

Winning the Youth.

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THE Sixth Plenum of the Communist Youth International held in December, 1926, at Moscow, was able to record, for the first time in many years that the membership, as well as the political influence of the various Leagues was again on the increase. This followed a period during which the membership had remained stable, and this period was in turn preceded by one during which the membership of the various Leagues outside of the Soviet Union had dropped considerably. While the Fifth Plenum was held at a time when the lowest point in the history of the C. Y. I. had already been passed, this Plenum was held when the upward march was already evident, and becoming more rapid. We can therefore safely say that after several years of trial and effort, the Communist Youth movement has succeeded in adapting itself to the conditions existing at the present time, and is carrying on its work successfully under these conditions. The great difficulty experienced in accomplishing this must be accounted for by the fact that the Communist Youth International was founded in a period of revolutionary upheaval—in fact, it was born out of the struggle against the imperialist war, against the betrayal of the revolutionary movement by the social democrats. It not only bore the mark of its birth—this mark it will always bear, and it will guarantee the carrying on of the revolutionary struggle—but it also carried over the character of its activities into the more peaceful era which set in after 1921. The present period is marked by greater participation of the Leagues in the everyday activities of the young workers, greater stability in the work of the Leagues, better relations with the masses of the young workers and with the non-political organizations of the working class youth—in short, the Leagues are beginning to establish themselves as the real leaders of the working class youth and the working class youth is beginning to look to the League as the only organization that actually fights for their interests.

Gains and Losses.

The Communist Youth International as a whole has been growing continually since its organization in 1919. This was due primarily to the tremendous growth of the Russian League, and secondly to the affiliation of new sections. At the same time, many of the largest leagues lost heavily in membership. Thus we have the German League declining from 70,000 in 1923 to 20,000 at present; the Italian League had 35,000 members in Nov. 1919 (at the time of the First Congress of the C. Y. I.) 60,000 in July, 1921 (Second Congress) and 8,000 today. Sweden had 30,000 members in 1919, and 10,000 today. In other countries, the Leagues were almost completely wiped out.

The White Terror.

There are several reasons that account for the above phenomena. The foremost one is the combined attack of the government, the employers, and in many cases, the Socialists, against our organizations. These attacks al-

most destroyed many of our Leagues and drove them into illegality. At the present time, out of 40 Leagues, 17 are completely illegal and 3 are semi-legal. A few instances only of the terrors which raged against some of our best organizations can be given. In 1921, the Communist Youth League of Jugo-Slavia, before it was suppressed by the government, had 20,000 members. Today it has but a handful and is completely illegal. The League was suppressed even before the Party as a result of its anti-militarist activities. The Bulgarian League had 40,000 (together with the junior section) at the time it was suppressed by the government. In fact, in all the Balkan countries, there existed mass Communist Youth Leagues. These are now all illegal, having been completely suppressed by the capitalist white terror. Many of our best comrades were executed, imprisoned, exiled. At the present time, our Polish League has 2,000 of its 7,000 members in jail. In Jugo-Slavia, Roumania, Lithuania, there are as many members in prison as outside. After the 1923 uprising in Germany, the League there was reduced from 70,000 to 30,000 by the attacks of the government.

Stabilization.

The second cause for the loss in membership of many of our Leagues was the recession of the revolutionary wave and the inability of the Leagues to adapt themselves to the period of slow penetration of the masses. In the years of revolutionary upheaval 1918-21, the young workers, many of them just back from the front, looking for leadership in their struggle against the capitalist system, flocked into the Communist Youth movement, which offered to them this leadership. In those days the Communist Youth Leagues led the young workers in the actual revolutionary struggle—on the barricades and in the streets and factories. The recession of the revolutionary wave, the temporary stabilization of capitalism, brought disillusionment and pessimism into the ranks of the workers, and this made itself felt by the severe loss in membership of our Leagues. Not only did large masses leave our movement because they were no longer carried along by the revolutionary wave, but large numbers were lost as a result of the inability of the Leagues to adapt themselves quickly enough to the new situation. The methods employed in 1919-21, the methods that were suitable for a period of "sturm und drang", were no longer suitable when the period of intense struggle, of barricade fighting, had come to an end. In the period of the partial stabilization of capitalism, the main activity of the League must be the participation in the small, every-day struggles of the young workers, the consolidation of the forces of the League, the penetration into the masses of the young workers; intense educational activity, both among the members, and among the masses of the young workers; the satisfaction of the cultural needs of the young workers. This is slow, patient work, and the Leagues were not able to adopt this work when the change in the situation took place, with the result already explained. The Sixth Plenum was able to record that these deficiencies are now being overcome, and the Leagues are able to report progress in this work.

The third cause of the loss in membership was the passing of the best elements from the Leagues into the Parties at the time when the Parties were in a formative stage. This left the Leagues with insufficient and inexperienced functionaries and with the more backward membership. The

sudden exodus, necessary as it was for the Communist movement, naturally had a bad effect on the Leagues, which suffered from the instability thus created.

Finally, it is necessary to remember that the Socialist Parties, which in most European countries are still mass parties, having control of the trade union movement, devoted great energies after 1921 to the building up of a Socialist youth movement. In many countries, membership for young workers in trade unions, brought with it, automatically, membership in the Socialist Youth organization. Special drives were conducted by the Socialist Parties to enroll the youth in their organizations. The result was that many thousands of young workers found their way into organizations which actually became a hindrance to them in their struggles, simply because the Socialist youth organizations offered them a place for cultural and social activity.

Recent Successes.

Only a few instances can be given to indicate to what extent the Communist Youth movement has now adapted itself to the situation of the partial stabilization of capitalism. This is evident in the first place on the economic field. In the countries of Europe, and the Far East, in the trade unions and in the shops and factories, the Communist Youth Leagues are now the acknowledged leaders of the working youth—not only because they defend the interests of the young workers in the abstract, but because they have demonstrated it through actual activity. Thus, the British League during the general strike, when all other youth organizations practically went out of existence, placed itself at the head of the apprentices and young workers, drew them into the strike and defended them against the right wing trade union leaders who attacked them for having violated their “contracts” by going on strike. In Germany, it is the League which is taking the lead in fighting for the protection of the thousands of unemployed young workers. Even in our own country, it is the Young Workers’ Communist League which was the acknowledged leader of the young workers during the Passaic strike. Our Leagues have learned how to adopt demands which are in accordance with the needs of the moment, how to organize their work so as at all times to retain the closest contact with the working youth.

In the application of the United Front, the International has also had distinct successes. The young workers’ delegations to the Soviet Union are but one expression of this. These delegations included representatives of young workers of all political opinions, as well as the non-partisan youth, ranging from members of the Catholic organizations to the Socialists. The example of the situation of the youth in the Soviet Union has drawn these young workers closer to the Communist youth movement. In Germany, the correct application of the United Front has helped to create an opposition within the Socialist Youth organization which now has a third of the membership behind it, and which has issued a program for making the Socialist Youth League a better proletarian organization, including close co-operation with the Communist Youth League in all activities. In Austria, a section split from the Socialist Youth League and joined the Communist youth. In other countries, the most advanced elements from the Socialist Youth organizations are joining our Leagues, individually, and also entire local or-

ganizations. The United Front has been applied not only to the Socialist Youth, but also to bourgeois youth organizations having large numbers of young workers in their ranks. This was done on a local scale, as in Germany, where local united fronts with Catholic youth organizations were established on the issues of unemployment relief for young workers, against discrimination, and other burning issues. So successful were some of these united fronts, that conflicts developed between the leaders of the religious organizations and the local organizations forming the united front, and the true character of the Catholic organizations was exposed to the young workers within them.

The most successful form of the united front was in the youth conferences held in almost every country—in England, conferences for the unionization of the young workers; in France conferences for the purpose of mobilizing the young workers for the economic struggle; in Italy, conferences against the Fascist terror. At these conferences, thousands and hundreds of thousands of young workers from trade union, political organization and shop were represented. Many of the conferences created unity committees, which form the basis for the unification of the entire working class youth in the struggle against capitalism, and give the Leagues approach to hitherto distant masses.

We and Others.

In their attitude toward other working class youth organizations, the Communist Youth Leagues have undergone quite a bit of change. There was a time when all other youth organizations were looked upon as enemies to be destroyed. Now, however, we have learned to distinguish between organizations which can be made to serve the interests of the working class and those which will always remain enemies. In the first category must be placed trade union youth sections, sport organizations, literary and dramatic organizations, etc. In countries where trade union youth sections exist, our Leagues must help develop them, draw the entire youth into them, and convert them into real organs of struggle against capitalism. Sport organizations are recognized as an essential feature of the working class movement which should be built up in all countries. Other organizations also fulfill certain functions, and can be made serviceable to the workers. Through these organizations, the young Communists can come in contact with and lead thousands of young workers who are not in any other organizations of the working class, and by proper activity, the best elements from these organizations can be drawn into the Communist Youth Leagues.

Last but not least, must be mentioned the efforts now being made to adopt lighter features for our Leagues. As a reaction to the Social-democratic practice of occupying the youth exclusively with social-cultural activity, when our movement was born, we dropped this entirely from our program. We are now convinced that in its proper proportion, not only can this activity not harm, but can be very beneficial to our Leagues. The youth has many-sided interests and broad needs. We cannot fill all the needs of the youth, but we must make an effort to meet them to some extent. The development of these so-called "new methods" of work will go a long way towards overcoming the large fluctuation and turn-over in our

membership, and will enable us to attract the less advanced elements of the working class youth, which are nevertheless necessary for our movement.

League and Party.

The Sixth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist Youth International again discussed the question of the relations between the Leagues and the Parties. This was due to a number of incidents which had occurred in various countries (Poland, Jugo-Slavia, Spain) and which had developed friction between the Leagues and Parties in those countries. The Plenum emphasized that the Leagues are politically subordinated to the Parties, and must follow the Parties. Only in those cases where the Party deviates from the line of the Comintern, or where it refuses to follow the directions of the Comintern, is it permissible for a League to follow a course different from the Party's, to follow the line of the Comintern as against the incorrect line of the Party. In such cases, international discipline is higher than national discipline—the discipline of the Communist International higher than the discipline of the Party of the particular country.

In the relations between Communist Party and Communist Youth League, three main stages have been gone through. The first stage was the period of the formation of the Communist Parties. At that time, the Leagues participated energetically in the organization of the Parties. Its best members and functionaries went into the Parties. In many countries (France, Italy, the Scandinavian countries) the Communist Youth League formed the kernel for the Communist Party. In several countries (Spain, Belgium) the Leagues constituted themselves as Communist Parties. Everywhere, one of the main activities of the Leagues was the struggle against Social Democracy and for the crystallization of Communist Parties. In this period, the Leagues were, to all intents and purposes, young Communist Parties and led an independent political existence. The second stage came when the Communist Parties had already been definitely established, and when the disintegration within the old Social Democratic parties and the revolt of the workers against their betrayers brought large masses into the young Communist parties. Naturally many joined the parties who were in no sense Communists, and who immediately gave expression to their social democratic theories within the Communist Parties. In this period, it became one of the foremost duties of the Communist Youth Leagues to fight against all social democratic deviations, to struggle for the line of the Comintern against all attempts to substitute a different line. The third stage, the present, is marked by well consolidated and stable Communist Parties, by stable leadership which follows the line of the Comintern very closely. The Communist Parties, numerically and in influence, are far more powerful than the Leagues, and are the unquestioned leaders in the class struggles. In this period, the Leagues follow the leadership of the Parties. The Central Committee which does not follow the Comintern is the exception. The Communist Youth Leagues therefore follow the lead of the Parties and support the Parties in all their activities.

We and Our Enemies.

The Sixth Plenum devoted a lot of attention to the question of the

struggle against opponents. This is the first time that the matter was taken up systematically, and in the future this will undoubtedly be one of the main tasks. The Communist Youth Leagues still have very powerful enemies who exert tremendous influence over the working class youth. When the leagues make serious efforts to reach the young workers and when successes follow, they will undoubtedly come into conflict with these opponents and it is therefore essential that systematic plans for combating them be worked out.

The Socialist Youth International is the most important opponent among the working class youth. The bulk of its membership is made up of young workers. It claims to represent the young workers, but it does very little to fight for their interests. It occupies itself mainly with cultural work, amusements, etc. At the present time the Socialist Youth International has 200,000 members. As explained before, in 1919 it practically did not exist. In 1921 the Socialist Youth Leagues (together with those adhering to the second and one-half international) had 180,000 members. In 1924 this had risen to over 250,000 members and since then has continually dropped. The main strength of the Socialist Youth International lies in a number of small countries and in Germany. Thus for example, the Germany Socialist Youth League has 70,000 members; the Austrian, 20,000; Belgium, 20,000, etc. Thus we see that only in one of the large countries is there a powerful Socialist Youth League and this forms over 1-3 of the total strength of the Socialist Youth International. The other Leagues are distributed in the small countries—Holland, Belgium, Austria, Sweden, Norway. In the more important countries—England, France, Italy, Socialist Leagues either do not exist, or are very weak. On the entire American continent there is a Socialist Youth League only in the United States, and that is very weak and has no influence among the young workers. In Asia there is not a single Socialist Youth League.

The Communist Youth International on the other hand has its most powerful sections precisely in those countries where the class struggle is most intense—Germany, France, England, Italy, China. All the important countries on the American Continent have Communist Youth Leagues. All the important countries of the near and far East have Communist Youth Leagues. In addition we must mention the fact that as a result of the greater activity of our Leagues, their influence among the broad mass of the young workers is far greater than the influence of the Socialist Youth, even in those countries where the Socialist Leagues are stronger numerically.

In contrast to the decline of the Socialist Youth International the C. Y. I. has developed constantly in membership as follows:

First Congress (Nov., 1919)	13 Leagues	220,000 members
Second Congress (July, 1921)	44 Leagues	750,000 members
Third Congress (Dec., 1922)	54 Leagues	800,000 members
Fourth Congress (July, 1924)	60 Leagues	1,000,000 members
Fifth Plenum (Mar., 1926)	*39 Leagues	1,800,000 members
Sixth Plenum (Dec., 1926)	*40 Leagues	2,100,000 members

*—All the Leagues in the Soviet Union, after the fourth congress are considered as one League.

Of the total membership, almost two million are in the Leninist Young Communist League of the Soviet Union. This League has 40% of the young workers within its ranks. It is growing at the rate of three thousand members every day. In all negotiations, agreements, contracts, it represents the young workers. It is doing great work in the rooting out of illiteracy. When we compare this achievement with the Socialist Youth Leagues in countries where Socialist government have existed for years, then indeed can we see which organization really is capable of fighting for the interests of the youth.

Our second most important opponent is the Y. M. C. A. and the Y. W. C. A. with their three million members. This organization is important not only because it has within its ranks hundreds of thousands of young workers, and exerts an influence over millions of others, but also because in the Asiatic countries it constitutes the outpost of foreign imperialism and is the most dangerous enemy of the working class in their struggle for liberation. In China, it is the only opponent of the Communist youth organization. Third in order comes the Catholic youth organizations, also totalling three million members and very powerful in the European countries where the bulk of the membership is working class in character.

Methods of Struggle Against Opponents.

The method of combating the Socialist Youth is mainly through the application of the United Front. This shows up to the young workers the inability of the Socialist Youth organizations to really fight for their interests and the unwillingness of the leadership of these organizations to do so. The correct application of the United Front has already led to the formation of powerful oppositions in the strongest sections of the Socialist Youth International. It is now necessary to win these opposition over to the Communist Youth Leagues through the intensification of this work. It was also permissible to apply the United Front to petty bourgeois and religious organizations, but only from below and on a local scale. The basis for such United Fronts should generally be the economic struggle and the aim is to develop the oppositions among the working class rank and file of the organization against the leadership. Certain successes can already be recorded in this work in Germany and Italy. On the whole these organizations must be energetically combatted along the entire front.

International Leadership.

The Communist Youth International as a whole has already developed a stable leadership which follows very closely the leadership of the Comintern and which has tremendous prestige not only among the rank and file of the Communist Youth Organizations but also among the broad masses of the working class youth. This is demonstrated by the ability of the International to mobilize hundreds of thousands of young workers in its struggles. On Liebknecht Day, International Youth Day, and other youth events celebrated on an International scale, hundreds of thousands of young workers demonstrate simultaneously against the capitalist system under the banner of the Communist Youth International. In the U. S. S. R. and in that part

of China under control of the National Revolutionary Government these are official holidays by government decree. In these countries the entire working class youth follows the leadership of the Communist Youth International. This in itself is sufficient proof that the Communist Youth International is the only youth organization that fights for the interests of the young workers. The many Socialist governments in European countries have never done anything for the working youth and consequently have been unable to win the youth over to the Socialist movement.

The leadership of the Communist Youth International is really International in character. The largest and most important Leagues have permanent representatives in Moscow, participating actively in all the work of the Executive Committee. Not only are the European countries and the United States represented, but also China, Japan, Korea, South America—even Palestine, where the newest section of the International has recently been organized, had a representative in Moscow for several months. The Russian League, as the largest, best developed, naturally plays the leading role in the International, and all the Leagues are glad to accept the advice assistance and leadership of the League in the country where the proletariat rules.

The stability of the leadership of the Communist Youth International was demonstrated by the unanimity with which it supported the Communist Youth International in the fight against the opposition. Not a single League placed itself on the side of the opposition. Two members of the Executive Committee who supported the opposition, Voyovich, one of the Secretaries of the E. C. and Michalec, the representative of the Czecho-Slovak League were quickly repudiated by their own organizations and removed from the E. C. by the Plenum. At the Plenum there was but a single speaker favoring the opposition.

On an International scale, the Communist Youth International, has definitely established itself as the only leader of the working class youth and as one of the foremost fighters for the emancipation of the working class. The struggles which it has gone through has stabilized it and left it stronger and more determined. The adjustments made at the sixth Plenum and at previous Plenums have made it possible for the C. Y. I. to adapt itself to all conditions and to continue its work under all circumstances.

NOTE:—Comrades who wish more information on the last two Enlarged Plenums of the Executive Committee of the Communist Youth International are referred to my articles in the Workers' Monthly for June, 1926, and the Young Worker, Feb. 1 and 15, 1927.
