

Should a communist youth movement be independent? Answers to this question from Karl Liebknecht, V.I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky, the Communist International and others...

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Declarations of Independence

A collection of texts by the independent
communist youth organization REVOLUTION

Table of Contents

REVOLUTION/DE

On the Road to a Youth International
Page 4

Karl Liebknecht

Workers' Movement and Youth Organization
Page 10

V.I. Lenin

Jugend-Internationale
Page 14

Communist International

Theses on the Youth Movement
Page 17

Communist International

**The Communist International and
the Communist Youth Movement**
Page 19

Leon Trotsky

The Struggle Against the Youth
Page 22

League for the Fifth International

**Communist Principles of
Youth Organization**
Page 28

REVOLUTION/DE

The Young Socialists' Alliance
Page 36

REVOLUTION/UK

Trotsky, Gould and the Youth
Page 38

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Why do we need a brochure about the communist youth movement? Is the youth movement relevant anymore? And why do we need texts by Lenin and Liebknecht – isn't that just left-wing nostalgia?

We, as members of the independent communist youth organization REVOLUTION, are firmly convinced that these texts have not become less important in the last 60-100 years. They put the question of the youth movement and the revolutionary youth organization on the agenda.

Of course today there is no strong revolutionary youth movement in sight: the "socialist" parties have more or less completely broken from Marxism and have wholeheartedly turned to "democratic socialism" – really: social neoliberalism.

And their youth organizations have followed. No one expects anything revolutionary to emerge from the British Labour Youth or the German Jusos. But as the economic crisis deepens, so grows the need for a mass revolutionary party of the working class and also for an organization of the revolutionary youth. The potential for such processes of organization is growing – we must recognize and use this potential.

In the summit sieges of the anticapitalist movement, in the youth protests in France and Chile we witness that young people are forcing their way onto the political stage to express their discontentedness, their will for change. They need their own organization.

For REVOLUTION we did not need this brochure to begin a discussion about the independence of the youth organization. REVOLUTION was founded by the League for the Fifth International (LFI) as a politically independent youth organization, in accordance with the views of Lenin and Trotsky.

Although we are formally independent from it, the LFI works as a faction in REVOLUTION. This means that LFI members have to submit to the decisions of the LFI leadership in regards to the best policies for REVOLUTION. Since LFI members make up a majority at the conferences and in the leading bodies in Revo, since the LFI makes decisions regarding Revo which are obligatory for all LFI members, our organization internationally is anything but independent.

In the mean time the theory of the independence

A Brochure – Why?

of a youth organization seems to have disappeared as well: the term “independent” is now reduced to “only organizational” or even “structural”.

Just a year ago the LFI said: “Any attempt to limit the political and organizational independence of the youth serves only the interests of reformism and reaction.” But confronted with us, a truly independent youth organization, a new theory was announced: “Political independence means only independence from Marxism”. The conclusion was clear: REVOLUTION should, despite all positions of both organizations, be subordinate to the small propaganda groups of the LFI.

That was enough for us “Indys” (i.e. non-LFI-members) to oppose this behaviour of tutelage with forceful protest. We founded our own tendency, “Independent REVOLUTION”, iRevo for short, and demanded that the LFI dissolve its faction.

We were unfortunately not surprised to be denounced as “unbolshhevik” or “passive”. Therefore we want to counterpose the “Leninist” practice of the LFI to the real thoughts of Lenin. We have decided to publish the texts in full, even if they don’t deal exclusively with the question of the youth movement. Such original texts should be available to all young revolutionaries, not just to party functionaries with private libraries, who can quote an appropriate passage for whatever point they want to make.

The discovery that a closed party faction within the youth movement is destructive was not made by iRevo. The “big ones” of the communist movement also recognized this and fought for the complete independence of the youth. That’s why there is not one single historical example (more precisely: not one example beyond the Maoist K-groups) of a communist organization working as a faction within a youth organization that sympathizes with it.

This brochure should present the foundations on which REVOLUTION (and iRevo) was built – also for those comrades who seem to have forgotten them!

Perhaps this brochure will help them to realize

that the slogan of the absolute political independence for the youth (and also for REVOLUTION) is today, like in the times of the revolutionary Comintern, “objectively revolutionary”. But this brochure is not just for Revo and the LFI. It should offer all interested parties, all active young people the chance to learn about the communist youth movement, to draw the conclusions from it and contribute to building up a new, revolutionary youth international!

Jalava, for the iRevo Coordination



On the Road to a Youth International

On September 1, 1915, the first issue of the internationalist youth magazine “Youth International” appeared. This small organ of propaganda and struggle was a central tool for founding the Communist Youth International in 1919. For young communists today, who recognize the need to build a revolutionary youth international, the first attempt, which dates back to 90 years ago, provides several important lessons. *Wlodek Flakin* wrote...

September 1915. The war rocked Europe. The dreams of a “victory before Christmas” drowned in blood as the massacre entered its second year. On the Western front armies of millions huddled in trenches to keep each other in check. In the battle of Ypern the German Imperial Army used poison gas for the first time in history. On the Eastern front soldiers of the Osmanic Empire fought against the Czarist Army in the Caucasus and the British Army in Mesopotamia.

At this time a small paper appeared in Zurich with the title “Jugend-Internationale” (Youth International), published by the “Secretariat of the International Alliance of Socialist Youth Organizations.”

With drawings of rebelling workers or Greek gods, and appeals “to our class brothers”, this sheet didn’t look much different than dozens of other socialist youth magazines. But while the socialist press was published legally in almost all warring countries, the “Youth International” was constantly suppressed. Because this paper, in contrast to the overwhelming majority of the social-democratic movement, wanted to end the war with a revolution.

The Socialist Press

The mass socialist parties had called for a “sacred truce” (“Burgfrieden” in German, “Union Sacrée” in French, meaning a pause in the class struggle) for the duration of the war. Even as they swore their opposition to the capitalist system and the war that it had caused, they wanted to prevent “worse things” during the war: the French Socialists defended their “democratic” fatherland against “German militarism”, the German Social Democrats defended their “civilized” fatherland against “Russian absolutism”, etc

Their central slogan for the working class was “Hold Out!” First beat the reactionaries in the neighboring country, and then, sometime, topple the ruling class at home.

Today it is quite normal to see Social Democrats supporting or even leading imperialist wars: Tony Blair in Iraq, Gerhard Schröder in Afghanistan, etc. But back then, the parties of the Socialist International had an antimilitarist programme: they had committed themselves, at least in official documents, to the proletarian revolution. At a congress of the International in 1907 in Stuttgart, a reso-

lution was passed that said: *"In case war should break out anyway, it is [the social democrats'] duty to intervene for its speedy termination and to strive all their power to utilize the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule."* The French Socialist Hervé said it this way: there should be *"rather an insurrection than a war."*

This position had a long tradition in the worker's movement. In The Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels made clear that the working class has no fatherland. Naturally they have no interest in a victory of "their own" country (i.e. the country in which they are exploited). With the famous slogan "Proletarians of all countries, unite!", internationalism became a basic principle of the socialist movement.

But as the German army invaded Belgium on August 4, 1914, and Germany, Austria, Russia, France, the United Kingdom and many other countries sent declarations of war around the world, most internationalists turned into patriots. The German Emperor Wilhelm made peace with his arch-enemies, the Social-Democrats, and said: *"I see no parties any more, I see only Germans."*

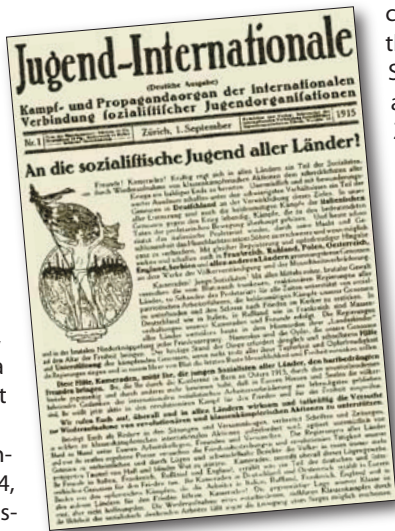
The Minorities

In every socialist party revolutionary tendencies formed, tendencies which didn't just hope for an end to the war, but wanted to end it with class struggle. The Reichstag deputy Karl Liebknecht called on the German working class to fight against their own government with the flyer *"The main enemy is at home!"*

The Socialist International, which only recently seemed unshakable, was shattered. As the social patriots in the warring countries were trying to entuse the workers for the mass slaughter, it was of course impossible to hold an international congress. Only minority tendencies like the Rus-

sian Bolsheviki, the German group Internationale, sections of the Socialist Party of Italy and others realised the necessity that the workers of all countries fight together for an end of the war.

But the youth organisations of the socialist parties could in their majority be won for this internationalist perspective. At Easter 1915 socialist youth organisations from nine countries, with a total of fifty thousand members, met in Bern, Switzerland to set up a new alliance. They founded an office in Zurich and decided to organize days of action against the war and publish the paper "Jugend-Internationale".



"Jugend-Internationale"

This paper stood in clear opposition to the imperialist war and its "socialist" defenders. In every issue it argued *"to end the most terrible of all wars by resuming the class struggle"*. The young workers of all countries should see each other not as enemies on

the battlefield but as friends in the class struggle. To increase feelings of solidarity on both sides of the front, the paper regularly reported on actions against the war in all countries.

The "Jugend-Internationale" was published in a German, Italian and Swedish edition. By the end of the war, this was expanded to English, Russian, Hungarian, Norwegian, Danish, and Jiddisch. The legal print run was 50,000, and this was distributed in neutral countries like Switzerland or in Scandinavia. In Germany, Italy and other countries tens of thousands of issues were copied illegally.

The first issue contained articles by Balabanoff, Bernstein, Kollontai, Radek, Rühle and other revolutionaries who are still known today. Later came contributions by Lenin, Trotsky, Zionviev and countless young correspondents from all of Europe and North America.

Karl Liebknecht appeared particularly often in the "Jugend-Internationale", as the author of letters from the prison where he was trapped because of

his antimilitarist agitation, or as the object of calls for solidarity and donations.

The Days of Action

The “Jugend-Internationale” was no mere propaganda organ. The paper’s goal was to organize mass actions against the war and lay the foundations for a new international. The first issue was focussed on the International Youth Day on October 3rd, 1915, which was proclaimed by the conference in Bern. On this day there were rallies in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the USA, Germany (where they were disguised as “Hindenburg celebrations”), Holland and Switzerland. The young anti-war activists distributed hundreds of thousands of flyers and sold tens of thousands of copies of the “Jugend-Internationale”.

The paper was constantly explaining that the war was caused by the contradictions of the imperialist world order. Evil or incompetent diplomats were not responsible for the war – and certainly not “the barbarians from the other side”. The cause was the necessity of economic expansion, the struggle for spheres of influence, colonies, and new markets, which is the basis of every imperialist state. For this reason pacifist projects like “peace conferences” or “appeals for disarmament” was pure dreaming: the war could only be stopped by the workers smashing capitalism.

The role of young people in the struggle against capitalism was a central theme. Millions of young men were dying to protect the profits of “their” capitalists. Young women were forced to accept the double burden of “normal” domestic work and child care, and then perform hard labour for the armaments industry – all this as they starved in the cities.

Young workers were the backbone of strikes that broke out in Italy and Russia at the beginning of the war, in Germany and France towards the end.

Young people were generally more ready to risk their freedom for antimilitarist actions. They felt less loyalty to the social democratic leaders, who called on their followers to serve “the fatherland”. For this reason the “Jugend-Internationale” argued for independent youth organizations, separate from the party bureaucracies that wanted nothing more than passive and apolitical associations

for recruiting future bureaucrats. Instead, young people should organize themselves and fight for their own interests – for an end to the war!

The Youth International

In this way the Alliance of Socialist Youth Organizations was built up during the war. By the end it had over 200,000 members.

The importance of the “Jugend-Internationale” was recognized not just by revolutionary-minded youth, but also by the state. From the first publication, the paper was banned in all warring countries. Young socialists had to pay for their political work with long prison sentences – leading members of the Socialist Youth of Italy were condemned to 22 years of prison for organizing the first Youth Day. In the spring of 1918 the Swiss authorities also prohibited the paper. The publisher, Willi Münzenberg, a German citizen who had refused military service, was deported. Once again the paper organized a campaign for a comrade’s release from prison (luckily not with the title “Free Willi!”).

After the war, during the insurrections of the year 1919, the new Communist International was founded in Moscow. Just after that, the Alliance of Socialist Youth Organizations decided at a conference in Berlin to rename itself the “Communist Youth International”. The youth organizations attached themselves to the respective communist parties. But the Communist Youth International was independent: in contrast to the youth associations of the social democracy, the communist youth organizations had their own structures, congresses, publications, etc. That was important to enable young people to learn to organize themselves, without orders from adults. This principle of independence won a number of socialist youth organizations with a critical attitude to their “mother party” for the new Comintern.

The Lessons

The tone of the “Jugend-International”, the unshakable faith in the socialist future, is obviously not in fashion these days. But even during the unprecedented massacres of the First World War, this faith was justified: before the paper was finally suppressed in the spring of 1918, the workers and peasants of Russia had topped capitalism and re-

placed the bourgeois government with workers' councils.

Every crisis of capitalism holds the seeds of its overcoming. The arming of the Russian peasants in the Czarist army and the concentration of the industrial workers for armaments production – measures which were meant to fight the Germans – eventually helped the struggle against the Russian government. And the support the German general staff gave to Russian revolutionaries, which was supposed to destabilize the government in St. Petersburg, could be transformed into the November Revolution in Berlin and the toppling of Kaiser Wilhelm.

The International Youth Days, which were organized by the "Jugend-Internationale", remind one of the international days of action in recent years, for example when hundreds of thousands of school students across the world struck against the Iraq War. Such actions create not only feelings of international solidarity, but also networks that cross borders and raise the struggle against war and capitalism to higher level.

If we want to beat the capitalists in our own country and internationally, we have to assimilate the experiences of young people and workers in other countries. That is why we, as REVOLUTION, organize across national borders. With our paper we always try to report about protests in other countries, and our manifesto reflects the experience of

communist youth from multiple continents.

In the last years we have witnessed the birth of a worldwide anti-capitalist movement, with protests against the G8, the IMF, the WTO, as well as world, continental, and national social forums. The increasing aggressions of imperialism – not just the USA in Iraq, also German imperialism in Afghanistan, French imperialism in Africa – require that we organize ourselves better. The young people fighting in Bolivia against privatisation, in Iraq against the occupation, in Germany against fascism, must unite in a general struggle against the capitalist system.

To be brief: the time is ripe for a new Youth International! We call on all youth organizations, who want to do something against the system, to build up a global revolutionary organisation!

The words of the Russian revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai (from Jugend-Internationale #1) are today as relevant as ever:

"The correct, the solid foundation for the new International can only be formed by the socialist youth. The youth, the bearers of the future; the youth, who are not dependent on the past, who expect everything from the future ... the youth, whose hearts are not corrupted with petty-bourgeois feelings and whose thoughts cannot be led astray with the ideology of a past age ... The fresh, brave, revolutionary, self-sacrificing working-class youth, who push forward, always forward!"

Source...

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Copied from: <http://www.onesolutionrevolution.de/revolution/0509/jugendinternationale/index-en.htm>

To the socialist youth of all countries!

The Bureau of the International Union of Socialist Youth Organizations wrote in the first issue of „Jugend-Internationale“...

Friends! Comrades! In all countries a part of the socialists are agitating to end this most terrible of all wars through the resumption of class struggle actions. A part of the comrades in Germany are, tirelessly and with astounding endurance, working under the most difficult conditions to realize this goal. We all vividly remember the heroic struggles of the Italian comrades against the war, struggles which belong to the most important acts of the proletarian movement. And now the Italian proletariat is re-arming itself, using its power and unity to make the butchery of its sons more difficult or if possible stop it completely. In France, Russia, Poland, Austria, England, Serbia and all other countries there are loyal comrades working with the same enthusiasm and self-sacrificing commitment on the great project of the understanding between peoples and the fraternization of humanity.

Comrades! Young Socialists! With all kinds of raw, brutal violence the reactionary governments of all countries, drunk in a blood frenzy, supported by the social patriotic workers' leaders, are trying to prevent the heroic struggles of our comrades and suffocate their cries for peace in the dungeons. In Germany as in Italy, in Russia as in France mass arrests of our comrades and friends have taken place. The governments of all countries are now competing amongst each other in the murder of "the country's children" and the brutal suppression of any move towards peace. The sacrifices that our comrades make at the altar of freedom are without name.

In the current situation we must urgently and immediately help and support the comrades in struggle, lest the governments be victorious despite all courage and self-sacrifice and drown the last remains of humanity and freedom in a sea of blood.

This help, comrades, must come from you, the young socialists of all countries, for our oppressed friends. You, who with the conference in Bern at Easter 1915, with the unbroken communication between you and with other things have proven that in your hearts and souls the liberating thought of the international socialist fraternization of workers is alive. You must now intervene actively in the revolutionary struggle for peace and freedom.

We call on you, everywhere and in all countries to effectively and strongly support the attempts to resume revolutionary class struggle actions.

Participate as speakers in the meetings and assemblies, distribute leaflets and papers that call on international class struggle actions, agitate tirelessly from mouth to mouth amongst your work colleagues, friends and relatives. The governments of all countries and a press which is entirely devoted to them are trying to cover up the movements for peace and the revolutionary work of our comrades, with lies and distorting reports to throw the peoples into a deepening spiral of hate and blind rage. Comrades, tear up this net of lies everywhere! You friends in Italy, France, Russia and England, tell that a part of

the German and Austrian comrades are doing for peace. You comrades in Germany and Austria, tell in your circles of the terrible struggles that the workers in Italy, Russia, France, England and other countries are carrying out for peace. Comrades! The current situation of our class is serious, but not hopeless. The resumption of decisive, determined class struggle by the majority of the socialist-thinking workers makes even our victory seem possible.

Now is the time for action. A second winter of offensive will increase the suffering and the misery of the working masses in all countries incalculably. The ground is ready for revolutionary anger – let us sow the seeds!

The young socialists must in all countries become the avant garde of the fighters for peace. We will dedicate ourselves to the proletarian liberation struggle restlessly. It is a hundred times better to bleed to death in the dungeons as a victim of revolutionary struggle than on the battlefield in a struggle with our class comrades from other countries.

Bourgeois peace conferences will never prevent wars, even if they wanted to, even if they are organized in the most impressive way. Only the strength of the proletariat and its

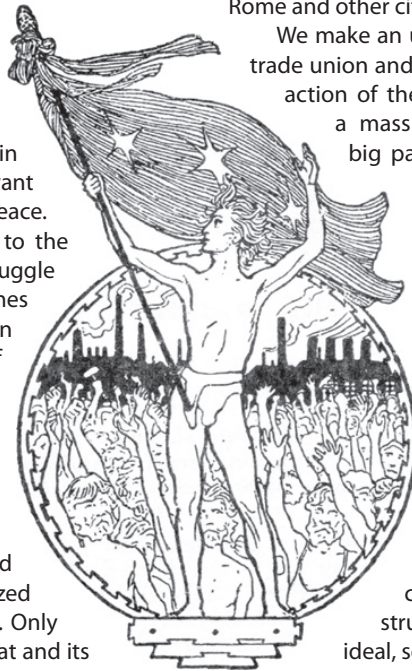
revolutionary actions can tame the exploiters' greed for profit and blood.

Comrades! Socialist youth organizations of all countries! We call on you to make known your unshakable will to work against militarism and for socialism with powerful demonstrations in all countries. On one day, October 3, 1915, we want to protest together at one time. The comrades in Copenhagen, Christiana, Stockholm, Paris and Berlin should know that at the same time they demonstrate for peace and socialism, their friends in Amsterdam, Vienna, Bern, Bucharest, Rome and other cities are doing the same.

We make an urgent appeal to the socialist trade union and party groups to support this action of the youth in all countries with a mass participation. We expect a big participation of the wives and mothers of the young people who are condemned to be butchered.

Forwards, young socialists of all countries, let words follow your thoughts, let deeds follow your words!

Long live the international young generation of workers, who will one day bring peace and freedom to the peoples. Love love the struggle against genocide and hatred, long live the struggle for humanity's highest ideal, socialism.



Source...

First published: Jugend-Internationale, #1, September 1915, Zurich

Copied from: Jugend Internationale: Die elf historischen Nummern der Kriegsausgabe 1915-1918, Verlag Neuer Kurs, 1972, Berlin

Translation: Wladek Flakin

Workers' Movement and Youth Organization

The first socialist youth organizations were founded at the end of the 19th century. The left wing of the workers movement recognized them as an important force for the socialist struggle, while right-wing party and trade union bureaucrats feared the independent youth movement as dangerous competition. The socialist youth had to fight for recognition, supported by the left wing. Karl Liebknecht wrote...

The proletarian youth movement is a necessary element of the modern workers' movement. The proletarian youth is the spirit and the legs of the working class. The free youth organizations have never seen another purpose in their work than to serve the workers' movement, to be a school for the fighting organizations of the workers. The youth organizations – like any new movement – had to fight for recognition from the working class. In the end: they succeeded. On September 29 in the year 1906, the working class adopted at its congress in Mannheim¹ this declaration of support, with all in favor and none opposed:

"The awakening of the proletarian youth to independent organizational activity, which is constantly progressing, is welcomed. The party comrades are called on to encourage the foundation and development of youth organizations, everywhere that the law on associations permits."

To motivate these sentences, a speaker (Dr. Karl Liebknecht) said: *"But also in places where the youth organizations aren't political, the party should explain that it has a friendly attitude towards them. It is the duty of the party congress to call out, also to*

the young people in North Germany: 'We agree with your activity!'"

These declarations were met with the lively applause of the party congress. Afterwards the youth and the working class worked harder than before to build up the youth organizations. Their blossoming development seemed guaranteed. But: *Dis aliter visum!* (The council of the gods decided differently!)

Just nine weeks after the party congress in Mannheim, representatives of the leading bodies of the central unions spoke out against special youth organizations at a conference in Berlin on November 26 and 27, 1906:

"The general commission considers a special central organization of the youth inexpedient; it is advantageous neither for the representation of economic interests nor on the terrain of the upbringing of the youth, but rather disadvantageous. The task on which the party and the trade unions should concentrate in equal amounts is not the creation of a youth organization but an adequate organization for the upbringing of the youth. The organization of young workers must be a greater concern of the trade unions. The individual trade union leaderships

and union congresses should deal exhaustively with the question of how to better draw young people to the unions and keep them inside. Then, the next trade union general congress should deal especially with the question of young workers and apprentices, for which the next leadership conference could submit appropriate proposals. The conference subscribed to these views."

Despite this statement from the trade union leaders, in September of the following year (1907), as the imperial law on associations, which was meant to strangle the youth organizations, was already in view, the congress of the working class of Germany in Essen² decided:

"To carry out the creation of youth organizations more intensively than before ... Simultaneously to prompt the party comrades to work in an enlightening way to this end."

The imperial law on associations presented the trade union leaders with the welcome opportunity to go public with their opinion and their plan. They tried to read things in the text of the law which weren't written there. We have already shown that our organizations remain untouched by the law. The one change that the law brought for the question of the youth organization was this: expansion of the hitherto North German youth organizations to South Germany. The diplomacy of the trade union leaders was able to convince the South German youth to dissolve their Mannheim association, which is a seldom occurrence in the workers' movement and is already bitterly regretted by the South German youth.

The right was reserved for the trade union general congress, meeting from June 22 to 27 in Hamburg, to speak the death sentence for the remaining youth organizations in existence.

How was it possible for the trade union general congress to decide against the youth organizations despite the decisions from Mannheim and Essen? Let us recall how the decisions came about. Robert Schmidt³ was mandated to give a report about "The organization for the upbringing of the youth". The working class did not suspect that the report would be a diatribe against the youth organizations, in order to demolish them. The working class could not assume this, because for them the question of the youth organizations had already

been decided (Mannheim, Essen).

At the congress itself there was no one who could block the unjustified attacks against the youth organizations. Schmidt's sorties were directed against the political youth organizations. Since these have ceased to exist, Schmidt's remarks had the effect of belittling the existing youth organizations in public. But Schmidt knew that they had a completely unpolitical activity. On May 2, he expressed acknowledgement to a leading member of our organization about the activities of the Berlin association. In Hamburg, Robert Schmidt was completely silent about our organization – to judge by the reports in the press. Since no one objected to Schmidt, the delegates believed him. And when he claimed that his resolution was based on an agreement, he won them over completely. After the dissolution of the Mannheim association, the delegates apparently assumed that the representatives of the youth organization also worked on this "agreement". Thus for the delegates everything appeared to be in perfect order, carefully prepared – they raised their hands for the death sentence.

An even graver accusation is directed against the speaker. He knew that the existing youth organizations resist the dissolution and did not participate in the agreement. Schmidt should have known that the delegates of the youth organization movement were paying even less attention than he was. Thus he should have said to himself: *Adiatur et altera pars!* (May the other party be heard as well!) Instead of this, the "state attorney" Schmidt advised to behead the accused, without giving him the chance to defend himself. *Sic volo, sic jubeo; sit pro ratione voluntas!* (Thus I want, thus I order, my will instead of a reason!)

As is shown by the development of the decision and the consideration of the question at the congress, it is not an expression of the will of the unionized workers, but only the work of a few trade union leaders who see the youth organizations as a competing undertaking which could be



dangerous to the unions, which proves their total lack of knowledge about the youth organizations. The decision contradicts not only the decisions made in Mannheim and Essen on the question of the youth organizations – his explanatory remarks are a slap in the face to the principles which the working class has defended up till now in the question of the upbringing of the youth.

The planned committees carry the seeds of death within themselves, assuming they go down the road marked out by Robert Schmidt. Endeavors to collect the youth, to educate them are nothing new. But they have never gotten past mere attempts. Of course here and there these educational institutions have sent forth individual educated workers. But they have never had a greater importance. This is explainable.

There are two points that guarantee the success of the attempts to organize the youth: independence of the youth and the protection of young people's rights. Only the free youth organizations, which emerged from the youth themselves, have provided for these needs of the youth. These needs emerge from the modern position of youth in economic life. Modern capitalism has elevated the young person to independence. The young worker in the factory is equal to the adults. The ancient patriarchal relationship between master and apprentice has been essentially abolished. This economic position of youth gives them the right to independent organizations. The changes in the economic relationships have also changed the psychology of youth. They grow up in different circumstances than before. This, and the intellectual tendencies in the cities, make the young person mature earlier. He is drawn into the great struggles of intellect. Simply following the compulsion of circumstances, the young person strives for independence, for independent activity, now as never before. This drive of the young people cannot be suppressed by force. Whoever attempted this would commit a sin against the proletarian youth. It is precisely independence which makes man unique. The task of a rational upbringing is to develop personalities in the young people.

The young worker, especially the apprentice, perceives nothing as more oppressive than his current material situation. This oppression is

strengthened by his lack of knowledge about the modern social order in general. In any case the young person desires his economic liberation more than the adult worker. Endeavors which address the young person's most deep-seated interests, his economic interests, attract the large mass of young people. The task of all endeavors to educate the youth must be: to raise the intellectual level of the mass, not to allow individual, especially gifted youths advancement.

Only the fact that the free youth organizations have sufficiently provided for these most immediate needs of the youth is the explanation of their success. Considering that the successes of the youth organizations were made by their own initiative, despite dangerous struggles with obscurantists, employers, police and the justice system, they deserve to be mentioned. The paper "Arbeitende Jugend" (Working Youth) has a minimum print run of 10.000 copies. The "Junge Garde" (Young Guard) has the same strong run, so in total there are 20.000 readers of the youth papers in Germany! When have the endeavors for educating the youth ever reached these numbers? If Legien⁴ can create a facility whose costs and labor are provided by the youth alone and which reaches 20.000 young people, then he can call the free youth organizations a failed project!

We should recall the mood amongst young people which was created when the free youth organization in Berlin was founded (October 1904). Not the foundation itself – how often associations are founded in Berlin! – but the practical protection of young people's rights and the independence of the association were the things that struck the public and especially the youth like lightning. The youth flocked to this, their own organization. And immediately even our opponents recognized the value of the self-management of the youth. "Das Reich" (The Empire, organ of the christian-social party) wrote after the association had existed for half a year:

"Mr. Liz. Mumm (that is a leader of the "christian" youth association. D.V.) already admitted at an earlier assembly that sins are committed in many youth associations in regards to independence of the members. That is the good thing we can learn from the new movement..."

The protection of young people's rights simultaneously creates the basis for a systematic intellectual enlightenment. Starting with the material situation of the youth, one can explain the composition of modern society to young people in a comprehensible way and demonstrate the way towards the liberation of the working class from capitalism. The youth learn to recognize at the same time how important intellectual education is for the workers, in order to lead the struggle for the liberation of the working class successfully.

The independence of the organizations and the protection of young people's rights by the youth themselves are also means of education. The first task educates practical functionaries of sound character for the workers' organizations, the latter task arouses a consciousness of rights in the youth. The young person who is enlightened about his rights learns to defend them. Even the young proletarian must know, as an inveterate principle, to never renounce a right without the greatest necessity.

The practical protection of young people's rights by the youth organizations must of course be carried out in connection with the trade unions. But the youth must take part in this work in a preeminent way. Youth organizations replacing the activity

of the trade unions is totally excluded. The independence of the youth organization does not mean that the youth, left to themselves, vegetate. The more the organization swells, the more older advisors are necessary. But in the youth organization democracy must reign. The youth must elect their leaders and advisors themselves; these must enjoy the trust of the youth. People who have no understanding for the psychology of the young person are naturally not suited to be advisors to the youth.

We would regret the resolution from Hamburg being implemented in practice. A pity for the personal and financial sacrifices for this work. They will soon be proven useless. In any case the working class should not destroy the existing youth organizations before provenly better institutions have been put in their place. Let us beware of carelessly demolishing the tedious work of the youth, done by great personal sacrifices, and to force upon them them other institutions whose value they might not be willing to recognize. Under no circumstances can the proletarian youth be made discontent, so that the enemies of the working class triumph over the youth! May the working class show itself obliging to the just desires of the youth for the independence of its organizations. The young person of today is the adult of tomorrow.

Notes...

1. Party congress of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany in Mannheim, September 23 to 29, 1906
2. Party congress of the SPD in Essen, September 15 to 21, 1907
3. *Robert Schmidt* – right-wing SPD politician
4. *Carl Legien* – right-wing trade union leader and SPD member

Source...

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Translation: Wladek Flakin

Jugend-Internationale

In the struggle against the First World War, the socialist youth movement played a central role. Revolutionaries attempted to deepen the gap between the youth associations and the reformist parties through the slogan of “complete independence”. With this review, meant to present the “Jugend-Internationale” to a Russian-speaking audience, Lenin encourages the initiative behind the paper but also criticizes its errors. *V.I. Lenin wrote...*

A German-language publication bearing the above title has been appearing in Switzerland since September 1, 1915. It carries the subtitle: “Militant and Propaganda Organ of the International League of Socialist Youth Organisations”. Altogether six issues have appeared so far. The magazine merits our attention and should be strongly recommended to all Party members in a position to contact foreign Social-Democratic parties and youth organisations.

Most of the official European Social-Democratic parties are advocating the foulest and vilest social-chauvinism and opportunism. This applies to the German and French parties, the Fabian Society and the Labour Party in England, the Swedish, Dutch (Troelstra’s party), Danish, Austrian parties, etc. In the Swiss party, notwithstanding the withdrawal (to the great benefit of the labour movement) of the extreme opportunists, now organised in the non-party “Grütli Verein”, there still remain within the Social-Democratic Party numerous opportunist, social-chauvinist and Kautskyite leaders who exercise tremendous influence on its affairs.

With this state of affairs in Europe, there falls on the League of Socialist Youth Organisations the tremendous, grateful but difficult task of fighting for revolutionary internationalism, for true socialism and against the prevailing opportunism which has deserted to the side of the imperialist bour-

geoisie. The Youth International has published a number of good articles in defence of revolutionary internationalism, and the magazine as a whole is permeated with a fine spirit of intense hatred for the betrayers of socialism, the “defenders of the fatherland” in the present war, and with an earnest desire to wipe out the corroding influence of chauvinism and opportunism in the international labour movement.

Of course, the youth organ still lacks theoretical clarity and consistency. Perhaps it may never acquire them, precisely because it is the organ of seething, turbulent, inquiring youth. However, our attitude towards the lack of theoretical clarity on the part of such people must be entirely different from what our attitude is and should be towards the theoretical muddle in the heads, and the lack of revolutionary consistency in the hearts, of our “O.C.-ists”¹, “Socialist Revolutionaries”, Tolstoyans, anarchists, the European Kautskyites (“Centre”), etc. Adults who lay claim to lead and teach the proletariat, but actually mislead it, are one thing: against such people a ruthless struggle must be waged. Organisations of youth, however, which openly declare that they are still learning, that their main task is to train party workers for the socialist parties, are quite another thing. Such people must be given every assistance. We must be patient with their faults and strive to correct them gradually, mainly by persuasion, and not by

fighting them. The middle-aged and the aged often do not know how to approach the youth, for the youth must of necessity advance to socialism in a different way, by other paths, in other forms, in other circumstances than their fathers. Incidentally, that is why we must decidedly favour organisational independence of the Youth League, not only because the opportunists fear such independence, but because of the very nature of the case. For unless they have complete independence, the youth will be unable either to train good socialists from their midst or prepare themselves to lead socialism forward.

We stand for the complete independence of the Youth Leagues, but also for complete freedom of comradely criticism of their errors! We must not flatter the youth.

Of the errors to be noted in this excellent magazine, reference must first of all be made to the following three:

1) The incorrect position on the question of disarmament (or "disarming"), which we criticised in a preceding article. There is reason to believe that this error arises entirely out of the laudable desire to emphasise the need to strive for the "complete destruction of militarism" (which is perfectly correct); but the role of civil wars in the socialist revolution is forgotten.

2) On the question of the differences between socialists and anarchists in their attitude towards the state, Comrade Nota-Bene² in his article (issue No. 6) falls into a very serious error (as he also does on several other questions, for instance, our reasons for combating the "defence of the fatherland" slogan). The author wishes to present "a clear picture of the state in general" (together with that of the imperialist predatory state). He quotes several statements by Marx and Engels, and arrives at the following two conclusions, among others:

a) "...It is absolutely wrong to seek the difference between socialists and anarchists in the fact that the former are in favour of the state while the latter are against it. The real difference is that revolutionary Social-Democracy desires to organise social production on new lines, as centralised, i. e., technically the most progressive, method of production, whereas decentralised, anarchist production would mean retrogression to obsolete

techniques, to the old form of enterprise." This is wrong. The author raises the question of the difference in the socialists' and anarchists' attitude towards the state. However, he answers not this question, but another, namely, the difference in their attitude towards the economic foundation



of future society. That, of course, is an important and necessary question. But that is no reason to ignore the main point of difference between socialists and anarchists in their attitude towards the state. Socialists are in favour of utilising the present state and its institutions in the struggle for the

emancipation of the working class, maintaining also that the state should be used for a specific form of transition from capitalism to socialism. This transitional form is the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is also a state.

The anarchists want to “abolish” the state, “blow it up” (sprengen) as comrade Nota-Bene expresses it in one place, erroneously ascribing this view to the socialists. The socialists—unfortunately the author quotes Engels’ relevant words rather incompletely—hold that the state will “wither away”, will gradually “fall asleep” after the bourgeoisie has been expropriated.

b) “Social-Democracy, which is, or at least should be, the educator of the masses, must now more than ever emphasise its hostility to the state in principle.... The present war has shown how deeply the state idea has penetrated the souls of workers,” writes Comrade Nota-Bene. In order to “emphasise” our “hostility” to the state “in principle” we must indeed understand it “clearly”, and it is this clarity that our author lacks. His remark about the “state idea” is entirely muddled. It is un-Marxist and un-socialist. The point is not that the

“state idea” has clashed with the repudiation of the state, but that opportunist policy (i.e., the opportunist, reformist, bourgeois attitude towards the state) has clashed with revolutionary Social-Democratic policy (i.e., the revolutionary Social-Democratic attitude towards the bourgeois state and towards utilising it against the bourgeoisie to overthrow the bourgeoisie). These are entirely different things. We hope to return to this very important subject in a separate article.³

3) The “declaration of principles of the International League of Socialist Youth Organisations”, published in issue No. 6 as the “Secretariat’s draft”, contains not a few inaccuracies, and does not contain the main thing: a clear comparison of the three fundamental trends (social-chauvinism, “Centre” and Left) now contending against each other in the socialist movement of all countries.

We repeat, these errors must be refuted and explained. At the same time we must make every effort to find points of contact and closer relations with youth organisations and help them in every way, but we must find the proper manner of approach to them.

Notes...

1. *O.C.-ists* – Supporters of the Organising Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party, also known as Mensheviks
2. *Nota-bene* – Pseudonym of Nikolai Bukharin, a young theoretician of the Bolshevik Party. At the time it was common for Bolsheviks to criticize each other publicly
3. See the book by V.I. Lenin „State and Revolution“

Source...

First published: „Sbornik Sozial-Demokrata“ #2, December 1916

Copied from: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/dec/00d.htm>

Theses on the Youth Movement

The following theses were drafted by the leadership of the Communist Youth International and passed by the Executive Committee of the Communist International in August 1920...

1The founding of proletarian youth organizations around the world results from several factors: the increased capitalist exploitation of young workers in all factories and workshops and in home industry, which can only lead to their spiritual and physical degeneration; militarism, whose burdens are born above all by working-class youth; the danger that their ranks will be permeated by bourgeois-nationalist ideology through the schools, the press, bourgeois youth organizations, and so on; and the special psychological characteristics of the younger generation.

2Communist youth groups arose in every country as part of the development of the workers' movement as a whole during and after the imperialist war. This occurred in part through old Socialist youth organizations going over to the camp of the Communist International and in part through splits in these organizations.

3The Communist youth organizations have the following tasks: the communist education of working-class youth, active participation in bringing down capitalism (the defense of the proletarian dictatorship and soviet construction after taking power), and the struggle to reorganize work and education on a new socialist basis. As much as possible, the Communist youth organizations promote the cultural development of young workers along the lines of the Marxist world view as well as physical education, which currently must aim primarily at military preparation.

4The most important element in the communist education of youth, aside from theoretical education, is their taking an active part in the daily political struggles of the working class. It is in this respect that the Communist youth organizations are different from the social-patriotic and centrist youth groups. Their political struggles, in addition to their educational significance, have great and real importance for the international Communist movement.

5The entire history of the proletarian youth movement in every country shows that only independent, that is, self-governing, youth organizations develop bold and determined revolutionary fighters and astute organizers of the proletarian revolution and soviet power. The independent action of working-class youth is the first prerequisite for their revolutionary communist development. By contrast, the social patriots' exercise of tutelage over the youth results in an opportunist, petty-bourgeois development. The communist development of young people requires special methods of work that reflect the special characteristics of their age group.

6The relationship between the Communist parties and the Communist youth organizations will take different forms as a result of differences in objective conditions and in the state of the party in each country. In some countries, where the formation of Communist parties is still in flux and the youth organizations are just breaking away from

the social-patriotic and centrist parties, our main slogan is that of the absolute political and organizational independence of the youth movement. Under such conditions this slogan is objectively revolutionary! The slogan of absolute independence is wrong, however, in countries where there are already strong Communist parties, and where this slogan is used by the social patriots and the centrists against the Communist youth and to mislead the youth. There the Communist youth organizations have based themselves on the program of the Communist Party.

7In all countries where old and active Communist parties existed, a strong relationship between the Communist Party and the Communist youth organization was established. The form this took was that the Communist youth organization adopted the program of the Communist Party and functioned in the framework of its political positions. At the same time, in these cases, the youth (1) had their own centralized organization; (2) decided for themselves how to carry out their organizational, agitational, and propaganda activities; (3) decided the place and the forms of their participation in political struggle; and (4) discussed the main political questions. All youth organizations must arrive at this relationship with the Communist Party, not through compulsion by the party, but by being convinced and making their own free decision.

8The Communist parties support the Communist youth organizations intellectually and materially, without tying this support to petty

interference in the activity of the youth organization or the exercise of tutelage over it. For their part the Communist youth organizations support the Communist parties in the full range of their organizational activity, legal and illegal, and their political work.

9The Communist International hails the formation of the Communist Youth International, whose basic tasks are the centralized leadership of the Communist youth movement, support of the national Communist youth groups, the formation of Communist youth groups where none yet exist, and international agitation around the ideas of communism and the youth movement.

10The Communist Youth International is part of the Communist International. As such it subordinates itself to the decisions of the congresses of the Communist International and the political directives of its Executive Committee. It carries out independently its work of leading, organizing, strengthening, and broadening the youth International.

11The Communist Youth International and its groups take part in the congresses of the Communist International. The Executive Committees of the Communist International and the Youth International exchange representatives with decisive vote.

12The Communist International assigns to its Executive Committee and its member parties the task of spreading the idea of the Communist youth movement among party members and the broad working masses.

Source...

Copied from: „Developing Proletarian Communist Youth Cadre“, The Militant, Vol. 60, No. 44, Dec. 9, 1996, http://www.themilitant.com/1996/6044/6044_21.html

The Communist International and the Communist Youth Movement

The following resolution was passed in the 24th session of the *Third World Congress of the Communist International* from July 12, 1921....

1 The young socialist movement came into existence as a result of the steadily increasing capitalist exploitation of young workers and also of the growth of bourgeois militarism. The movement was a reaction against attempts to poison the minds of young workers with bourgeois nationalist ideology and against the tendency of most of the social-democratic parties and the trade unions to neglect the economic, political and cultural demands of young workers.

In most countries the social-democratic parties and the unions, which were growing increasingly opportunist and revisionist, took no part in establishing young socialist organisations, and in certain countries they even opposed the creation of a youth movement. The reformist social-democratic parties and trade unions saw the independent revolutionary socialist youth organisations as a serious threat to their opportunist policies. They sought to introduce a bureaucratic control over the youth organisations and destroy their inde-

pendence, thus stifling the movement, changing its character and adapting it to social-democratic politics.

2 As a result of the imperialist war and the positions taken towards it by social democracy almost everywhere, the contradictions between the social-democratic parties and the international revolutionary organisations inevitably grew and eventually led to open conflict. The living conditions of young workers sharply deteriorated; there was mobilisation and military service on the one hand, and, on the other, the increasing exploitation in the munitions industries and militarisation of civilian life. The most class-conscious young socialists opposed the war and the nationalist propaganda. They dissociated themselves from the social-democratic parties and undertook independent political activity (the International Youth Conferences at Berne in 1915 and Jena in 1916).

In their struggle against the war, the young socialist organisations were supported by the most

dedicated revolutionary groups and became an important focus for the revolutionary forces. In most countries no revolutionary parties existed and the youth organisations took over their role; they became independent political organisations and acted as the vanguard in the revolutionary struggle.

3 With the establishment of the Communist International and, in some countries, of Communist Parties, the role of the revolutionary youth organisations changes. Young workers, because of their economic position and because of their psychological make-up, are more easily won to Communist ideas and are quicker to show enthusiasm for revolutionary struggle than adult workers. Nevertheless, the youth movement relinquishes to the Communist Parties its vanguard role of organising independent activity and providing political leadership. The further existence of Young Communist organisations as politically independent and leading organisations would mean that two Communist Parties existed, in competition with one another and differing only in the age of their membership.

4 At the present time the role of the Young Communist movement is to organise the mass of young workers, educate them in the ideas of Communism, and draw them into the struggle for the Communist revolution.

The Communist youth organisations can no longer limit themselves to working in small propaganda circles. They must win the broad masses of workers by conducting a permanent campaign of agitation, using the newest methods. In conjunction with the Communist Parties and the trade unions, they must organise the economic struggle.

The new tasks of the Communist youth organisations require that their educational work be extended and intensified. The members of the youth movement receive their Communist education on the one hand through active participation in all revolutionary struggles and on the other through a study of Marxist theory.

Another important task facing the Young Communist organisations in the immediate future is to break the hold of centrist and social-patriotic ideas on young workers and free the movement from

the influences of the social-democratic officials and youth leaders. At the same time, the Young Communist organisations must do everything they can to 'rejuvenate' the Communist Parties by parting with their older members, who then join the adult Parties.

The Young Communist organisations participate in the discussion of all political questions, help build the Communist Parties and take part in all revolutionary activity and struggle. This is the main difference between them and the youth sections of the centrist and socialist unions.

5 The relations between the Young Communist organisations and the Communist Party are fundamentally different from those between the revolutionary young socialist organisations and the social-democratic parties. In the common struggle to hasten the proletarian revolution, the greatest unity and strictest centralisation are essential. Political leadership at the international level must belong to the Communist International and at the national level to the respective national sections.

It is the duty of the Young Communist organisations to follow this political leadership (its programme, tactics and political directives) and merge with the general revolutionary front. The Communist Parties are at different stages of development and therefore the Executive Committee of the Communist International and the Executive Committee of the Communist Youth International should apply this principle in accordance with the circumstances obtaining in each particular case.

The Young Communist movement has begun to organise its members according to the principle of strict centralisation and in its relations with the Communist International – the leader and bearer of the proletarian revolution – it will be governed by an iron discipline. All political and tactical questions are discussed in the ranks of the Communist youth organisation, which then takes a position and works in the Communist Party of its country in accordance with the resolutions passed by the Party, in no circumstance working against them.

If the Communist youth organisation has serious differences with the Communist Party, it has the right to appeal to the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

Loss of political independence in no way implies loss of the organisational independence which is so essential for political education.

Strong centralisation and effective unity are essential for the successful advancement of the revolutionary struggle, and therefore, in those countries where historical development has left the youth dependent upon the Party, the dependence should be preserved; differences between the two bodies are decided by the EC of the Communist International and the Executive Committee of the Communist Youth International.

6One of the most immediate and most important tasks of the Young Communist organisations is to fight the belief in political independence inherited from the period when the youth organisations enjoyed absolute autonomy, and which is still subscribed to by some members. The press and organisational apparatus of the Young Communist movement must be used to educate young workers to be responsible and active members of a united Communist Party.

At the present time the Communist youth organisations are beginning to attract increasing numbers of young workers and are developing into mass organisations; it is therefore important that they give the greatest possible time and effort to education.

7Close co-operation between the Young Communist organisations and the Communist Parties in political work must be reflected in close organisational links. It is essential that each organisation should at all times be represented

at all levels of the other organisation (from the central Party organs and district, regional and local organisations down to the cells of Communist groups and the trade unions) and particularly at all conferences and congresses. In this way the Communist Parties will be able to exert a permanent influence on the movement and encourage political activity, while the youth organisations, in their turn, can influence the Party.

8The relations established between the Communist Youth International and the Communist International are even closer than those between the individual Parties and their youth organisations. The Communist Youth International has to provide the Communist youth movement with a centralised leadership, offer moral and material support to individual unions, form Young Communist organisations where none has existed and publicise the Communist youth movement and its programme. The Communist Youth International is a section of the Communist International and, as such, is bound by the decisions of its congresses and its Central Committee. The Communist Youth International conducts its work within the framework of these decisions and thus passes on the political line of the Communist International to all its sections. A well-developed system of reciprocal representation and close and constant co-operation guarantees that the Communist Youth International will make gains in all the spheres of its activity (leadership, agitation, organisation and the work of strengthening and supporting the Communist youth organisations).

Source...

Copied from: <http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/3rd-congress/youth.htm>

The Struggle against the Youth

The economic and cultural backwardness of Russia led to the workers' councils, which had organized the October Revolution, being replaced by a state and party bureaucracy. In the 1930s, hundreds of thousands of Communists were persecuted and executed. Oppositional communists fought for the re-establishment of council democracy – the Soviet youth, massively oppressed under Stalinism, was their central hope. Leon Trotsky wrote...

Every revolutionary party finds its chief support in the younger generation of the rising class. Political decay expresses itself in a loss of ability to attract the youth under one's banner. The parties of bourgeois democracy, in withdrawing one after another from the scene, are compelled to turn over the young either to revolution or fascism. Bolshevism when underground was always a party of young workers. The Mensheviks relied upon the more respectable skilled upper stratum of the working class, always prided themselves on it, and looked down upon the Bolsheviks. Subsequent events harshly showed them their mistake. At the decisive moment the youth carried with them the more mature stratum and even the old folks.

The revolution gave a mighty historical impulse to the new Soviet generation. It cut them free at one blow from conservative forms of life, and exposed to them the great secret—the first secret of the dialectic—that there is nothing unchanging on this earth, and that society is made out of plastic materials. How stupid is the theory of unchanging racial types in the light of the events of our epoch! The Soviet Union is an immense melting pot in which the characters of dozens of nationalities

are being mixed. The mysticism of the "Slavic soul" is coming off like scum.

But the impulse given to the younger generation has not yet found expression in a corresponding historic enterprise. To be sure, the youth are very active in the sphere of economics. In the Soviet Union there are 7,000,000 workers under twenty-three—3,140,000 in industry, 700,000 in the railroads, 700,000 in the building trades. In the new giant factories, about half the workers are young. There are now 1,200,000 Communist Youth in the collective farms. Hundreds of thousands of members of the Komsomol¹ have been mobilized during recent years for construction work, timber work, coal mining, gold production, for work in the Arctic, Sakhalin, or in Amur where the new town of Komsomolsk is in process of construction. The new generation is putting out shock brigades, champion workers, Stakhanovists, foremen, under-administrators. The youth are studying, and a considerable part of them are studying assiduously. They are as active, if not more so, in the sphere of athletics in its most daring or warlike forms, such as parachute jumping and marksmanship. The enterprising and audacious are going on

all kinds of dangerous expeditions.

"The better part of our youth," said recently the well-known polar explorer, Schmidt, "are eager to work where difficulties await them." This is undoubtedly true. But in all spheres the post-revolutionary generation is still under guardianship. They are told from above what to do, and how to do it. Politics, as the highest form of command, remains wholly in the hands of the so-called "Old Guard", and in all the ardent and frequently flattering speeches they address to the youth the old boys are vigilantly defending their own monopoly.

Not conceiving of the development of a socialist society without the dying away of the state that is, without the replacement of all kinds of police oppression by the self-administration of educated producers and consumers—Engels laid tile accomplishment of this task upon the younger generation, "who will grow up in new, free social conditions, and will be in a position to cast away all this rubbish of state-ism." Lenin adds on his part: "... every kind of state-ism, the democratic-republican included." The prospect of the construction of a socialist society stood, then, in the mind of Engels and Lenin approximately thus: The generation which conquered the power, the "Old Guard", will begin the work of liquidating the state; the next generation will complete it.

How do things stand in reality? Forty-three per cent of the population of the Soviet Union were born after the October revolution. If you take the age of twenty-three as the boundary between the two generations, then over 50 per cent of Soviet humanity has not yet reached this boundary. A big half of the population of the country, consequently, knows nothing by personal recollection of any regime except that of the Soviets. But it is just this new generation which is forming itself, not in "free social conditions," as Engels conceived it, but under intolerable and constantly increasing oppression from the ruling stratum composed of those same ones who—according to the official fiction—achieved the great revolution. In the factory, the collective farm, the barracks, the university, the schoolroom, even in the kindergarten, if not in the creche, the chief glory of man is declared to be: personal loyalty to the leader and unconditional obedience. Many pedagogical aph-

orisms and maxims of recent times might seem to have been copied from Goebbels, if he himself



had not copied them in good part from the collaborators of Stalin.

The school and the social life of the student are saturated with formalism and hypocrisy. The children have learned to sit through innumerable deadly dull meetings, with their inevitable honorary presidium, their chants in honor of the dear leaders, their predigested righteous debates in which, quite in the manner of their elders, they say one thing and think another. The most innocent groups of school children who try to create oases in this desert of officiousness are met with fierce measures of repression. Through its agency the G.P.U. introduces the sickening corruption of treachery and tale-bearing into the so-called "socialist schools." The more thoughtful teachers and children's writers, in spite of the enforced optimism, cannot always conceal their horror in the presence of this spirit of repression, falsity and boredom which is killing school life. Having no experience of class struggle and revolution, the new generations could have ripened for independent participation in the social life of the country only in conditions of soviet democracy, only by consciously working over the experience of the past and the lessons of the present. Independent character like independent thought cannot develop without criticism. The Soviet youth, however, are simply denied the elementary opportunity to exchange thoughts, make mistakes and try out and correct mistakes, their own as well as others'. All questions, including their very own, are decided for them. Theirs only to carry out the decision and sing the glory of those who made it. To every word of criticism, the bureaucracy answers with a twist of the neck. All who are outstanding and unsubmissive in the ranks of the young are systematically destroyed, suppressed or physically exterminated. This explains the fact that out of the millions upon millions of Communist youth there has not emerged a single big figure.

In throwing themselves into engineering, science, literature, sport or chess playing, the youth are, so to speak, winning their spurs for future great action. In all these spheres they compete with the badly prepared older generation, and often equal and best them. But at every contact with politics they burn their fingers. They have, thus, but three possibilities open to them: participate in the bureaucracy and make a career; sub-

mit silently to oppression, retire into economic work, science or their own petty personal affairs; or, finally, go underground and learn to struggle and temper their character for the future. The road of the bureaucratic career is accessible only to a small minority. At the other pole a small minority enter the ranks of the Opposition. The middle group, the overwhelming mass, is in turn very heterogeneous. But in it, under the iron press, extremely significant although hidden processes are at work which will to a great extent determine the future of the Soviet Union.

The ascetic tendencies of the epoch of the civil war gave way in the period of the NEP² to a more epicurean, not to say avid, mood. The first five-year plan again became a time of involuntary asceticism—but now only for the masses and the youth. The ruling stratum had firmly dug themselves in in positions of personal prosperity. The second five-year plan is undoubtedly accompanied by a sharp reaction against asceticism. A concern for personal advancement has seized upon broad circles of the population, especially the young. The fact is, however, that in the new Soviet generation well-being and prosperity are accessible only to that thin layer who manage to rise above the mass and one way or another accommodate themselves to the ruling stratum. The bureaucracy on its side is consciously developing and sorting out machine politicians and careerists.

Said the chief speaker at a Congress of the Communist Youth (April 1936): "Greed for profits, philistine pettiness and base egoism are not the attributes of Soviet youth." These words sound sharply discordant with the reigning slogans of a "prosperous and handsome life," with the methods of piecework, premiums and decorations. Socialism is not ascetic; on the contrary, it is deeply hostile to the asceticism of Christianity. It is deeply hostile, in its adherence to this world, and this only, to all religion. But socialism has its gradations of earthly values. Human personality begins for socialism not with the concern for a prosperous life, but on the contrary with the cessation of this concern. However, no generation can jump over its own head. The whole Stakhanov movement is for the present built upon "base egotism." The very measures of success—the number of trousers and

neckties earned—testifies to nothing but “philistine pettiness.” Suppose that this historic stage is unavoidable. All right. It is still necessary to see it as it is. The restoration of market relations opens an indubitable opportunity for a considerable rise of personal prosperity. The broad trend of the Soviet youth toward the engineering profession is explained, not so much by the allurements of socialist construction, as by the fact that engineers earn incomparably more than physicians or teachers. When such tendencies arise in circumstances of intellectual oppression and ideological reaction, and with a conscious unleashing from above of careerist instincts, then the propagation of what is called “socialist culture” often turns out to be education in the spirit of the most extreme antisocial egotism.

Still it would be a crude slander against the youth to portray them as controlled exclusively, or even predominantly, by personal interests. No, in the general mass they are magnanimous, responsive, enterprising. Careerism colors them only from above. In their depths are various unformulated tendencies grounded in heroism and still only awaiting application. It is upon these moods in particular that the newest kind of Soviet patriotism is nourishing itself. It is undoubtedly very deep, sincere and dynamic. But in this patriotism, too, there is a rift which separates the young from the old.

Healthy young lungs find it intolerable to breathe in the atmosphere of hypocrisy inseparable from a Thermidor³—from a reaction, that is, which is still compelled to dress in the garments of revolution. The crying discord between the socialist posters and the reality of life undermines faith in the official canons. A considerable stratum of the youth takes pride in its contempt for politics, in rudeness and debauch. In many cases, and probably a majority, this indifferentism and cynicism is but the initial form of discontent and of a hidden desire to stand up on one’s own feet. The expulsion from the Communist Youth and the party, the arrest and exile, of hundreds of thousands of young “white guards” and “opportunists”, on the one hand, and “Bolshevik-Leninists” on the other, proves that the wellsprings of conscious political opposition, both right and left, are not exhausted.

On the contrary, during the last couple of years they have been bubbling with renewed strength. Finally, the more impatient, hot-blooded, unbalanced, injured in their interests and feelings, are turning their thoughts in the direction of terrorist revenge. Such, approximately, is the spectrum of the political moods of the Soviet youth.

The history of individual terror in the Soviet Union clearly marks the stages in the general evolution of the country. At the dawn of the Soviet power, in the atmosphere of the still unfinished civil war, terrorist deeds were perpetrated by white guards or Social Revolutionaries. When the former ruling classes lost hope of a restoration, terrorism also disappeared. The kulak terror, echoes of which have been observed up to very recent times, had always a local character and supplemented the guerrilla warfare against the Soviet regime. As for the latest outburst of terrorism, it does not rest either upon the old ruling classes or upon the kulak. The terrorists of the latest draft are recruited exclusively from among the young, from the ranks of the Communist Youth and the party—not infrequently from the offspring of the ruling stratum. Although completely impotent to solve the problems which it sets itself, this individual terror has nevertheless an extremely important symptomatic significance. It characterizes the sharp contradiction between the bureaucracy and the broad masses of the people, especially the young.

All taken together—economic hazards, parachute jumping, polar expeditions, demonstrative indifferentism, “romantic hooligans”, terroristic mood, and individual acts of terror—are preparing an explosion of the younger generation against the intolerable tutelage of the old. A war would undoubtedly serve as a vent for the accumulating vapors of discontent—but not for long. In a war the youth would soon acquire the necessary fighting temper and the authority which it now so sadly lacks. At the same time the reputation of the majority of “old men” would suffer irremediable damage. At best, a war would give the bureaucracy only a certain moratorium. The ensuing political conflict would be so much the more sharp.

It would be one-sided, of course, to reduce the basic political problem of the Soviet Union to the

problem of the two generations. There are many open and hidden foes of the bureaucracy among the old, just as there are hundreds of thousands of perfected yes-men among the young. Nevertheless, from whatever side the attack came against the position of the ruling stratum, from left or right, the attackers would recruit their chief forces among the oppressed and discontented youth deprived of political rights. The bureaucracy admirably understands this. It is in general exquisitely sensitive to everything which threatens its dominant position. Naturally, in trying to consolidate its position in advance, it erects the chief trenches and concrete fortifications against the younger generation.

In April 1936, as we have said, there assembled in the Kremlin the tenth congress of the Communist Youth. Nobody bothered to exclaim, of course, why in violation of its constitution, the congress had not been called for an entire five years. Moreover, it soon became clear that this carefully sifted and selected congress was called at this time exclusively for the purpose of a political expropriation of the youth. According to the new constitution the Communist Youth League is now even juridically deprived of the right to participate in the social life of the country. Its sole sphere henceforth is to be education and cultural training. The General Secretary of the Communist Youth, under orders from above, declared in his speech: "We must ... end the chatter about industrial and financial planning, about the lowering, of production costs, economy accounting, erop sowing, and other important state problems as though we were going to decide them." The whole country might well repeat those last words: "as though we were going, to decide them!" That insolent rebuke: "End the chatter!" welcomed with anything but enthusiasm even by this supersubmissive congress—is the more striking when you remember that the Soviet law defines the age of political maturity as 18 years, giving all electoral rights to young men and women of that age, whereas the age limit for Communist Youth members, according to the old Constitution, was 23 years, and a good third of the members of the organization were in reality older than that. This last congress adopted two simultaneous reforms: It legalized membership in

the Communist Youth for people of greater age, thus increasing the number of Communist Youth electors, and at the same time deprived the organization as a whole of the right to intrude into the sphere, not only of general politics—but of that there can never be any question!—but of the current problems of economy. The abolition of the former age limit was dictated by the fact that transfer from the Communist Youth into the party, formerly an almost automatic process, has now been made extremely difficult. This annulment of the last remnant of political rights, and even of the appearance of them, was caused by a desire fully and finally to enslave the Communist Youth to the well-purged party. Both measures, obviously contradicting each other, derive nevertheless from the same source: the bureaucracy's fear of the younger generation.

The speakers at the congress, who according to their own statements were carrying out the express instructions of Stalin—they gave these warnings in order to forestall in advance the very possibility of a debate explained the aim of the reform with astonishing frankness: "We have no need of any second party." This argument reveals the fact that in the opinion of the ruling circles the Communist Youth League, if it is not decisively strangled, threatens to become a second party. As though on purpose to define these possible tendencies, another speaker warningly declared: "In his time, no other than Trotsky himself attempted to make a demagogic play for the youth, to inspire it with the anti-Leninist, anti-Bolshevik idea of creating a second party, etc." The speaker's historic allusion contains an anachronism. In reality, Trotsky "in his time" only gave warning that a further bureaucratization of the regime would inevitably lead to a break with the youth, and produce the danger of a second party. But never mind: the course of events, in confirming that warning, has converted it ipso facto into a program. The degenerating party has kept its attractive power only for careerists. Honest and thinking young men and girls cannot but be nauseated by the Byzantine slavishness, the false rhetoric, concealing privilege and caprice, the braggadocio of mediocre bureaucrats singing praises to each other—at all these marshals who because they can't catch the

stars in heaven have to stick them on their own bodies in various places. [Translator's note: The phrase "he does not catch the stars in heaven" is a proverbial way of saying that a man is mediocre.] Thus it is no longer a question of the "danger" as it was twelve or thirteen years ago of a second party, but of its historic necessity as the sole power capable of further advancing the cause of the October revolution. The change in the constitution of the Communist Youth League, although reinforced with fresh police threats, will not, of course, halt the political maturing of the youth, and will not prevent their hostile clash with the bureaucracy.

Which way will the youth turn in case of a great political disturbance? Under what banner will they assemble their ranks? Nobody can give a sure answer to that question now, least of all the youth themselves. Contradictory tendencies are furrow-

ing their minds. In the last analysis, the alignment of the principal mass will be determined by historic events of world significance, by a war, by new successes of fascism, or, on the contrary, by the victory of the proletarian revolution in the West. In any case the bureaucracy will find out that these youth deprived of rights represent a historic charge with mighty explosive power.

In 1894 the Russian autocracy, through the lips of the young czar Nicholas II⁴, answered the *Zemstvos*⁵, which were timidly dreaming of participating in political life, with the famous words: "Meaningless fancies!" In 1936 the Soviet bureaucracy answered the as yet vague claims of the younger generation with the still ruder cry: "Stop your chatter!" Those words, too, will become historic. The regime of Stalin may pay no less dear for them than the regime headed by Nicholas II.

Notes...

1. *Komsomol* – Kommunisticheskiy Soyuz Molodiozhi – Communist Union of Youth, youth organization of the CPSU
2. *NEP* – the New Economic Policy, which in 1921 re-allowed private property in certain areas of the economy of the Soviet Union
3. *Thermidor* – the month in the calendar of the French Revolution when Robspierre was toppled by reactionaries, used by Trotsky as an analogy for the bureaucratic counterrevolution in the Soviet Union
4. *Nikolaus II* – the last czar of Russia, who ruled from 1894 to 1917 and was executed in July 1918 by the Red Army
5. *Zemstvo* – a form of provincial administration under Tsarism which was dominated by the nobility and remained largely meaningless

Source...

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Copied from: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1936-rev/ch07.htm#ch07-2>

Communist principles of youth organisation

With the appearance of the anticapitalist movement at the end of the 1990s, the League for the Fifth International (LFI) began to build up REVOLUTION as an independent youth organization. Basing themselves on Lenin, they argued for the “complete independence of the youth organizations.” But implementing these communist positions proved much harder than propagating them. Summarizing a Resolution of the 6th Congress of the LFI, Luke Cooper wrote...

For Lenin and Trotsky, it was essential that revolutionary youth organisations, despite their political allegiance to revolutionary communist parties and an International, should be free from all tutelage and domination by the latter. They thought such independence would give youth the best possible introduction to politics and the class struggle by giving them full responsibility for making their own decisions, successes and failures. More than that, they believed that the revolutionary youth had a vital role to play in helping to keep the parties and the unions on a bold and revolutionary course.

The great youth radicalisation of 2003 saw millions of young people take the road of struggle against war, imperialism and global capital. Youth are again in the vanguard of the mass movement. This was clear in the historic demonstrations of 15th February when at least 20 million took to the streets of every major city in the world. These protests represented the emergence of a new generation taking to the streets to oppose imper-

alist war. Later, this was manifested in the unprecedented wave of school student strikes in the first days of the war which spread across Europe, the USA, Australia and the Middle East.

Revolutionaries were surprised only by the sheer scale of this radicalism. Even a glance at the history books shows that young people have repeatedly been receptive to radical ideas, to militant struggle and, indeed, to revolutionary communism. Why this lack of conservatism, relative to older workers? Quite simply it comes from the fact that, unlike the latter, they have not yet experienced the mind numbing effect of years of bourgeois ideology, the demoralising effect of accumulated defeats, and the influence of reformism within the organised labour movement. All of these spread a resignation amongst many older workers to the supposed impossibility of any fundamental social change in their lifetime. Nor does such radicalism end when young people leave school. Journalists all commented on the youth of the Italian metalworkers of FIOM who struck in

protest at the murder of Carlo Giuliani in Genoa and then led a series of strikes over the next two years for their own demands.

It is natural for young people to be directly concerned about the future, to be sensitive to injustice and suffering, to be impatient about the yawning gap between the high flown idealism of our rulers' words and the squalid indifference to suffering and shocking cruelty of their actions. However, it is not just that young people are positively enthusiastic to take up the causes of others, they have their own battles to fight. Under capitalism they suffer a systematic oppression. The absence of legal equality, economic dependence on the family, irksome control over, or non-recognition of, their sexual lives, authoritarian education, super-exploitation either in low paid dead end jobs or as apprentices, all make young people into second class citizens. Moreover, the jobs available to them often mean effective exclusion from trade unions and even when they can join a union all too often they face discrimination there, too. This is true even in political organisations. Bourgeois society regards all this as a natural burden of being young. After all "we had to suffer this when we were young" and in any case "they will grow out of it."

The huge number of young people involved in the anti war movement is a reflection of the fact that they have a direct interest in opposing capitalist militarism and war. Around the globe it is young women and men who are the foremost victims of war. Many states conscript them at 16 or 18 before they have had an opportunity to use their civil rights: old enough to die but not to vote. In the civil wars that have raged in the Global South, children have been forced into armies and militias from the moment they are old enough to hold a gun. In the chaos of these wars, rape, ethnic cleansing, responsibility for caring for the old and very young, all fall heavily on young women.

Young people around the world have plenty to fight back against and they are doing so in increasing numbers and with greater radicalism. These struggles are not just good for young people themselves they can play a regenerative role for the older generation who suffered serious defeats, encouraging them back into struggle and

renewing their faith in the power of working class action to change the world.

The revolutionary youth organisation

The specific circumstances in which young people live, study, and work for many create barriers to recruitment into a revolutionary party. Special forms of agitation and methods of organising are therefore required if the revolutionary organisation is not to become ever older and less capable of relating to the concerns and lives of youth. For this reason, in the past, the revolutionary workers' movement developed specific forms of publication and activities aimed at young people. It also developed special youth organisations and movements. The revolutionary wing of the movement conceived of these not as carbon copies of the party for young people, still less as strictly subordinate bodies, but as distinct organisations. They were to be organisationally independent of the party, whilst the young cadres of the revolutionary party inside them would fight to win them to political solidarity with revolutionary parties and international organisations. This independent form of organisation aimed to bring youth into struggle, connecting them closely to the party, but enabling them to learn from their own experience independently of the adults.

The political theory behind organisational independence was developed by the Bolsheviks in the early 20th century. Historically, the Bolsheviks themselves had a very youthful age profile. In 1907, 60 per cent of the Bolsheviks were under 25 and a fifth of them were teenagers, while only one third of their rivals, the Mensheviks, were under 25 years old and 5 per cent of them teenagers. The Mensheviks always complained of this in a totally patronising way. The Bolsheviks were just immature youngsters, they said.

Defending his party against the charge that the Bolsheviks had no experienced cadres in their ranks, Lenin quoted Frederick Engels: *"Is it not natural that youth should predominate in our party, the revolutionary party? We are the party of the future and the future belongs to the youth. We are the party of innovators, and it is always the youth that most eagerly follows the innovators. We are a party that is waging a self-sacrificing struggle against the old*

rotteness, and youth is always the first to undertake a self-sacrificing struggle."¹

Indeed, it was the youthful make up of the Bolsheviks that made them bold, self-sacrificing, able to resist the huge pressure of bourgeois patriotism when the First World War broke out. It was this young party that made the October Revolution. It was young people right across Europe, who launched the struggle against the traitors in the Second International when they broke all their pre-war pledges and supported the imperialist war. In 1915 and 1916, the majority of the pre-war Socialist Youth International overthrew its patriotic leadership and joined the movement against the war and for a new International. Lenin and the Bolsheviks defended and encouraged this revolt. In fact, the revolt against opportunism had begun before the war within the youth organisations attached to the Second International. In Belgium, Germany, Italy and France, young revolutionaries fought for the independence of the youth leagues against the bureaucratic party and trade union leaders. These leaders hated the independence and radicalism of the youth organisations and did everything in their power to subordinate them to strict party control. Lenin sided with the young rebels against the old bureaucrats.

He observed in 1916: *"The middle aged and the aged often do not know how to approach the youth, for the youth must of necessity advance to socialism in a different way, by other paths, in other forms, in other circumstances than their fathers. Incidentally, that is why we must favour organisational independence of the Youth League, not only because the opportunists fear such independence, but because of the very nature of the case. For, unless they have complete independence, the youth will be unable either to train good socialists from their midst or prepare themselves to lead socialism forward."*²

Thus organisational independence was, for the Bolsheviks, a principle that applied not only to the youth sections of reformist parties but also to the new parties of communists that had to be created. They not only upheld the right of the Youth Leagues of the Second International to independence from the control of the centrist, reformist and social-patriotic International Bureau but advocated it for the new International they were

seeking to found. Thus, when the Third (Communist) International was founded, it also held that, even where youth organisations had voluntarily decided to affiliate to the Communist Parties, to participate in their political discussions, to be represented in their structures and recognise the authority of the party's decisions for the communist movement as a whole, this *"in no way implies loss of the organisational independence which is so essential for political education."*³

That is to say the youth organisations had themselves made the decision to accept the party leadership. If they did not accept these decisions, then they had the right to formally break their link. It was not until the bureaucratic "Bolshevisation" drive was initiated by the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in 1924 that this independence was removed, with disastrous consequences for the revolutionary education of the young communists and for the International.

Distinct from the question of organisational independence is the issue of whether the youth organisation should formally adhere to, and be directly bound by, the political decisions of the revolutionary party. This must be judged in the context of the specific historical development of the revolutionary movement in a given country. The Communist International first considered this question in August 1920, at its second congress. It did so faced with a situation in which mass proletarian youth organisations had broken with the social democratic and centrist parties, had taken the road of struggle against the First Imperialist war and against the social traitors, and were now rallying to the defence of the Russian Revolution.

A meeting of delegates who constituted themselves a new Communist Youth International took place alongside the congress. Special Theses on the Youth Movement were then adopted by the Executive Committee of the Communist International at a joint meeting with youth representatives. These explained the appropriate relations between the youth organisation and the revolutionary party, nationally and internationally. The theses again insisted on the organisational independence of the youth movements in the most unambiguous terms:

"The entire history of the proletarian youth move-

*ment in every country shows that only independent, that is self-governing, youth organisations develop bold and determined revolutionary fighters and astute organisers of the proletarian revolution and soviet power ... By contrast, the social patriots' exercise of tutelage over the youth results in an opportunist, petty bourgeois development."*⁴

The theses then went on to deal with the issue of political independence. They explained that in countries in which the working class had not yet established a strong revolutionary party and *"where the formation of Communist parties is still in flux and the youth organisations are just breaking away from the social patriotic and centrist parties, our main slogan is that of the absolute political independence of the youth movement. Under such conditions this slogan is objectively revolutionary!"*

The Bolsheviks recognised that, in the absence of a substantial revolutionary party, the youth could, and usually did, play a vanguard role in rallying opposition to war and the apparatuses of treason. The absolute independence and freedom of action of the revolutionary and anti-imperialist youth was, therefore, paramount for the development of a strong revolutionary movement unencumbered by the stranglehold of the reformist and centrist organisations. In short, the political independence of the youth movement allowed revolutionary elements within it to promote their views and campaign for leadership of the youth. More than this, they could be, along with splits from the reformist organisations, a major force for creating a new revolutionary communist party.

However, at this time, in certain countries, the working class movement had already succeeded in forming strong revolutionary communist parties. This was achieved through the efforts of the anti-imperialist left wing of the social-democracy, the influence of the Communist International, the attraction of the Russian Revolution and the efforts of the youth themselves. In such advantageous conditions, the vanguard role in organising the struggle of the working class for power fell not to the youth but to a vanguard workers' party. Thus the Theses went on: *"the slogan of absolute independence is wrong, however, in countries where there are already strong Communist parties, and where this slogan is used by the social patriots and*

*the centrists against the Communist youth and to mislead the youth. There, the Communist youth organisations based themselves on the programme of the Communist Party."*⁵

Was this an example of double standards or cynicism? Not in the least. In the first place, as we have seen above, the Comintern insisted on the continued organisational independence of the youth in every country. Secondly, the Comintern vehemently rejected all 'tutelage' of the youth, any domineering and patronising approach which would reproduce between the party and youth organisation the master and pupil relationship typical of the bourgeois school, the workshop and the family. Thirdly, in contrast to the reformist and centrist parties, the youth were to participate as equals in the internal democratic decision making processes of the party itself. Fourthly, in all circumstances, this type of adherence of the organisationally independent youth movement to the party was to be a product of the voluntary decision of the youth themselves, through their being won freely and democratically to the programme and project of the Party, and not through the exercise of commands or controls:

"In all countries where old and active Communist parties existed, a strong relationship between the Communist Party and the Communist youth organisation was established. The form this took was that the Communist youth organisation adopted the programme of the Communist Party and functioned in the framework of its political positions. At the same time, in these cases, the youth (1) had their own centralised organisation; (2) decided for themselves how to carry out their organisational, agitational and propaganda activities; (3) decided the place and the forms of their participation in political struggle; and (4) discussed the main political questions. All youth organisations must arrive at this relationship with the Communist Party, not through compulsion by the party, but by being convinced and making their own free decision."

The theses also established that the Communist Youth International, which united all communist youth organisations, should be part of the Communist International. The CYI and its national groups were to *"take part in the congresses of the Communist International. The executive commit-*

tees of the Communist International and the Youth International would exchange representatives with decisive votes."

The aim of the CYI was "the centralised leadership of the Communist youth movement, support of the national Communist youth groups, the formation of Communist youth groups where none yet exist, and international agitation around the ideas of communism and the youth movement."

As a fully participating "part of the Communist International" with full rights, the CYI "as such ... subordinates itself to the decisions of the congresses of the Communist International and the political directives of its Executive Committee". Nevertheless, it "carries out independently its work of leading, organising, strengthening, and broadening the youth international."

Relation of the youth organisation to revolutionary groups today

Is political independence appropriate only for left-moving youth linked to reformist/centrist parties? Is political dependence always the correct relationship for a youth organisation linked to a revolutionary group, whatever its size or the stage of its development towards being a real party of the workers' vanguard? To say yes to these propositions would be schematic and false.

Leon Trotsky in 1938 advised the SWP (US Section of the Fourth International) a cadre organisation with good worker militants but by no means yet a mass organisation, that, at the early stage of the development of a revolutionary youth group, a flexible approach should be adopted. His words echoed those of Lenin in 1916:

"... if we approach the young comrades with a general conception such as this: 'Boys and girls, you acted very well against the Socialist Party because it was a bad party; but we are a good party. Don't forget it. You must not oppose us.' How can you convince them with such a general conception? It is very dangerous. 'You believe it is a good party, but we don't believe it!'. 'Yes, we are against vanguardism insofar as it is directed against us.' Then they will answer, 'You are bureaucrats, no more, no less.' It is very dangerous. Theoretically, it is correct, like the question of discipline. Iron discipline, steel discipline,

is absolutely necessary, but if the apparatus of the young party begins by demanding such iron discipline on the first day it can lose the party. It is necessary to educate confidence in the party in general because the leadership is only an expression of the party..."⁶

What is the lesson of this for today? In no country has the working class vanguard yet constituted a revolutionary communist party. Over recent years, we have seen a weakening of left social-democracy and Stalinism as mass forces. Anarchism, which revived in the late 1990s and early years of the new millennium, shows signs of weakening due to its inability to face up to the tasks of real mass struggle and defeating reformism. The experience of the youth in the antiwar movement was valuable in this regard. It is precisely these conditions which have given rise to a huge and very heterogeneous movement against war, capitalism, racism and imperialism, consisting of mass youth mobilisations not hegemonised by any one political force. It has thrown up new forms of organisation, such as social forums.

Today, we are closer to the conditions the Second Congress theses describe, in which the absence of mass communist parties puts the radicalised youth in the vanguard. Our task is to initiate and build mass organisations of the revolutionary youth, independent of the apparatuses of reformism and centrism, and to help them to find their way to revolutionary communism.

It is essential to convince these youth organisations to commit themselves to communism and to struggle constantly to maintain this commitment. Therefore, it is the job of revolutionaries to fight for their political programme within such organisations, give a political and fighting lead in struggle and win respect for their own politics, method and fighting capacity. Communists must aim to win the youth organisation to adopt their programme, to the struggle for a new, Fifth International and the establishment of revolutionary parties based on a transitional programme of socialist revolution.

Hence the question arises; should revolutionary youth organisations, today, adhere to the national sections of communist groupings even where they remain small fighting propaganda societies?

No, to do so would be tactically naive. Revolutionaries should fight for the youth organisations to express political solidarity with the activity and programme of communist cadre organisations but not to subordinate themselves to the decisions of such groups. Broader forces must be won to the revolutionary youth movement than can be won, at least from the outset, to accept the leadership of a small propaganda society that does not yet lead a section of the masses and as such cannot demonstrate the superiority of its programme through leadership of any significant section of the working class. Solidarity should, however, be secured with the programme and struggle of revolutionary communist forces, through joint activity and programmatic debate.

However, the absence of a revolutionary party in a given country does not mean that there is NO relationship between the revolutionary youth movement and the struggle for the revolutionary party, or that the youth movement is merely a repository for future recruits to the communist cadre organisations. On the contrary, where there is no revolutionary party, the revolutionary youth organisation must become an instrument for its creation.

The Revolutionary Youth International and the Fifth International

In the anticapitalist and antiwar movements, a vanguard, consisting overwhelmingly of young activists, has emerged which has the potential to form new mass revolutionary youth organisations. These, in turn, could act as catalysts to encourage the formation of new mass revolutionary organisations of the working class. In certain countries, especially those where young workers have come to the forefront of working class struggles, as in Italy, they could actually become the nucleus around which such parties would form. However, such is the character of the “movement of movements” that this plethora of young people does not have an international organisation into which all youth entering the movement are drawn. Indeed, both the anticapitalist and antiwar movements have been characterised by a mass of non-aligned individuals willing to take action on the streets against

neo liberalism and war but not yet ready to fight consciously for the politics of any of the particular political tendencies within the movement itself.

The absence of a mass youth organisation, whether reformist, centrist or revolutionary, on an international scale, has meant that the voice of the youthful militant majority who took to the streets in the great anticapitalist and anti-war mobilisations of the past few years has not been heard when these movements have come together to discuss programme and strategy. At the Social Forums of Porto Alegre, Florence, Hyderabad, Paris and, most recently, in Mumbai, the youth dominated the floors of the workshops, seminars and huge plenary sessions, yet the platforms themselves were made up of the traditional “old” academics, journalists and politicians of the post-1960s left. These are not the people who risked their skins on the streets opposing the neo liberal agenda, Moreover, most of these “big names” have a political agenda of wanting to drive the movement into an accommodation with capitalism and turn it into a lobbying group for nothing more than token reforms.

In such circumstances, revolutionary Communists must argue for young people to be able to lead and direct the struggle. This will mean that young people will need to form their own organisations.

Of course, there are already many youth organisations associated with parties, trade unions, NGOs, and even faith organisations, whose members really do want to change the world. We are not starting from scratch. That is why we think it is necessary to issue a call for a new mass revolutionary youth international to give a political structure and direction to the vanguard of youth who have already proven their capacity to take militant action. To do this will mean forming united fronts with groups who also want to give young people an organisational and political voice, but who may not be won at first to the historic revolutionary programme of the working class. To make immediate agreement with this programme a pre-requisite for the establishment of an international would, of course, be an absurdity and would actually go against the Marxist principles of youth organisation we have outlined.

Conversely, the formation of a youth international in which programmatic discussion and, therefore, the discussion of political strategy, was absent, even suppressed, or which limited itself to being nothing more than a united front around certain campaigning initiatives, would represent just as much of a dead end for the struggle against capitalism. Therefore, in forming alliances for the formation of a new revolutionary youth international, Communists put forward three key principles. These are, firstly, that the new organisation we seek to build must be centred on the discussion of, and eventual decision on, a programme, for which communists must themselves put forward and argue a revolutionary strategy. This is not to paralyse the structures of the new organisation in a conflict between different political tendencies but rather to say that these debates on programme, strategy and action are crucial. Secondly, democratic decision-making to agree on the immediate and burning tasks which face us today. Thirdly, once discussed and decided upon, the decisions of the majority must be implemented. In short, we advocate a system of democratic centralism, total freedom in discussion, loyal unity in action. In this way, the call is not a bland call for "unity" based on a lowest common denominator but a call for a new international political organisation of radical youth.

Here and now, important steps can be taken to build this new organisation. Communists must seek alliances with youth organisations on issues on which they have political agreement. This may, for example, take the form of joint days of action against neo-liberalism or joint seminars and workshops around issues effecting youth. In taking these joint initiatives, communists can build trust with other key forces that can potentially be won to a new international and also take revolutionary politics to a broader audience.

As such, the call for a new Youth International, is not a passive invitation to other political tendencies to undertake joint work but is a political chal-

lenge to the large centrist and reformist formations in the social movements. Put simply, we seek to win the masses of these organisations to our revolutionary programme and to demonstrate the superiority of it through struggle against capitalism and for its overthrow. In this sense, the slogan for an independent, revolutionary youth international that can unite all young people struggling against capitalism, is objectively revolutionary in the same way as the slogan for independent organisation was in 1920. That is, it provides a means by which young people can be won, en masse, to the historic programme of the working class and away from the movement's mis-leaderships.

A new youth international could organise the mass action necessary to take the struggle against capitalism forward and give it a strategic political direction towards another world, a communist world. It could leave the right wing academic milieu isolated and unable to mislead the movement. In galvanising a mass of young people in political struggle, it could provide the political leadership for the entire movement.

As such, the formation of a revolutionary youth international can actually lead to the development of new revolutionary parties. By recruiting first hundreds, and then thousands, to their ranks, by agitating for a new international political organisation of young people in struggle against capitalism, the revolutionary youth organisations can then go on to hold congresses, working with other working class forces that share the same goal, for the foundation of new revolutionary parties and, indeed, the Fifth International.

This model provides us not only with a principled, dynamic and historically grounded understanding of the relationship between the youth organisation and the revolutionary party: it also opens up the prospect of a contemporary path to the new combat organisations, the new world party of social revolution that we so urgently need, one which we can realistically travel in the period ahead.

So, what's up with all the white space?

iRevo is an international tendency, and we published this brochure simultaneously in English and German. It turns out that the German versions of the texts are much longer than the English versions. Rather than do a new layout, we provide this empty space as a service to you, the reader, to make notes or write a manifesto for an independent youth movement. – *iRevo layout guy*

Notes...

1. V.I. Lenin, "The Crisis of Menshevism", Collected Works Vol. 11, Moscow, 1965, p. 353
2. V.I. Lenin, "Jugend-Internationale", Collected Works Vol. 23, London, 1974, p.164
[see this brochure, p. 14]
3. Third International, "The Communist International and the Communist Youth Movement"
[see this brochure, p. 19]
4. Third International, "Theses on the Youth Movement" [see this brochure, p. 17]
5. Third International, "The Communist International and..." [all further quotes from this source.]
6. L.D.Trotsky, "Toward a revolutionary youth organisation", Writings, 1938-9, New York, 1974, pp.121-2

Source...

First published: Fifth International #2, London, 2004

Copied from: <http://www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?id=70,296,0,0,1,0>

The Young Socialists' Alliance

In the trench warfare between REVOLUTION and the LFI, the central question was whether the LFI should work as a faction within Revo. With numerous historical examples, independents in Revo tried to show that this "entryism in one's own youth organization" had been consistently rejected by the Trotskyist movement up till now. The *leadership of REVO/DE* wrote...

The principle of the independence of the youth organization has been a foundation of the communist movement for more than eighty years. It was defended by Lenin, Liebknecht and Trotsky.

REVOLUTION is not the first Trotskyist youth organization to call itself independent. There have been many before us, including some extremely negative examples like the "Young Socialists" in the Labour Party in the UK in the 1960s – a large but largely unpolitical group based on frenzied activity, with nearly 50-year-old Gerry Healy acting as informal leader and public spokesman. But there have also been positive examples: the Young Socialists' Alliance in the US, which the Socialist Workers' Party created in the late 1950s. The YSA was an organizationally independent youth organization which was politically subordinate to the SWP and which brought together different tendencies of left-wing youth who worked out a Marxist programme in a discussion lasting several years.

This youth organization came to an end in the early 1960s. Because the YSA leadership rejected SWP's accommodation to the Castro government, the SWP dropped the principle of youth independence and placed all its members (around half of the YSA leadership) under party discipline. The

YSA ceased to exist as an independent organization and sunk into meaninglessness.

For our discussions we should consider some of the documents of the SWP/YSA. This will merely be a summary of the most important letters and resolutions. Nonetheless it is no replacement for the original texts which are available in the brochure "The Leninist Position on Youth-Party Relations, documents from the YSA & SWP, 1957-61", and online¹.

Before the YSA was started, Murray Weiss, a leading SWP member, explained how the SWP would intervene in the leftist youth movement, which was in chaos after the collapse of the CP-USA youth. The SWP's method was to work in an open and constructive fashion within a broad organization. The question was asked if young SWP members would act as a faction within the youth movement – Weiss answered with a definite "no". Party members belonging to a minority within the party would have the right and the duty to fight for their positions in front of the youth, rather than just towing the party line, as Weiss explained:

"The concept of the responsibility of a minority to confine its struggle basically to the party has never implied limiting the freedom of expression of supporters of a minority within a revolutionary youth organization, whatever the exact relation of such an

organization to the party (is). As a matter of fact, all the great struggles within the party were invariably paralleled in the youth organization. Or ... under certain circumstances, found their major arena in the youth movement. Such was the case with regard to the left wing in the international social-democracy."

Weiss described an episode from the 1930s when a debate within the SWP about the "labour party tactic" was carried out in the youth organization: "I cannot recall a single attempt on anyone's part to question the right of the SWP minority to fight for its position among the youth or the charge that in doing so they were violating some organizational principle."

Thus the independence of the youth movement requires that all major questions, including and especially those on which the party is divided, be discussed and decided by the youth independently. This is important not just for the development of the youth but in some cases to correct mistakes of the party.

Based on the experience of the First World War, when youth organizations played a crucial role in the fight for revolutionary internationalism and the foundation of the parties of the Communist International, the SWP drew the conclusion that a revolutionary party must strive to make the youth movement as independent as possible.

Weiss then added, as an extra guarantee against factional work: "No one who held the Leninist view of the revolutionary party's relation to the youth movement has, to my knowledge, ever attempted to introduce the practice of a party faction in the youth movement."

Based on these principles, the SWP could contribute a great deal towards building up the YSA as a broad, revolutionary youth movement, which included several different tendencies and worked out a common, Marxist programme. It grew into the most dynamic left-wing youth organization in the USA. Tim Wohlforth, SWP member and YSA leader, summarizing the experiences of several years' work in a report to the SWP conference, stressed the importance of openness:

"The party based its policy on a recognition of the

organizational independence of the youth. It did not attempt to dictate to the youth. ... The youth movement is neither an opponent organization within which the party members operate as a faction nor a simple appendage of the party... No young person in his right mind (and these are the only young people we want) would join a youth group if its policies were determined by a caucus of that group composed of members of an adult party. The quickest way to kill the youth movement is to impose that type of discipline within it."

Wohlforth concludes that the SWP should not "resort to simply applying discipline on party members in the youth. [This] approach, which may be necessary under extraordinary circumstances ... tends to undermine the essential unity of party and non-party youth, eat away at the independent organization of the youth, and damage the possibilities for future growth of the youth movement".

Now such independence may cost a good deal of effort. As the editors of the brochure, years later, summarized: the youth "must be assisted in acquiring, through struggle inside as well as outside the movement, the necessary revolutionary qualities of discipline and intransigence. But such struggle often clashes with internal order. Moreover, it places on the incumbent 'adult' leadership the continuing responsibility and necessity to defend its program and tactics."

The party's programme and tactics could be adopted simply by giving a party faction in the youth organization instructions about which policies to force through. This is quick, but it blocks the development of the youth movement, not only of the independent youth but also of the party youth charged with carrying out these directives.

Finally, the editors of the brochure taunted the hypocrisy of the SWP leadership in shutting down the independent youth organization. Their position would have meant to "pretend that a youth organization is an opponent organization, in which the party members need discipline in action (with the unique logic to this reasoning being the need to mobilize its members to fight its own young sympathizers!)"

Notes...

1. Brochure: „The Leninist Position on Youth-Party Relations, documents from the YSA & SWP, 1957-61”, Spartacist League/US, 1967, http://www.bolshevik.org/history/youth/mb7_complete.html

Source...

An internal polemic in REVOLUTION, written by the leadership of REVO/DE on June 2, 2006

Trotzki, Gould and the Youth

Another important question in the conflict between Revo and the LFI was whether independents, i.e. non-LFI-members, could or should make up a majority in the leading bodies of Revo. In the 1930s, Leon Trotsky advised the American Socialist Workers Party to place great emphasis on having only a minority of party members in the leadership of the youth organization. Sam C wrote...

To adopt a Leninist position towards the youth movement means arguing for the independence of the youth organisation. The youth must have organisational independence to come to the path of socialism through their own mistakes and debates. They must have their own elected decision-making bodies, their own publications and their own programme and constitution. If there is a revolutionary party, the youth organisation should stand politically subordinate to it, but this political subordination must of course be won, not imposed from above.

On the issue of the leadership of the youth organisation, in adopting a Trotskyist position, an independent youth organisation must have an independent majority on its leading bodies. This is clearly outlined in Trotsky's published debate with

a leading SWP member, Gould, about the make up of the national committee (NC) of the youth organisation built by the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the late 1930's. Here Trotsky argues for a clear minority of party members, proposing that ideally, out of 19 members on the national committee, 5 should be party members and 14 independent members (a majority of nearly 2/3rds). However, he argues that he will compromise with a maximum of 7 party members to 12 independent members:

'The national committee is the highest university of the organisation. If seven are good teachers and from the party, then the seven will be the best and the twelve (non party NC members) will be good people. They will be accessible to good arguments.... I would propose only 5 party members and 14 rank

and file of the youth organisation, and I assure you it would be excellent. But I can make a concession and repeat my proposition, seven and twelve.”¹

The leadership of a party majority is not an ideal leadership, this may be easily agreed on. However, how and when to implement such a theoretically ideal leadership is still a matter of debate.

Gould argues: *“Now on the question of the national committee composed of not more than seven comrades who are members of the party. Theoretically, that is as it should be, but institute that method today, that procedure tomorrow, and you will have no leadership, because all the advanced cadres are members of the party. You ask any comrade here from any section who the leaders of the youth are; they are members of the party. That is because the youth organisation is not ideal, but the most advanced members are members of the party. Likewise there is a provision in the resolution that all members of the youth organisation past the age of 21 shall be sent out of the youth organisation and into the party. Ideologically that is correct and eventually it will be carried out. Put it into practice tomorrow and I don't think it will be fruitful to the organisation. It must be done gradually, and the same is true about the national committee.”*

Trotsky replies to this: *“If there are 12 (non party NC members), the majority, you (Gould) are sure that they represent better the spirit of youth than the principles of Marxism, but if you (the party) are not capable of winning them (the 12 independents) for your decision, then the decision is bad, or the decision comes too early for this organisation and then you must postpone it. It is better to postpone than*

rule by bureaucratic decision.”

Thus, Trotsky's very clear in arguing against the complaints that the Youth would not be able to lead itself and against Gould's argument that at the moment an independent majority would not be fruitful for the organisation. How can independent members develop the confidence and knowledge to become cadre without sharing the responsibility to lead the organisation? So not allowing the raw youth to have majority on the leadership actually prevents the development of youth into independent youth cadre, capable of leading the youth independently. Obviously this needs to be in conjunction with education around how to participate democratically on a leading body and in conjunction with political education around a revolutionary constitution.

We would do well to heed Trotsky's advice in his argument: *“How can you educate the youth without a certain amount of confusion, errors and internal fights which have not been infiltrated by the old gentlemen (of the adult party) but arise from the natural development of the youth themselves. I now have the impression that well-educated party members inside the youth organisation, think, speak, discuss and decide in the name of the youth. The party cadres naturally make a high level of discussion in the conventions and the National committee but this high level is an expression of the negative side of the situation.....The worst thing that could happen to us would be to establish a division of labour within the youth organisation: the young rank and file play with colours and trumpets and the selected cadres attend to the politics.”²*

Notes...

1. “Toward a Revolutionary Youth Organisation”, November 18, 1938, The Writings of Leon Trotsky (1938-39), Pathfinder Press, 1974, pp. 123-128.
2. “A Revolutionary Name for a Revolutionary Youth Group”, December 10, 1938, ebenda, p. 152

Source...

Motivation for a motion to the leadership of REVO/UK, by independent Revos on September 2, 2006



Introducing iRevo...

REVOLUTION is an independent communist youth organization with groups in 8 countries on 3 continents. Independent? What does that mean? Precisely this question has led to intense discussions in **REVOLUTION**. Independent **REVOLUTION**, iRevo for short, is a tendency that emerged from this discussion. It fights in **REVOLUTION** for an independent youth organization, as advocated in the texts of Liebknecht, Lenin and Trotsky. iRevo opposes a relationship between youth and adult organizations which corresponds to the relationship between apprentice and master. Instead we strive for a relationship between young people, learning independently in struggle, and adults as their advisors.

In response to the question of what a youth organization which can fight effectively against war, exploitation, unemployment, racism, sexism and above all their source – global capitalism – this brochure provides multiple answers. But just reading this brochure and forming an opinion is, by itself, nothing revolutionary. We must participate actively in social struggles and fight to organize the revolutionary youth, so that they, together with the workers and other oppressed, can dispose of capitalism and every kind of oppression.

Join the Revolution!

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REVO/CZ: revo.revolute.info

REVO/CH: www.revo.ch.tc

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