

SOCIALIST



YOUTH REVIEW



JAN-FEB 1947

SOCIALIST YOUTH REVIEW

Dear Friends:

The SYR is intended to be a means of self expression for our comrades and friends. As such the average level of SYR articles should accurately reflect the maturity of our youth movement and its periphery. The SYR can therefore be a gauge: as the Socialist Youth League develops politically, so will the articles grow in accuracy, subtlety and finesse.

VOL. I NO. I JANUARY 1947
A monthly discussion and educational
bulletin-----published by the SOCIALIST
YOUTH LEAGUE

The editorial board will make regular assignments. However every individual comrade should be encouraged to make some kind of contribution to the magazine. A good idea for units would be for them to develop educational projects in which all comrades should participate. "Education in America", for example, is a topic which can easily be broken down and divided among all the members of a particular unit. After the comrades have assembled their facts and interpretations, the articles could be used as a basis for educationals and subsequently sent to the SYR.

The units should also send articles of an organizational nature: articles dealing with local problems, reports of meetings, unit growth etc. Social and cultural articles are likewise requested from comrades and friends.

One final word: The Socialist Youth Review will be what we make it. If we take the magazine seriously in a concrete way it will become one of our best organizers and educators.

Comradely,

EDITORIAL BOARD

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Foreign \$1.50
Single Copy.....10%
Foreign..15%

A LETTER TO YOUNG SOCIALISTS ○ ○

The following lines are excerpts from a letter which Leon Trotsky wrote to the French Fourth Internationalist youth ten years ago. They are of interest and importance to all working class youth and have particular importance for our youth organization today.

* * *
e YOUR ORGANIZATION is weak but you have an idea. Your program corresponds to the character of the present epoch. It expresses correctly the fundamental historical interests of the proletariat. Every great event will confirm your program. With the help of pitiless criticism, of constant propaganda, of bold agitation, you will destroy the old organizations, internally rotten, which have become the principle obstacles on the road of the revolutionary movement. That is why, dear comrades, your small congress has a great importance. You must become fully conscious of the great mission which history has placed on your young shoulders.



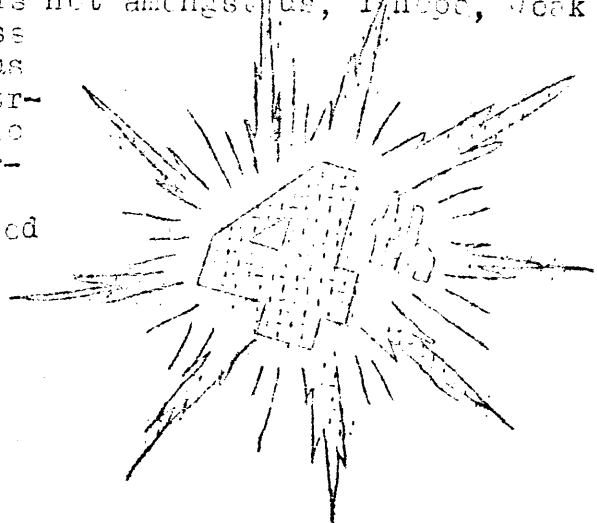
YOU PROJECT YOUR shadow before you into the future and this shadow from today on is ten times, one hundred times taller than your organization. The persecutions, and calumnies of your enemies, give you the necessary strength and prepare you for the great tasks and battles which lie ahead.

I TRUST THAT the congress of your organization will be held under the banner of faith in your future, while at the same time criticizing without pity all the faults and weaknesses of your present condition. What the revolutionary organizations in France have most often lacked is attention to details, system, a well-regulated organization which must be begun by exact financial accounts and by careful scrutiny of publications. The great quality of the French working class is its spirit of initiative and improvisation, which has more than once left its mark on history. The proletariat must be given a scientific program and a strict and all-conquering fighting organization.

THE WEAK WILL perhaps say that it is difficult. Obviously it is difficult! The socialist emancipation of the proletariat is, in general, a difficult thing. But there is not amongst us, I hope, weak ones. Through this letter, I address myself to the courageous and audacious revolutionaries, ready to see this struggle through to the end. There is no other way outside of the Fourth International. Follow in this direction without hesitation. Victory is assured you.

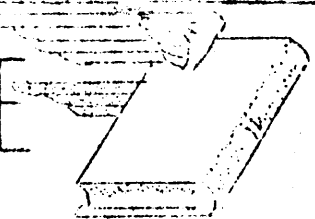
Coyoacan, Mexico D.F., May 2, 1937

L. Trotsky

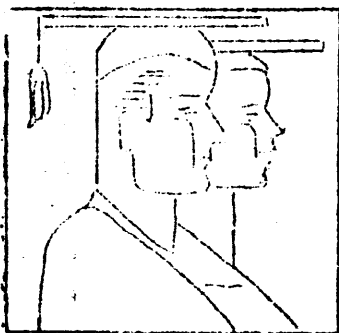


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IN AND AROUND THE LEAGUE



IT SHOULD COME as a surprise to no one that the Socialist Youth League has not made startling progress in the last year. Founded at the Detroit Workers Conference in August 1943, the Socialist Youth League is still an infant organization, chronologically and organizationally.



THE ORIGINAL CORE OF SYL members unfortunately had only two or three comrades with the experience and talent required for building a revolutionary youth organization. The bulk of the membership was composed almost exclusively of young high school and college students for whom the SYL was their initial contact with the revolutionary movement. It is this lack of a politically experience core which has been the greatest obstacle to our growth.

IN TAKING INTO account organizational failures and successes we must mention the limits imposed on us by social conditions. In the depression days young students and young workers were tremendously affected in their psychology and social outlook by the instability of American capitalism. Students faced unemployment after graduation and young workers, fortunate enough to have a job labored long hours for small pay, without any visible prospects of a better life. The inevitable disillusionment of large sections of young people with the "American Way of Life" created the political climate that was conducive to the growth of militant student and youth organizations.

Today, however for reasons not directly pertinent to this article, American capitalism achieved a minimum stability. There are more than sixty million employed workers today and only a "normal" two and a half million unemployed. Contrast this with the fourteen million unemployed at the height of the depression of which five million were youth.

This temporary revival of American economy has had a direct effect on the thinking and habits of the population as a whole and in particular on high school and college students to whom the SYL directs most of its propaganda. The American post-war student is not concerned so much about his future. He takes it for granted. For him the problem is not "will I find a job" as was the case ten years ago but rather "which of several professions or jobs shall I choose?"

Confident of his future, lulled into a false sense of security by the transitory "boom" we cannot expect significant numbers of youth to be attracted by a revolutionary socialist program.

HOWEVER WE WOULD BE dishonest and smug to sit back and pass off our small membership as something which cannot be otherwise because of objective conditions. These conditions, I believe, negate the possibility of building a mass youth movement today, but does not prohibit a much greater growth in our membership than has been the case up to now.

THE FIRST TASK OF THE SOCIALIST YOUTH LEAGUE is the self-education of its own members and an intensification of its efforts to recruit more politicalized youth in the high school and college campuses. Classes, discussions and educational should receive priority above anything else. Only through an intensive educational program can we expect to build the cadre that we need. However this should not be interpreted as meaning: Internal education to the exclusion of outside political activity. The latter may even be considered part of general education if conducted efficiently. Most units of the Socialist Youth League have several members on college campuses who are not participating in the school's political life. The unit exec should discuss the possibility of organizing discussion clubs on campuses or entering those which already exist for the purpose of presenting our point of view.

Each unit should do a minimum of high school work. In a recent communication to all units the National Office has made an excellent offer along these lines. It was suggested that all units send copy for a high school bulletin to the National Office and receive in return a new bulletin for distribution. If such a bulletin is distributed regularly outside of high schools it is inevitable that we will make a number of contacts and eventually recruits. This bulletin can also be an educational project. Writing articles will be a valuable experience which will be stimulating to the political development of the comrades made responsible for the articles.

LEAGUE ACTIVITIES

HONORS FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS

West Virginia

In the recent period the youth comrades have been instrumental in the formation of a party branch and have now mapped out a plan for themselves whereby they may be expected to show something concrete in youth work. There are real possibilities of eventually recruiting a number of young workers and several students.

Chicago

We now have a functioning unit composed mainly of new members compared with the defunct youth fraction of two months ago. The comrades there are now actively participating in campus life, working in youth clubs and seriously considering high school activity. This activity is also being integrated with Albert Goldman's campaign for Mayor.

New York

The youth unit in New York will set the pace in the SYR sub drive. They have set themselves the goal of selling at least 100 copies of S.Y.R. in the high schools and on the college campuses

Julius Falk
(National Secretary)

FACTS AND VIEWS ON THE RECENT COAL MINERS STRIKE ○ ○ ○ ○

A COAL CAMP is different from any other kind of industrial grouping that I know of, in appearance and location and atmosphere. The reasons for this lie in the very nature of the coal mining industry in a capitalist economy. The miners themselves are individuals; there are intelligent ones as well as unintelligent ones, clean ones as well as slovenly ones, and yet there are traits in every camp which tend to obscure the individuality of the miners.

WEST VIRGINIA is the greatest bituminous coal producing state in the world. One of the richest of the valleys is Monongahela. The Monongahela River has its source in the central part of the state, flows north to meet the Tygart River near Fairmont, W. Va., the Cheat River near Pt. Marion, Pa., and the Allegheny River at Pittsburgh. It carries more tonnage than any other river in the world of its size. The whole of the valley is dotted with coal camps; it is a veritable social workers paradise. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt was moved by the plight of one of its tributary valleys, Scotts Run, to promote the building of a housing project called "Aurthurdale" in a nearby agrarian county. However this did little to better the general condition of the people in the valley.

SCOTTS RUN, near Morgantown, W. Va. presents good field for analysis. If you know Bertha Hill, Osage, Pursglove, Cassville to name a few of its camps, you know Kenvir, Ky. or Penn Pitt in Poland, Pa. They look about the same. In all of them you find the same bared hills, the slack piles, the rows of identical company houses clinging to the contours of the steep hills, the treacherous one-lane road which winds up the hill and in between the shanties. The houses are poorly constructed and stereotyped. Most of them were built before the first World War or during the twenties--mass production homes which cost the company about \$80 apiece. The homes have long since been paid for in rent. But this does not stop the trend on the operator's part to sell them at about \$500 for each room. In the case of Pursglove, and Osage, the houses are serviced by water and electricity. But the company has only one meter for each; and the cost of water and electricity used in the mine is combined with that used in the shanties and divided up evenly between the miners. Small wonder that companies like Carnegie-Illinois can afford so generously to refuse to collect the individual fines established by Judge Goldsborough!!

THE MINERS STRIKE was the culmination of the above conditions and a host of other factors: rising prices, shortened hours, an artificial car shortage which cut production, and the forced sale of houses in company towns at exorbitant prices, which led to a declining standard of living. The summer of 1946 was something of a nightmare for the miners. Prices skyrocketed in the company stores and consumer goods were of low quality when

obtainable. Meat, for example, was impossible to buy for many months and cheese was used as a substitute until it became sickening.

PRIOR TO THE WALKOUT, an undercurrent of dissatisfaction had spread throughout the mining country. The rank and file grumbled but waited for Lewis to move. It was against this background that "John L." demanded re-negotiation of the contract. The government refused. The night of November 19th saw government agents clothed in raincoats which might, in another day, have passed for inquisitors' robes, tacking up silly little notices around the pits' entrances calling for the diggers to continue work. The 20th saw the men of the pits streaming home, tools slung over shoulders, and just a little merry.

BUT BENEATH THE jokes there was an air of tension, a questioning anxiety. The government had threatened action. There were rumors that troops and FBI agents had been seen in several company towns. However the miners were only slightly depressed by this news; they repeated to each other, "They can't mine coal with bayonets". It was a sort of psychological belt tightening. The self-confidence, however, was oppressing, for it was more than genuine self-confidence; it was also over-confidence in Lewis. The rank and file was slipping into the "let Lewis handle it" policy. The political aspects of the strike left the men apathetic at best and the possible consequences were ignored. To inspire the miners to united militancy and political consciousness, education was needed and this is totally lacking in the UMWA.

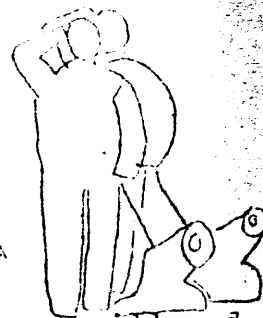
JOHN L. LEWIS is a master strategist. He has led his union in many a successful strike. But in all his years as head of the miners, he never advocated an educational program in the union which would be politically beneficial. He has failed to show the need for the miners to concern themselves with independent politics. This however, is not an accident. John L. Lewis plays an ambivalent role in the American labor movement. At the same time that he bases himself on the mine workers' union, he is tied to the capitalist state politically and psychologically. In the recent miners' strike the latter tie was the decisive one. That is why Lewis sagged and capitulated when the government brought its full pressure to bear on the mine workers.

THE NEEDS AND shortcomings of the union movement in general were made clear by the government-broken miners strike. The union movement today cannot afford to limit itself to economic struggles as was the case thirty or forty years ago. The growing intimacy between Big Business and the capitalist state makes it a vital necessity for the working class to organize politically as well as economically.



Youth Fight

Conscription

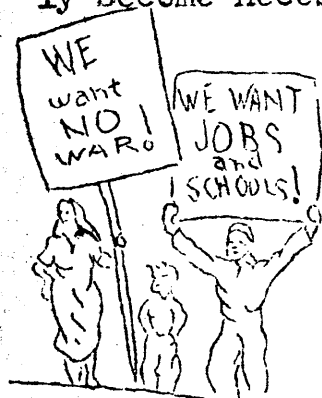


"We must ~~not~~ accept the philosophy that this war will end all wars and that there will never again be a need to resort to arms"

From a letter by Secretary of War Stimson to the Citizen's Committee for Universal Training, quoted in the New York Times, August 23, 1944

WHY CONSCRIPTION?

EXPANDING AMERICAN CAPITALISM long ago set itself the task of complete world domination. That this domination would eventually become necessary was evident by the ever growing needs of its economy for raw materials, foreign markets for its products and places to invest capital which could not be used at home. Operating in a changing world, the methods which it uses to attain these necessities must also change. In earlier days of capitalist expansion peaceful acquisition and aggrandisement were possible, at least on the part of the United States whose strong and youthful economy was in a position to emerge triumphant in the course of normal competition. American commodities found their way to all parts of the world and the United States gradually emerged as its leading



creditor. In most cases it was not necessary for her to control colonies by force. Where others fought their way to control, America, by virtue of her economic strength, bought her way in.

BUT TRADITIONAL AMERICAN imperialism, based on "dollar diplomacy" gave way before a world of keener competition and outright warfare. The American bourgeoisie, wiser by the experiences of two world wars, leans more and more upon militarism to support its economic blackmail. Originally forced to introduce military conscription in its fight against the Axis, the ruling class has kept it in effect for over a year after the war ended, and is now attempting to make it a permanent part of American life.

THE INCREASING FREQUENCY of war has made this necessary. So, too, have the modern requirements of war. The mechanization of warfare calling for a skilled army well trained in the requirements necessary to wield tanks, airplanes, radar and the like, and the development of the atom bomb and long range bombers which have made it possible for one country to render another defenseless in a brief period of time, no longer permit mobilization after the outbreak of war. Natural barriers and favorable geographic location which until now have minimized the importance of preparation for the United States, mean nothing before the accomplishments of present day warfare.

INCIDENTAL, BUT STILL valid reasons why American capitalism can use conscription are that a mass conscript army helps to solve some of the internal problems of the economy by providing

a large market for industry, the expense of which is carried by the people as taxpayers, and also removes youth from the labor market at an age when they are least able to be absorbed by industry. This aids in reducing somewhat the unemployment problem almost always present in modern capitalism. But it does not eliminate the industrial reserve army which is useful to capitalism in that it tends to drive wages down.

LESSONS OF WORLD WAR TWO AND THE ARGUMENT OF DEFENSE

WE WERE TOLD, before and during World War II, that the United States and her allies were fighting for peace and democracy. That the cause of democracy was not perceptibly advanced by the war, in spite of the promises made to insure our support of it, is evident to anyone who surveys the facts.

COLONIAL SORESPOTS LIKE India, China, Indonesia, Puerto Rico and South Africa remain as hellholes of starvation and slavery. Western Europe is a shambles; the living standards of her peoples have been reduced tremendously; her political and economic freedoms are constantly imperiled by the intimidation and pressure of the United States and Russia. In Eastern Europe, democracy has ceased to exist altogether for the oppressed nationalities who tremble under the bayonets of the occupying armies of totalitarian Russia. Right here in the United States, a million Negro "fighters for democracy" returned from the battlefields to find themselves the victims of the very racial oppression which the war was supposed to have eliminated.

AS FOR PEACE, what illusions of a peaceful post-war world are left after watching the development of heated antagonisms in the United Nations Assembly and Security Council are certainly dispelled by the call on the part of American governmental leaders for a permanent peacetime conscription law. There is no need for any country to train and maintain a large army unless war is expected. Further, those who advocate conscription now not only deny, in effect, the efficacy of the United Nations Organization as an agency to secure and maintain world peace, but recognize war as not just a "mistake", "accident" or means of conquest of a certain nation which is "aggressive", (as we were told last time, again, to insure our support) but as an integral and permanent feature of the American and World social system.

IN AN EFFORT to avoid having to admit the falseness of their propaganda and the failure of the alleged purpose of the war just concluded, those who led it and who now support the conscription campaign, are reviving their cries of "aggressor nation", directed this time at Russia. But this just adds to their already long list of lies and contradictions since they cannot explain how Russia, whom they previously insisted was one of our friendly "peace-loving" allies became a maker of war overnight. No matter how they twist and turn, they cannot avoid the fact that all we were told about why we were fighting the last war were lies. And that must give us pause, for if the American people were misled before, how do we know that the same thing isn't happening again?

WE DON'T. AND that is why the main argument of those who support conscription - the argument of defense - falls through. The issue of conscription cannot be abstracted from the context.

which it is proposed; we are neither for nor against it except on the basis of what it will accomplish. In modern imperialist wars there are objectively no such categories as "aggressor" and "defender". It is not that war is made by one participant of malice and ill-will upon another participant of innocence, but rather that war is forced upon all participants by the exigencies of capitalist expansion. In a sense, all imperialist nations today play the role of aggressor and defender at the same time. Each defends its existence by striving for the downfall of the other.

THAT IS WHY, despite the promises of the Atlantic Charter, the "Four Freedoms" were not realized. That is why the war could only end in the kind of unjust and unstable peace that it did; and that is why we face the prospect of another war so soon after the last one has been concluded. All talk of conscription for defense today must be understood to mean conscription for the defense of American capitalism. American capitalism must "defend" its interests in China, in the Near East and in South America. It is in the defense of these things that the real meaning of the next war is to be found.

TO FIGHT AGAINST conscription now is to fight against the occurrence of this war. But the fight against conscription must be a fight based on the ~~necessity of social change~~. If imperialist wars are inevitable under capitalist competition then the way to fight against these wars is to fight for the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of Socialism - a society where the causes of war have been removed.

A REAL STRUGGLE for socialism precludes the support of one imperialist against another. Measured against the possibility of a Socialist society, the defense of "democratic" capitalist states against a more totalitarian society is impossible. Then, the alternatives are not between American capitalism and German fascist capitalism or American capitalism and Russian bureaucratic collectivism, but between oppressive class society on a world scale and socialism. To defend and preserve a lesser evil against a greater evil and thereby destroy the chance of wiping out both of them is to doom society to an endless succession of wars.

THE PROPONENTS OF CONSCRIPTION

THE MILITARY COACHES have given their pep talks, and the cheerleaders of the press are prepared to go into their fight-team-fight routine as soon as the quarterbacks in congress put the ball in motion. Thus, like a football team going into the final quarter of a scoreless game, the propaganda machine of bourgeois America can be expected to open wide its bag of tricks in these next few months of its drive for permanent peacetime conscription. The effort of practically every farsighted member of the American capitalist class is being thrown into this drive. Regardless of whatever other differences they may have concerning American foreign policy they all agree (they all foresee another war) that preparedness and conscription are necessary to make it effective. No other issue with the possible exception of the cry for anti-labor legislation has evoked such a stream of editorials from the nation's press. A few ask for less, but the average proposed length of service is one year. Some like Lt. Gen. Hugh H. Drum, Commander, New York Guard have demanded service for as long as five years. However the fact remains, Wallace and Byrnes, Republican and Democrat, they're all lined up behind

the conscription bill.

CONSCRIPTION AND NATIONAL WELFARE

IT IS NO accident that conscription was first proposed by President Roosevelt. Farsighted politician that he was, he took advantage of the wartime jingoism to propose permanent conscription as early as 1943. At that time he was questioned by reporters concerning exactly what he proposed. Unable to admit the approach of another war and his plans for America's preparation, he tried, as he did with everything he proposed, to disguise the issue as a proposal for national welfare. Other tactful politicians have followed suit. They argue that conscription is necessary, not for war, but for the health and education of our Youth.

THAT THIS IS not true can be seen from American foreign policy and from the statements of other men who, because they are not vote conscious politicians, are more blunt. Writing in the Army and Navy Journal on Sept. 23, 1944, Secretary of the Navy Forrestal said:

"We believe it is possible to combine some civic and educational training with the purely military indoctrination. But these we think should be collateral to the basic purpose, which is training for actual military service."

The army, too, shortly after the conscription bill came up in Congress last year, circulated an order calling for the majority of the training period to be devoted to battle training. Or listen to what Hanson W. Baldwin wrote in the New York Times of Jan. 20, 1944:

"The services do not want to have defense confused with sociology. They fear that the physical and mental improvement that might be a by-product of peacetime conscription might be over emphasized; in other words, that this would become the primary aim, rather than military training itself. They do not want to be saddled with illiterates and the unfit"

With this fact in mind - that the ruling class wants conscription for military purposes - we can take up the argument that it will be beneficial to national welfare.

THE ARMY CANNOT teach democracy. It can teach herd-mindedness and prejudice. Here is a statement on the matter by Major Finman of the Army's Morale Division:

"It is not our job to teach the men in the army what is right. It is simply our job to teach them to fight for what is right, as laid down by the government."

Perhaps those like Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt who believe that the army is a good place to learn democracy are referring to the particular policy of Jim-Crow which segregates all Negroes and places them in inferior jobs, or the well known Anti-semitic policy of the navy. Or perhaps they feel that growing accustomed to the dictatorship of the army officer caste is the best thing for building character.

MILITARY TRAINING DOES NOT build self reliance. The number of young men who entered the army at a time when they would normally be attempting to escape from the sheltered life of their childhoods, who now find themselves terrified by the insecurity of civilian life is enormous. The army teaches men how to obey decisions that are made by others, not to make their own. We are all familiar with the unruly behavior of soldiers off duty. This is fostered by army training where the only law is a mechanical response to commands from above. The increase in crime rates with the

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