

# YSA

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## DISCUSSION BULLETIN

Vol. 10 No. 3  
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by

Jan G.

10 cents

**YOUNG SOCIALIST ALLIANCE**

**YSA, BOX 471, COOPER STATION, N.Y., N.Y. 10003**

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## ON LOCAL ORGANIZATION

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(This discussion article was originally given in a local tasks and perspectives discussion in May, 1966. Jan now contributes it to the pre-convention discussion as a step towards an "organizer's handbook," which was mentioned hypothetically at the 1966 convention.)

The following remarks on local organization mean nothing unless they are considered in the context provided by the basic political documents of our movement. They assume the correctness of the understanding that we operate in the epoch of imperialist decay; that the main enemy of the world is our own ruling class; that we are trying to win students and youth in general to socialism and the working class even though, at the present time, the working class is yet to be radicalized; that we function in the contexts detailed by our 1966 convention resolutions. The purpose of the following remarks is to try to formulate, in a manner consistent with our method, a conception of the grass-roots functioning of the YSA so that we may proceed about it in a more conscious way. The focus will be more the local and individual rather than the national.

I. Our movement starts and derives from the socialist embryo it contains, the cadres and the members in general insofar as they possess attributes of cadres: i.e., insofar as they possess a depth of socialist conviction, the ability to contribute great quantities of revolutionary work, to perform with the multifaceted techniques needed to build the movement, to educate others in these techniques, to organize, to explain, to convince, to transmit the best traditions of the working class and the cultural conquests of humanity, to see ahead and to plan, to cooperate and to move about flexibly, to avoid spreading misery by getting bogged down in petty quarrels, etc. In short, insofar as we have already created socialist man, we have resources for building a socialist movement.

For a local to function effectively, it must have a good share of the cadre types of individuals; they must seek to develop themselves and others, to expand the cadre abilities of the members. They cannot afford to take a back seat but must constantly press themselves forward, going out of the way to help develop new leadership capabilities at the same time that they are careful not to let an unnecessary vacuum occur.

In "top heavy" locals it may be natural for some of the cadre elements to decline from election to the executive committee to allow newer members to develop themselves as leaders, but in normal circumstances it is a crime for the leaders in activity not to participate in the formal local leadership. The norm for our movement is to have a working E.C., made up of those members who set an example. It is

the local's responsibility to assure that the leaders in fact are leaders formally; when you have a discrepancy between the two you can easily get unnecessary internal difficulties.

The YSA is a training ground for revolutionary youth. Most of our members will be leaders in the struggle as it grows. We want to train ourselves to be good leaders of the forces that accept a socialist program (from an essential part, such as "Bring the Troops Home Now," to the whole thing). We want to train to be the kind of leader that leads by persuasion and by example, the kind of leader who can train other leaders, toward the end that the distinction between leadership and followership within ever greater circles will disappear. The comrade who, at his youthful age, concludes "I'm not cut out to be a leader" does himself, the revolutionary movement and the socialist ideal a real disservice. He supports by example the contention of the worst bourgeois apologists who always say, "Well, some were meant to do the leading, and the others are fit only to do the work."

II. The activity of a YSA local is a function of the time contributions of the membership. Revolutionary youth either live below their value as producers or sacrifice the trappings of a privileged petty-bourgeois existence.\* The difference, in terms of the extra money that could be earned if they worked more hours for the boss, or that could be spent on themselves if they were so inclined, or the increased personal security they might have if they climbed the student's ladder to "success" goes to the revolution in the form of monetary contributions or time spent in keeping socialist functions going: selling literature, going to meetings, preparing forums, recruiting new members, cleaning the hall, educating oneself for socialism, etc.

Revolutionary labor-time, as described above, could be reduced to its monetary value if we wanted to give it quantitative description. But our goal is to transform this definite quantity or more or less homogeneous labor-time, in the most conscious and efficient way possible, into all the qualities that are needed by the socialist cadre for the mass revolutionary socialist movement. We start by recognizing that at any one given time, there is a limit to it. Given that limit, there are things we cannot expect to do; given our task, however, it is imperative that we use our resources up to that limit. (The small material properties of the socialist movement are, in a very important way, precursors of the collectivized means of production of the future. We should be just as careful not to allow waste of them--e.g. leaflets or periodicals which sit on the shelf past the forum or sale date--as we would be not to allow the various parts of the socialist economy to become unbalanced and thus to squander the people's wealth.)

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\* The value of a worker is determined by the labor time socially necessary (i.e. average) to produce his wages, i.e. the goods and services he consumes on the average to keep himself and his family going.

Hegel would say that the YSA is the embodiment of "the ideal (socialism) striving for the real." Our task is to maximize the reality of socialism for our members and sympathizers. This consists not in a one-sentence definition but of the integrated whole of its infinite parts. Therefore, we have to emphasize the communication of socialist ideas and methods as well as human and working class experiences to ourselves, even before we attempt to spread them efficiently beyond our own organization.

From this derives the importance of (1) heightened communication among the socialists themselves, even increased among the cadre and the leadership; (2) education of the membership as a primary task, one without which the organization tends to lose its purpose for being. Without communication (making common) an organization moves toward dissolution. For us, however, the basis for this communication does not consist of petty gossip but of the verbal application of the dialectical materialist method, of scientific socialism, to all aspects of social--and indeed natural--existence.

A substantial portion of the material basis of the organization, its revolutionary labor time, must be spent to carry out this communication and to refine it. It requires that time be spent to patiently explain, to convince, to argue when necessary, to carry on the political dialectic on newly arisen problems, to think problems through with the accumulated analytic tools of Marxism, to query all possible sources of answers, to read much, to dig deeply in the wisdom of the working class and radical movement and not just to skim the surface.

Having carried on a proper intensity of internal communication, members will not find it difficult to explain very complex ideas to non-members and to help recruit them to the socialist movement.

Sometimes members are heard to say, "I'm not theoretical" and, as a result, they slough off on the need to study and learn Marxist history and science. Also, sometimes comrades will say, "I'm not cut out to be a speaker," and, again they do not try to develop talents they have and which the socialist movement needs to put into action.

III. The ideas of the YSA are what makes us socialist. It is vital that we spend time, that every member spend time, learning them, helping to communicate them to each other and helping to formulate them when necessary. However, we do not live in a socialist world; we want to aid in the transition from this society to the next. In terms of bourgeois society, we are very poor; we do not have access to the most advanced machines which will make all drudgery work superfluous, that will make all transportation quick and effortless, that will put the right people in touch with each other to perform a certain function, that will get scientific socialist literature into the hands of those who need it and are willing to read it, etc.

All we have is a tiny amount of money and some dedicated individuals. The money doesn't go far, so we need to have a headquarters committee to clean up, secretary and treasurer, salesmen, a social committee, stamp-lickers, mimeographers, leaflet distributors, phone-list callers, etc.--and they have to come most of the time from our ranks. Most of this is technical work, formally similar to jobs done by individuals or machines employed by bourgeois institutions; yet absolutely necessary for the survival of a socialist movement, just as much as our socialist ideas. The mark of a socialist is that he does not seek to avoid routine work, but is able to maximize his contribution in this field because he knows that the end, socialism, is realizable only if such means are included. Otherwise, socialism remains an ivory-tower dream, with no roots whatsoever in this world. Much is sometimes made of the revolutionary heroes and heroines who have given their lives in battle; a man or woman who spends his or her life loyally serving the revolution through thick and thin, always willing to do his or her share of the organizational detail work, is just as much of a hero. The importance of obtaining the skills involved in sales, printing, etc. cannot be underestimated.

Sometimes we discover people who are too pure to dirty themselves with such routine work as licking stamps, passing out leaflets, etc. That used to be a big problem with the "highly theoretical" factionalists in New York, but we sometimes see traces of this attitude today. If we are conscious of the petty-bourgeois source of this prejudice and the goal we must keep in mind in order to overcome it, we will not hear any more groans when members find out that their time to serve on the headquarters committee has come up. We would never build a socialist movement if everybody tried to get out of as much routine work as he or she could.

IV. Recruitment: Our number one goal, outside of maintaining the YSA intact and functioning, is to build it through recruitment. Unless we pay sufficient attention to the internal functioning of our movement, we will never be able to recruit people and we will never be able to make the ones we do recruit stick. Recruitment is a good objective measure of how well we are functioning; how the recruits develop is a less objective yardstick, but just as important. Our recruits must learn to understand all the above things about maintaining the movement; otherwise their association with us becomes just a passing thing which will end as soon as personal pressures are brought to bear on them. We have to have classes for our contacts and constantly seek to raise their level of understanding; we have to continue classes after they join and encourage studying ever deeper into Marxism. There should always be some educational program going on...

Security: We have nothing to be ashamed about in our program; but we have to learn to present it in a transitional fashion so that we can lead the thinking of workers and students

forward from the point where they stand at present. We have to be very conscious about what we say so that it has no sound of being "terroristic" or ultraleft. Moreover, we have to be absolutely clear about the role of the bourgeois state in developing the witchhunt and we must give them no unnecessary clues about how they can witchhunt our members. We do not publicly acknowledge who all our members are and do not talk lightly about where they work, etc.

Defense: The need to defend our comrades when attacked is quite plain, both in the civil liberties as well as the physical sense. What is at stake in defense cases is nothing other than the right of radical organizations, especially ours, to survive.

Sales: All members have an obligation to sell the Young Socialist and the Militant. Although the first may be more difficult to sell, the YS is also the most important for the YSA, because it represents our organization.

Finances: The sustaining fund is the financial basis on which the locals carry out their activities. Dues and fund drives support the national office. Members must develop an ability to maximize their contributions to both categories.

V. A most important relationship is that between the life of the local and the outside work it carries on. The job of a revolutionist is to reach layers that aren't socialist and to win them to socialism; however, that can't be done if the local isn't functioning properly on both the theoretical and practical levels.

The region's share of national tasks is performed and directed through the local; the local and the E.C. direct the work in centralized fashion. They have the right to do so; what is more important is that they have the duty to do so and to take the time necessary for it. The local, or the E.C. has the obligation to regulate consciously the extent as well as the kind of work in outside formations. It can be fatal for YSAers to get so involved in outside work that they fail to attend properly to the internal discussion, decision and education that is necessary to maintain the outside work effectively.

Sometimes a tendency will arise for a comrade to identify his work in a given outside arena as the way to the revolution. This is often bolstered by such statements that "our primary work" is in such-and-such a field. Members should never forget that the reason for our work in non-socialist milieus is to raise the consciousness of the masses towards the program of our movement and to build and extend the influence of the revolutionary party. Without that "primary work," we might as well quit and go home; because without the unified revolutionary leadership, the entire struggle will eventually go

down in defeat and we will all certainly be destroyed by fascism. Those members who denigrate the need for a lively internal life in the movement, who avoid business meetings when they could have come, etc. are acting objectively as liquidationists.

Effective outside work requires that it be meshed with our internal consultation and decision-making. This requires: (1) frequent, accurate and clearly expressed information reports to the organizer, the executive committee and the membership-- in that order of intensity and (2) the development of conjunctural attitudes towards given formations: i.e. formulations which generalize from the facts about a group at a given time; from these formulations, we derive an attitude which is a sub-. perspective of our national perspective, dependent on local conditions. These attitudes help each member relate to various groups and institutions on the scene at the time in terms of support, active or moral, to what degree, etc.

#### VI. Uses of Bourgeois Science:

Socialism will have to appropriate the highest products of bourgeois culture, science and technique. We don't have much of it now, but that is a liability--not an asset--of our movement. It is not at all excluded that the socialist movement--even before the taking of power--will put to use computers and advanced accounting techniques for example. Of course, it will be necessary to purge bourgeois science of all mystification and magical qualities which have surrounded it as master of man; socialist science will be bourgeois science, harnessed, cleansed and controlled by a truly conscious mankind.

When a comrade, therefore, suggests that we devise tests to check something, it is not correct to suggest that this is capitulation to the enemy. A Marxist will say, let's look at the test you've devised and ask whether or not it is likely to give a valid result, an accurate assessment of the situation. But don't expect it to do anything more than that.

On traditions: ~~Anti-~~traditionalism is reputed to be very revolutionary. Historically it is bourgeois revolutionary; it is pragmatic. It doesn't distinguish between useful traditions and harmful ones and it is metaphysical because it doesn't force the individual to use his critical facilities to ask how the tradition operates in a given context. Bolshevik norms are traditions which we take seriously and seek to follow. We don't follow them blindly and they evolve as the movement evolves; but neither do we forget them or change them casually. Some of these traditions are in the Constitution: e.g. an E.C. in every local. Most of them aren't: e.g. a continuity of leadership so that experienced members work with newer ones learning the ropes; in Detroit, a tasks and perspectives discussion every three months; other traditions we should try to maintain include starting our local meetings on time; every



member regarding it as his duty to help recruit new members; every member selling our literature regularly.

The "Personality" Question: A Marxist knows that negative personal qualities--selfishness, rudeness, disloyalty, stubbornness, egocentricity, etc.--are (1) conceived differently by different classes but (2) as far as socialists are concerned, they are products of a class culture on the one hand and a lack of consciousness, personal inexperience and often a demoralizing personal situation on the other.

They are characteristic of bureaucracy and bureaucratically-run organizations and they represent tendencies which, if allowed to become dominant, threaten to destroy the opposite of bureaucracy, the socialist movement. They must be consciously resisted. This entails a deliberate maximization of one's personal situation--getting the best-paying jobs when you have to work, not allowing oneself to get deeply in debt, living at a decent but modest level, keeping physically healthy, paying one's phone bills and parking tickets on time, etc. The socialist goal--to submit everything to plan--like charity--must begin at home.

Character traits such as stubbornness, disloyalty, etc. abound in petty-bourgeois organizations like SDS. Their self-flagellation sessions--or their ill-informed workshop discussions--just increase their sense of hopelessness. If we ever started anything like that, we would become just as ineffective as SDS is and would probably cease to exist.

Our socialist goal gives us every reason to subordinate the petty personal grievances which arise in the course of normal human relations in this most alienating of all societies. We develop the ability to overlook any but the most glaring faults of our comrades with regard to ourselves and patiently explain privately to them how they can improve themselves and thus better help the organization. We try to understand what their present limits are and not to push them any faster than they are capable of going.

We don't repeat all the personal details we know about each other or which we find out inadvertently. We try to be above gossip. The fact that we know what kind of pressures it reflects helps us to stop from sliding into it.

We can do it because it is all a diversion from the real task at hand, making a socialist revolution in America. We want to develop a team that is capable of doing that job, creating the social premises for the complete abolition of all pre-conscious modes of human behavior.

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