own name, resuscitated the Representative Students Party, an old organization which had once put some candidates in and in which there was a coalition of CP-liberal forces.

Now our main efforts on this campus were to separate the liberals from the CP. Not wishing to lose everything we had fought so hard for, we decided not to enter this Stalinist figleaf organization, although many liberal friends did, and swarming against the tide and all the advice of all the well wishers, we openly denounced this organization as a Stalinist attempt to gain power, in the student newspaper. This pretty effectively killed the group, which was small and 3/4 Stalinist, so that every liberal candidate refused to accept its backing.

The election results exceeded our expectations by about five times and were a surprise to everyone, especially the Stalinists. The SYL was the only really radical candidate put up, although there were a

variety of luke-warm liberals all seeking office. A block with these liberals, or with the Stalinists and the few liberals they capture would have been a folly. We defeated the Stalinists, put our name around the campus and left the SDA staring with amazement.

We made many technical errors in about campaign about which it is unnecessary to make any observations other than: experience is the greatest teacher. On the other hand, we took a chance on the basis of our popularity and put ourselves forward as the alternatives to liberalism and Stalinism.

I think that this was the correct thing to do, and should not be replaced by a fearful timidity about stepping on peoples toes and a policy of mutual masturbation with respect to the various varieties of liberal opportunists.

Our electoral campaign did not mention the socialist revolution, sovicts, dual power or any other cliché. It stuck to the local situation, for which a program was worked out, and brought in its general socialist position as a strictly subordinate part of the campaign. We, however, were the SOCIALISTS, not the block of nice people, and I think this was definitely an advantage.

Your objection to our "pushing our role" as the "vanguard" of the anti-oath students is to me uncomprehensible. Firstly, since you compare this to the Stalinists, I would say that the Stalinists push themselves and declare themselves the leaders of things when they are not. But we were precisely the vanguard of the anti-oath students. This is a fact. The fact that this makes the liberals wary of collaborating with us leaves me cold. The liberals offered no effective leadership to the students. We did. Why should this not be mentioned and turned into a political criticism of liberalism (as I did in the Anvil article).

Finally, since there does appear to be a difference of opinion on the main point: namely, the political advisability of electoral blocks vs. independent electoral activity, in general, I would be very glad to debate this question in person or in writing at any time. I think that it should be thoroughly discussed and a national decision arrive at.

fraternally,

Bob MAGNUS

## TACTICS ON THE CAMPUS

To make clear what is involved in the communication from comrade Magnus, it is necessary to set forth for the SYL reader some of the circumstances and background material which led up to it, before undertaking to discuss some of the issues raised. For some time now the writer has been periodically assailed by doubts about the nature of the activity of our Berkeley unit, largely on the basis of educational and rather incomplete reports. Because of this unit's very excellent performance, however, particularly its success in recruiting new members, we have hesitated to criticize its work in the absence of more specific information. Stated in general terms, and without much concrete evidence, we nevertheless had the impression that our Berkeley comrades suffered from a, not too uncommon disease which might be called super-radicalism. Although there were accompanying political manifestations, organizationally this disease seemed to manifest itself in the unnecessarily provocative flaunting of unorthodox ideas, an inflexibility in working with other campus political tendencies, and an unwholesome attitude of self-righteousness adopted toward other organizations. But as we say, this impression was very hazy, and based largely on a few personal reports and facts. An example of such a fact was the name which the Berkeley comrades gave to their local news sheet, when they called it, "The Campus Trotskyist".

Thus we welcomed the opportunity occasioned by the publication of an article in Labor Action describing a local campaign which the Berkeley SYL unit conducted for a candidate to the student council. We thought that this would allow us to explore some of the attitudes of the Berkeley comrades toward campus work, and to see if there really was any difference of opinion. We thought that such a concrete question would be most fruitful for this purpose. We were not disappointed in our expectation (or perhaps we were) when we learned that there is a real difference in approach between ourselves and comrade Magnus. This difference does not relate particularly to the special issue which initiated this discussion (whether in the given concrete situation the SYL should have run an independent electoral campaign) but has much broader and more significant meaning in terms of how the SYL should seek to orient and direct its campus activity. Since the writer's experience has been largely confined to the University of Chicago campus it may be that his viewpoint is too largely colored by the special conditions prevailing there, but as a point of comparison, it is nevertheless convenient to counterpose to the views of comrade Magnus--as incompletely set forth in his foregoing letter--what might be called the "Chicago approach" to student politics. What we mean by this will become clearer as we proceed, but we might initially characterize it as a policy which seeks by all possible means to break down the ideological and personal barriers (consciously instilled by our opponents or unconsciously promoted by ourselves) which separate us from other political elements on campus. This leads us into trying to the greatest degree possible to break out of isolation by surrounding ourselves with friendly elements, and working with as many different political tendencies as possible. To some degree this invariably means making concessions to, or taking into account the political interests of others besides ourselves. To one degree or another this meant facing the danger of opportunism, and inevitably it meant facing the accusation of op-

portunism, and inevitably it meant facing the accusation of opportunism; yet we consistently pursued such a policy because we thought it to be the appropriate one for our political role. One example of how we functioned was our participation in an AVC election where we supported a slate including a Republican precinct captain and a Democratic machine supporter (and where they in turn supported our candidate). Another was our participation in an electoral block with ADA, the Republican Club, and other assorted organizations to take control of the Student Assembly away from the stalinists, (which netted us a total of ten seats out of a hundred and twenty). Such maneuvers inevitably lay one open to the charge of opportunistic power-seeking. However, it is from just such positions of "power" (in reality, only prominence) as can be exercised by an AVC delegate and a student assembly member that our ideas and program can most effectively be presented to a broader audience and tested in action against those of other political tendencies. The basic hallmark of sectarian politics is precisely that it avoids such positions of influence as will restrict and confine freedom to act openly in a completely revolutionary fashion. This is true not only on the campus, but in the trade unions and other kinds of mass organizations.

It was with such considerations in mind that we wrote our original letter to comrade Magnus. Proceeding on the basis of the account in LA, we suggested that an alternative policy in their student election might have been followed by our comrades in Berkeley. Essentially such a policy would have been to attempt to create a common slate of candidates from all tendencies (with the exclusion of the stalinists) that had fought against the oath. The circumstances (as far as they could be ascertained at a distance) seemed particularly opportune for such a move. The incumbent members of the student council had made themselves detested by all students involved in the anti-Oath campaign (having acted as a rubber stamp for the administration throughout). We had achieved at least some degree of popularity due to our role in the oath fight, so that we would have added substantially to any slate's strength. We were presumably on close terms with liberal forces because of the leading role we had just finished playing. Given these conditions it appeared possible that a coalition slate of candidates might have been able to win at least some council positions away from the fraternity crowd which was currently in control. Under the best circumstances such a slate, where there were four or five to be elected, might be expected to include one SYLER, two or three liberals, and maybe some popular anti-stalinist Wallacite, if such were to be found. In other words, we would seek to make it as broad as possible in order to draw support from as many different variety of students as possible. In its campaign such a slate would emphasize primarily the shabby role of the student council in the Oath fight, and pledge itself to more vigorous action in the future. This would be the essential political content of the electoral campaign, the various related issues could be exploited (Take the Student Council away from the fraternities; Complete self-government--get rid of the faculty "advisers" etc.) Basing its campaign on such a program, it seemed possible at least, that



such a slate might have gotten the support of a majority of students whose general democratic and anti-fraternity sentiments could have been appealed to. At any rate, it would have served to "politicize" the election, to have made it less of a personality contest and more of an ideological one. Granted our participation it would have further solidified our relations with liberal tendencies and independent radicals, and served to decrease the organizational distance between us and the rest of the student body. These were the considerations which we put forward in our original letter to comrade Magnus, together with explanatory additional remarks. Of course, we stated, such a perspective was dependent on a number of factors; and whether it could be adopted was related to various concrete circumstances such as 1) was the fraternity strength too strong to win against in any case, in which eventuality an independent campaign might be the best idea 2) would the liberals agree to running on a slate with us, and would they act so as not to "cut" us on election day? These and similar questions could not be answered from a distance, which is why we did not press our course on the Berkeley comrades as the only correct one, but merely asked that it be discussed, to decide retrospectively if it would have been possible or desirable. For part of the conditions of such an electoral bloc was our wholehearted and enthusiastic work for its creation.

The reply from comrade Magnus which is printed in this bulletin shows, in our opinion, that he has a number of false ideas about how the SYL should try to function on campus. In a personal conversation many of these differences were considerably reduced, but for the purpose of elucidating our ideas to a broader SYL audience, we will take his reply as it is set forth here, as the basis of our discussion.

What seems to be at the bottom of comrade Magnus' position is a false identification of student elections with elections to Congress or other government bodies. Since Luxemburg polemicized against Volmar (not to go back any further) revolutionary socialists have always accepted the dictum of the necessity for electoral independence from all other political tendencies and parties, for the very good reasons that comrade Magnus sets forth. The underlying assumption has always been that on the plane of national and international politics only the socialist revolution can be expected to solve the basic problems of society, and socialists can take no responsibility for any government, or any parties in a government which is not committed to the establishment of socialism. So much is ABC. So also are the strategy and tactics dictated by such considerations when applied to electoral activity: no electoral blocs, utilize the election for the propagandization of the socialist program, etc., etc. Almost everything that comrade Magnus has to say about "electoral activity" is absolutely true and correct when applied to the field of national politics, that is, to the struggle for state power.

But there are many other institutions in our society which differ from the state in that they are not, or are not exclusively devoted

devoted to maintaining the rule of the bourgeoisie. To one extent or another some of them function (seldom in a completely "pure" fashion) as a vehicle of expression and pressure for popular, democratic, or even socialist ideas. Thus trade unions defend (however inadequately) the immediate material interests of the working class; a student assembly may be the vehicle thru which a campus ROTC unit is abolished; or a student newspaper may give voice to liberal and radical ideas which might otherwise not find expression. Now while the interests of socialists are seldom identical with those of these institutions, neither are they always in conflict. For such immediate aims as are often embodied in their structure, socialists may be in complete agreement. Further, wherever possible, socialists should actively champion and promote all generally democratic or socially progressive measures by joining and working in the special organizations and movements which are formed to promote such interests. All this is also elementary, and would not have to be repeated if it were not a link in our chain of argument.

When we come to apply these principles, however, what we find is generally the following situation. One, or two, or a small group of our members after working some time in a given milieu, find themselves in some small position of influence where they are either called upon or forced to assume some measure of leadership in our organization. They then have to decide to what extent they will have to sacrifice their role as "independent critics" and assume some of the responsibilities of leadership. If they consider it important, they have to decide to what extent they wish to limit or inhibit their independent position as socialist propagandists. This latter may be necessary because the situation imposed certain restrictions on their freedom of expression. An example from the trade union field will make this clear. With most of our comrades in the shop, it is considered undesirable for them to lay themselves open to red-baiting attacks by making public speeches based on the full program of the ISL. Not only undesirable, but unnecessary inasmuch as their fellow workers have not yet reached the stage of consciousness where it makes any difference what our comrades hold to be the correct road to socialist power.

Similar considerations apply to student work, although here to a lesser degree. Because so much more of our work on campus can be described as directly propagandistic, it is to that degree uninfluenced by considerations of "power politics". However, and here is where we believe comrade Magnus makes his second big mistake, socialist propaganda cannot be conducted in a vacuum, uninfluenced by and unaffected by the surrounding conditions or the status position of those who put it forward. If persuasion can be likened to seduction (as in one sense it probably is) then we may say that it is metaphorically easier in a bedroom than a meeting hall, and with a receptive partner as the object. (This also puts us even up with comrade Magnus as far as sexual allusions are concerned.)

Translated from freudian into political terms this means that in order for our ideas to be presented with maximum effectiveness, for there to be the best "audience receptivity", it is not only our words which are important, but the total situation in which they are set forth. At the present moment some of our difficulties in

reaching and convincing other students arises from the false, or falsified conceptions which they have of us and what we stand for. These conceptions are the result of years of political work by our enemies, stalinist and liberal, who have more or less consciously worked to build up a picture of us which will alienate their followers from us and make them unwilling to even listen to our arguments. In a politically sophisticated arena the intricacy of these rationalized slanders is sometimes amazing. The stalinists, for example, would never think of using their "agent of Hitler" argument wherever we are there to combat it; rather they build up a picture of us as "extreme factionalists", "hair-splitters", "organizational sectarians", etc. etc. And to one degree or another the liberals echo these charges, adding a few of their own which the stalinists are incapable of: "bolshevik amoralsists", "Trotskyite dogmatists", "stalinists in other guise", and last but not by any means least, "neurotics", or "screwballs". Now the significance of these charges is not so much their truth or falsity, but the effect which they have, to the degree which they are accepted, in preventing those who listen to us from sympathetically, or at least open-mindedly attending to what we have to say. To the degree to which their minds and consciousness are influenced by the effects of these demagogic characterizations of our position, to that degree are they impervious to our real arguments.

From this it follows that part of our political task at the present time is to be aware of these false conceptions which are spread about us, and to act in such a way as to provide the least possible justification for their being believed. As opposed to our enemies, we seek to present ourselves as serious, responsible people who pursue certain ends which others have not yet come around to accepting, but which we hope they ultimately will.

All of the foregoing may appear to be simply redundant, but we wished to restate the general considerations which we feel many comrades accept abstractly but then forget in practice. Take the question of a student election, to get back to the issue at hand, or for that matter, almost any power struggle in a campus organization. It is one of the easiest things in the world for a socialist to look at a local situation and, knowing the character of the people involved, say "there is nobody here who is any good, both sides represent nothing but personal or incidental interests, we are the only ones who can present a clear program, a firm leadership and a correct policy." and on the basis of that proceed to take independent action by running a third slate.

Comrade Magnus tries to give this political basis by laying down the rule that "the keystone of electoral activity be anti-war and anti-militarist political actions." (his emphasis). This is a statement which is undoubtedly true of genuine elections (to Congress, etc.) but not necessarily of elections to other bodies. We are sure that comrade Magnus would not attempt to foist upon our trade union fractions the policy of introducing anti-war planks into their union caucuses. It is also undoubtedly true of our general propaganda, which means our press and most of our person-to-person political propaganda, meetings, etc. Yet it is not necessarily true that we inject the war question, or the

question of socialism for that matter, into every kind of electoral bloc we enter. Where, as at the University of California, there was a ready-made issue lying to hand, where we could within the framework of campus politics alone put forward a part of our program (and, the democratic part of our program is not the least important) it does not necessarily follow that we base ourselves exclusively on our socialist or anti-war position. Within an electoral coalition we ask people to vote for us not because we are socialists, but in a sense, in spite of it. We appeal to them for support because we stand opposed to the oath, and have demonstrated it in action. This does not mean that we thereby play down (even in the person of our candidates) what we stand for in regard to socialism and the war. Our candidate can still make public speeches as the direct spokesman of the SYL but he does not ask people to vote for him on that basis. Along with the rest of the slate he asks for support of non-socialists because of what he stands for on student and faculty liberties. For the same reason, we ask socialist and radical students to vote for the non-radical section of the slate, in order to displace the fraternity elements with a "lesser evil" candidate.

Now where it is not possible to construct a united slate, then how about running an independent candidate? The answer is that it is all to the good, not only for the chance it gives to put ones position (ones full position this time) forward, but also as a chance to measure the degree of ones support among the student body. The results achieved in the Berkeley election were highly gratifying in this regard. But where there is a power struggle going on, and where it is possible to engage on the democratic side of such a struggle, to intervene and influence it; we consider it far better to do the latter. Even from the short description given by comrade Magnus, it is easy to see what happened. The stalinists utilized the prevailing discontent with the Student Council to construct one of their "popular front" coalitions, leaving us isolated. We then busted up this coalition, to the presumed end of helping the fraternity crowd win. At any rate, the political lines were so blurred by that time to the politically unsophisticated student that the election did not become generally an ideological one, based on the oath question, but reverted again to becoming a personality duel.

The conditions for entering an electoral block generally include an agreement among the candidates that with respect to the opposition forces that they will generally consult among themselves and be bound by majority decision to carry out a joint policy. That SYL members should ever permit themselves to enter into such an agreement seems to comrade Magnus to be a violation of SYL discipline; he seems to feel that it ties our hands in an impermissible manner. Actually, it is only the first rule, and an absolutely necessary one, of caucus organization. We have participated in such caucuses hundreds of times: in unions, in AVC, in other political parties, in fact in almost every organization in which we ever worked. In fact, caucus discipline is generally from our point of view highly desirable since our influence upon caucus decisions is usually much greater than that which we could exert upon the caucus members individually. Its desirability, indeed its necessity, arises in any situation where the fight for some

particular point of view (no matter of what breadth) requires organized effort on the part of all those holding that point of view. To make it very specific, assume that our hypothetical "slate" of candidates swept the student council elections at Berkeley, and the "anti-oath" caucus held a majority of five out of nine positions. This would mean that the slate would hold a slim majority of one vote on all questions where the fraternity faculty forces voted solid. The only way in which the latter could be defeated would be for our slate to always decide on policy beforehand, and come into council meetings prepared to vote through a commonly decided line. This is what is meant by caucus discipline.

"But doesn't this make us the tail of the liberal kite, since they are presumably in the majority within the slate?" Obviously, it does restrict our freedom to the extent that within the council we are bound by democratic decisions. Even, this is not always true, since the caucus can always decide to limit its control to major questions, and allow the caucus members to take differing positions on these points not considered within the caucus program. This would generally be the case where the opposition itself has no unified policy. But where the caucus must take the responsibility for a particular measure, it has the right and duty to insist on voting discipline.

But again, "this puts us at the mercy of the liberal opportunists. They are likely to make compromises at our expense." This may or may not be true depending on many circumstances: the individual character of the caucus members, the general level of political consciousness on the campus, our own role and influence in the caucus, and the extent to which we can bring pressure to bear on our behalf from outside of the student council. In most cases, a caucus policy will not be exactly what we should like, but a compromise between our views and those of the more conservative elements. The extent to which it bears our stamp is largely a measure of our flexibility in operating within such a small group, knowing when to compromise and when to hold firm, what is of major importance, and what can be given up without great loss. But there is another weapon at our disposal, namely, the pressure of those who worked for the election of the slate. This broader caucus, exclusive of the candidates, worked for their election presumably because of agreement with the principles it stood for (Anti-Oath, etc.) Further, its members are not as subject to considerations of personal prestige, power-seeking etc. That is why we may expect greater support for our general point of view from this broader caucus, and, that is why we press for this thing called "responsibility to the caucus". This means simply, that we reserve the right (as may other candidates) to attempt to get a decision reversed by the broader caucus, which has been made by the five presumably elected Council members. This is a very simple democratic procedure, and one for which we should be for in principle precisely because it is more democratic. If the liberals don't want it, it is precisely we who should insist upon it, not "forget to mention" it.

But after all is said and done, it remains true that we must and should be willing to subject ourselves to the democratic decisions of broader movements, up to and including a slate in the Student Council. Many of the decisions made we may not like and may not agree with. But if we are to behave seriously and responsibly (not to speak of democratically) we must be prepared to carry them out in a disciplined manner. This is what we demand from others, and we can not make an exception to ourselves without raising serious doubts as to the truth of our assertion of fealty toward democratic processes. We cannot be for democracy only when we are on the winning side, but also when we are in a minority.

"But does not this open the way for betrayals of principles by our 'allies'? Betrayal of principle is always a possibility, but is generally much more complicated in origin than simple personal defect. In a case such as we are discussing it generally originates in the social pressure which the administration can bring to bear, the flattery of faculty attention, the "responsibilities" of power, etc.. But it is not a one-way proposition: the extent to which we can exert pressure, subtly and without carrying a chip on our shoulder, this also plays a part in preventing betrayal. One of the major deterrents is the responsibility which we can help instill in our caucus members as to their principles, their electorate, and their caucus, and to us

But this brings us to another attitude of comrade Magnus which we feel to be harmful, namely his offhand assumption that "we are the only principled people." It is this kind of attitude, and the behavior which flows from it, which contributes to maintaining the detrimental stereotypes. If he means by principles, that our politics are developed on the basis of explicit principles rather than moulded to fit the exigencies of separate situations, then it is absolutely not true that other individuals and political tendencies are not principled. In the long run, we think that historical developments will force liberalism to abandon its tenets; but this is a social valuation and not an individual one (or at least, it need not be within a short range of time). If it is true that many career minded students, seeking an easy path into the labor movement, join such a liberal organization as SDA, it does not necessarily follow that all liberal students or all liberal organizations are primarily and immediately moved by exclusively opportunistic motives. There are principled liberals, and even opportunists have to show some traces of consistency. The important thing is that it neither advances our interests nor makes us friends (who, even be they liberals, are sometimes very useful), to lump all liberal or social-democratic opponents together and treat them as if we expected from one day to the next that they will turn into the worst reactionaries. Indeed, by treating them as if we expected it, we only help them along the road.

Similar consideration lay behind my "objection to 'pushing our role' as the 'vanguard' of the anti-oath students." If, as you seem to proudly admit might be the case, this "makes the liberals wary of collaborating with us" I don't see where the advantage lies.

What good does it do us that the liberals, and all those they come in contact with believe that we are people who are always looking for some

Kind of incident which we can use to factional advantage. (Not, you understand that I am against making factional use of events, but not in the hostile aggressive way which interferes with good political and organizational relations.) Such feelings on the part of liberals may "leave you cold" but they are not politically smart.

But to return once again to this problem of participation in electoral blocs, what about the "freedom of criticism" which comrade Magnus declares to be an essential aspect of the united front, but presumably banned when entering an electoral coalition. If the difficulty is merely one of what name to apply to a particular group, then an electoral coalition slate to a student council election has much more in common with his description of a united front, than with what he calls an "electoral bloc." Again, we believe, the confusion stems from a failure to differentiate between elections to the government and elections to much more limited institutions. This is shown by the fact that he thinks it necessary to stress the point that the SYL forces should reserve the right to criticize our allies. But neither we nor anybody else has ever proposed anything different! Of course we maintain the right to criticize our allies, to show how their basic political orientation leads them to make mistakes, concessions, etc.. But even here we use good judgement, and maintain a sense of proportion. We don't criticize everything to everyone. On minor points we confine our criticism to close friends, especially where the significance of a particular development is clear only to those with some previous knowledge. In other words, we don't "show up" our allies every day by writing letters to the campus newspaper denouncing their every deviation from the line of righteousness. If our allies make serious mistakes, ones which really threaten to undermine the principles with which we united with them, then we denounce them publicly in order to help bring pressure to bear. If the disagreement is really deep, and irreparable, we are not afraid of a split if it must come to that. But here again, we are wary of splits, we seek to avoid them as long as possible, we seek to place the blame for them on others, and above all, we do absolutely nothing to provoke them.

One last question which comrade Magnus raises should now be easy to see as arising out of a misconception, namely what is the role of SYL discipline which allows our members to submit to the discipline of broader groups/ SYL discipline is exerted over the individual activity of our members in these groups, in deciding what our policy should be toward forming them, what our member should advance within them, what kind of concessions we should be willing to accept, and when we should leave them. What SYL discipline does not mean is that we attempt to exert it over non-SYL groups, but of course, that is again obvious.

In considering the differences between comrade Magnus and ourselves, it is obvious that they do not relate to any particular question such as whether or not our unit should have run an independent campaign or attempted to form an electoral coalition in the Council election at Berkeley. That question could have been answered only on the basis of concrete local factors; yet there is obviously a difference in this thing called "approach" which might have led us to take a different position from that of the Berkeley unit. It certainly would have resulted in a different tactic at one point or another. Yet we do not want to exaggerate any difference which may exist; indeed believe that if we define our terms precisely, comrade Magnus would agree with much of what we say.

To summarize our outlook we would say that it stems from an estimate of our present situation which sees us as an extremely small, by an d

large politically unpopular tendency, isolated from the broad mass of student opinion and subject to certain administrative threats. This imposes on us the tasks of seeking to break out of isolation, surround ourselves with friendly elements, win the respect of other tendencies, all as part of the prerequisites for an increased rate of growth. This means, given our small size, that a large part of our activity must be in terms of working in broader groups than ourselves in order to prepare the way for creating an atmosphere favorable to our ideas. And this means the greatest tact, flexibility, and forswearing of organizational fetishism. At the same time, it does not mean in the least any watering down of our political program or the vigor with which we put it forward.

, however, in the way in which it may be most effective. If this discussion can help in any way to bring us to a mutually better understanding of how this can be done, then it will be justified.



Agenda

1. Election of chairman
2. P. C. report on an industrial orientation  
P.C. report: Shachtman: 15 min.  
Buro report: Julie: 15 min.  
Discussion
3. Character of Anvil and the Federation - Socialist or Anti-war  
For an anti-war program: Leon: 15 min.  
For a socialist program: Sommie: 15 min.  
Discussion
4. Unit reports  
Chicago: Leon: 10 min.      Buffalo: Marty: 5 min.  
St. Louis: Andy: 5 min.      Berkely: Jim: 15 min.  
Oberlin: Paul: 5 min.      New York: Sonny: 15 min.  
Other: Julie: 20 min. All reports discussed separately
5. Relationship of units to the national SWL organization. Julie: 10 min.  
Discussion
6. Campus functioning: strategy and tactics in light of student elections  
at Berkely      Don: 15 min.      Jim: 15 min.  
Discussion
7. Korea resolution

For the past several years the orientation of the SYL has been towards the campus. As a result the membership consists in a large majority of student youth in the undergraduate and graduate schools and the periphery of the SYL is of similar composition.

The SYL was motivated in deciding upon this orientation by one over-all factor: the need to build a cadre of the more intellectualized youth in order to be a more effective force when conditions warrant a concerted effort to work among high school and proletarian youth. Until now the SYL has felt that it was easier to recruit youth from the academic world because it is easier to function on campus more or less openly as a socialist without fear of frightening the student body or of meeting with severe recriminations from the Administration. These are but a few of the reasons which led to our present orientation. A more detailed discussion can be found in our resolutions of the past. The problem that confronts us today is whether in the light of the Korean war, the draft, and the revival of war industries a change in orientation is called for.

The SYL National Committee feels that no serious change in our campus orientation is justified. The political situation is radically different from a year ago, of course, but the reasons which motivated our campus orientation then, are not any less valid today.

The SYL has grown in the past year; it has several new units and the prospects for growth continue. The campus will not be depleted by the draft for a long time, if ever - as far as an arena for SYL activity is concerned, as claimed by comrades on the ISL P.O. But even if it were to be depleted in two or three years, which, we repeat, is not likely, the SYL must function on the basis of what the political situation in the country will be like in the next year or two.

To change from a campus to an industrial orientation would involve the following difficulties: there will be no special youth problems in a shop

Resolution 1.

The perspective of retaining Anvil and Student Partisan as an anti-war magazine does not necessarily mean approval of the idea that the SYL should attempt to convert those clubs in which it has influence into anti-war clubs.

approved

Resolution 2.

We oppose transforming our present socialist clubs into anti-war clubs, except under circumstances of a possible sudden accession of non-socialists, but that we do not attempt to lay down any hard and fast rule for places where we do not have clubs.

approved

Resolution 3.

Whereas: The Political Committee of the Independent Socialist League has characterized the present conflict in Korea as a struggle between the two all-powerful imperialist rivals: Russia and the United States, and  
Whereas: This struggle between these imperialist powers strives for control of the destination of a subjugated people with no concern for democracy on the part of either power, and  
Whereas: Supporting either side in the war can only be carried out consistently if we abandon the struggle for democracy and socialism,  
Therefore be it resolved: That the SYL National Conference endorses the socialist, third camp position of the Independent Socialist League on the Korean War.

approved

as compared to the obvious special political problems of youth on campus in the present period; it will bring our recruitment to a halt; it will mean losing many of our contacts who have been brought close to us on campus; it will mean the end of the clubs which have been built up on campuses in a number of different cities during the past two years; it will mean the end of Anvil and Student Partisan, as it is the SYL as a campus force which is the backbone of the magazine and its sponsoring clubs. It will in effect mean the end of the SYL.

Besides the above reasons, which are traditional reasons in the SYL for working on campus, the new world political situation has brought with it additional reasons for continuing this orientation. The campus is becoming a political storm center as never before. The fight for academic freedom will be intimately connected with the fight for democratic rights in the labor movement. Thus, the political weight of campus will be greater and our concern with it should be greater too. Also, the possibilities for recruiting on an anti-war basis from the campus will be made relatively easier by the war situation than will be the case within the labor movement. This is not to say that a mass anti-war movement is anticipated on campus in the coming period; merely that students will be more affected by the draft than workers and will also be more tolerant of anti-war and socialist views in the coming period.

In the opinion of the SYL national committee comrades in the SYL should be impressed with the importance of participating in the labor movement after leaving school. In preparation for this it is in favor of starting a systematic campaign among the youth to enter trade schools. This will not only prepare our members for working in shops, psychologically, but will equip them with a skill which will make shop work easier from a personal point of view and increase his effectiveness as a socialist and trade unionist in the plant (a skilled worker usually has more prestige in a shop among his fellow workers than the unskilled man.)

National Committee

Socialist Youth League

105

## ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

### 1. The value of youth work in the past period: (3/49 to 9/50)

- a) Nationally, the SYL, viewed as an ISL activity, has been a major and fruitful field of work. This point stands out particularly when one compares the relative activity of ISL branch to SYL unit in such places as St. Louis, San Francisco area, and Chicago.
- b) Furthermore, not only has the SYL more than held its own in size, but it has done so in a period when other youth movements (LYL, YPSL, SDA, etc.) have experienced a considerable decrease in strength.

### 2. Statement of the perspective under which this activity occurred: (3/49 Youth Resolution)

- a) The primary task for the SYL is the consolidation of its membership and the building of cadres for the party.
  - (1) Toward this end and among other things, an immediate educational bulletin was promised.
  - (2) Furthermore, less emphasis was to be given to building campus clubs and discussion groups where such work seriously detracted from direct SYL activity.

### 3. Results of the 1949 perspective:

- a) To a large extent the 1949 perspective was not fulfilled.
  - (1) The promise of a bulletin could not be carried out. Generally speaking it was impossible to find out what was going on locally throughout country, except for an occasional, dry organizational bulletin.
  - (2) Some units continued to function as before in spending too much time on campus clubs and discussion groups where such work seriously detracted from direct SYL activity.
  - (3) Essentially the SYL functioned as autonomous units having correspondence with the NY buro which functioned as a leading body only for the NY area.
- b) In spite of these defects, the SYL grew and became, in many areas, a recognized, active force.

### 4. Implementation:

- a) There is a need for increased ISL recognition of the SYL in terms of material and financial aid to the youth.

This issue is primarily a question which can be acted upon only by the ISL National Committee. However, the ISL should, in view of the opportunities of youth work at this time, devote much greater aid to the SYL than it does.

One striking example involved here is in the recent fund drive, in which the SYL was allowed to keep for its own use only that money which was sent in over and above a certain initial quota which went to the ISL.

Undoubtedly in the short term such help, particularly the financial, from the ISL means real sacrifice, but in a longer period this initial difficulty would be offset by the positive results which the activity thus made possible would introduce.

- b) There is an acute need of a competent national organizational and political leadership for the purpose of giving local units direction and of tying the units together in a national whole and as components of a national organization.

Toward this end there must be a continuation of effort to obtain a national buro which is functioning, responsible, balanced in the capabilities of its members, and national in character. All possibilities of bringing unit leaders of sufficient calibre to the national office must be explored.

One basic difficulty to be overcome in the formation of a strong national leadership is that our present National Buro and N.C. are not as their names imply, national: rather, they are a collection of individuals elected by and responsible to local units only. This problem can, of course, only be overcome by a founding convention which should not be overly delayed because of the desire to reach a certain arbitrary size.

a) The establishment of a national SYL publication directed to the campus is of immediate need. Of the measures suggested in this section, such a regular bulletin or magazine would do the most, immediately, toward strengthening the SYL, both internally by giving it a national ideological center, and externally by increasing SYL campus influence directly.

Three principal objections can be made to this proposal.

(1) Adequate editorial forces:

In part this is the same problem as that of the national buro, however, this is one task which need not be done solely from New York. As writing assignments are farmed out, so can much of the editorial activity, leaving only the technical work as a problem for New York alone.

(2) Securing enough copy of a satisfactory level:

Granted the basic premise that there are enough people in and around the SYL who can write well, the problem is not insurmountable. Rather it is one of learning how to stimulate discussion on specific questions instead of issuing general appeals for the comrades to write.

(3) Financing:

An answer to this real problem can be made in the form of some questions. How many units have a pledge system and one in which a certain portion of the monies collected is transmitted to NY? Would not the very need of money for such a purpose as this arouse the comrades much more than would the need for stamp money? To what extent can aid be obtained from the ISL,

5. In conclusion:

There is no perspective of a mass 3rd camp anti-war federation on American campuses. Time does not permit this development. The 3rd World War, itself, is not more than a few years off. While the draft is here now and will shortly decimate the ranks of those on campus who are the potential base for a big anti-war movement. Further, what opposition to draft there is at this time is expressed in an individualized passive resistance.

Moreover the SYL is now a factor on campus. Not in a mass sense of numbers, but in a political sense in that the SYL now constitutes a political focal point.

Generally what 3rd camp anti-war activity on campus will develop, will be through the SYL or through united fronts, blocs, etc. which the SYL will initiate.

To achieve this end, the SYL must be strengthened to a point of being openly recognized as a major activity of the ISL and the appropriate steps must be taken in view of this recognition.

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Berkeley

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