

The Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Young Communist International

By Herbert Zam

"THE Communists are retreating." "The Communist International is gradually dropping its ideas of violent revolution." These are some

of the expressions one can read in the Social-Democratic papers, and this is the theme of a good many of the speeches delivered at Socialist Congresses. It is precisely such expressions as these that show the utter incapability of the Social-Democratic leaders to comprehend the tactics of the class struggle, and their utter bankruptcy as leaders of the working class. To them, compromise with the enemies of the working class is the only form of strategy and every maneuver in the class struggle they interpret from this standpoint.

The Communists are neither retreating nor are they revising their principles. They are adapting their work to the conditions of the moment and it is precisely because they are performing this task well, that the Social-Democrats are in such a panic. The business of the Communists in every country is to lead the workers in the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship. This task assumes different forms in different countries and different periods.

During the present period it is the duty of the Communists to strengthen their organizations, to win a majority of the working class, to unify the ranks of the working class and to prepare it for the next decisive struggle. This the Communists have been doing, and every time they come together on an international scale to take store of their accomplishments, it is seen that great progress has been made and that the rate of progress is ever increasing. Viewed in this light, the last plenum of the Executive Committee of the Young Communist International marked a decisive forward step for the young workers of the world and prepared the way for an ever greater advance of the revolutionary youth.

Left Tendencies Among the Young Workers.

If, as a result of the partial stabilization of capitalism, it has been enabled to grant to some sections of the working class better conditions, the working youth did not share these better conditions. On the contrary, the conditions of the young workers in the capitalist countries is becoming ever more difficult, their wages are being reduced more and more, while at the same time they are being used more and more as a

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weapon of fighting the adult workers. In some countries, as in Germany, compulsory labor laws are even being introduced as a direct

weapon against the young workers. The young workers are the worst sufferers from the chronic unemployment. As a result of these attacks, a distinct leftward movement has begun among the young workers, both among those organized in the Social-Democratic and bourgeois youth organizations, and among the trade union and unorganized young workers. The sending of the youth delegations to Soviet Russia is only one indication of this left tendency. This pressure from the rank and file is so strong, that even religious organizations are beginning to take a favorable stand toward the workers' struggle as compared with their previous anti-working class attitude.

The left movement among the rank and file of the young workers has become so strong as to seriously threaten the hold of the bourgeois youth organizations and of the reformist trade union leaders. They were compelled to bend before the storm or be broken. And they bent. The reformist trade union officials began making special efforts to get the young workers into the trade unions, to issue special demands for the young workers and even to put up the front of fighting for their interests. The bourgeois youth organizations which had hitherto neglected entirely the interests of their members as young workers, which had hidden the class struggle and had tried to "mix" the young workers with the bourgeois youth, were compelled to include economic demands into their programs, and to assume a more sympathetic attitude toward the working class movement generally. Thus these measures, and as a result of the insufficient strength of the Young Communist Leagues, the reformist and bourgeois youth organizations have managed to keep within their ranks a large part of the working class youth.

The Young Communist Leagues and the Working Youth.

In this situation we find the Young Communist Leagues not yet in a position to utilize fully the objectively favorable conditions for increasing their influence upon the masses of the working class youth. Most of the Leagues had not yet learned how to approach the masses properly, how to make use of every opportunity

to draw the young workers into their rank, and increase their contact with them, how to satisfy the needs of the young workers and so make the Communist youth organization an attractive place for them. This situation the plenum of the E. C. Y. C. I. discussed and in the solution of the problems which presented themselves marked an important step forward for the international Communist youth movement and for the young workers.

The Y. C. I. had before issued the slogans of going to the masses but in a majority of cases these instructions were not carried out or were carried out very poorly. Many of the Leagues accepted the directives mechanically, without regard for the particular conditions under which they were working. They tried to apply the decisions dogmatically. No better example can be given than the reorganization. The proper reorganization of the Leagues should result in an increase of membership and influence of the League. We find, however, that, as a result of the mechanical way in which many of the Leagues put the reorganization into effect, there was actually a loss of membership, and not a gain; that the work of the League was held up for long periods of time, and consequently suffered greatly. The plenum established that the Leagues must display greater initiative in the solution of their own problems and greater elasticity in carrying out the directives of the Y. C. I. The Y. C. I. is international in its outlook. It lays down the decisions for application on a world scale, taking into consideration the general world situation, and not the situation in a particular country. It is the duty of the Leagues in the various countries to properly apply the decisions in accordance with the conditions and the situation in their country. Only in this way can a world youth League function, and only in this way can the Leagues develop as mass organizations.

Mass Work.

The plenum not merely criticized the work of the Leagues in the past. It laid down directives for the practical extension of the mass work of the Leagues. Only by obtaining contact with the young workers in every field of activity, only by participating in all these activities, can the Leagues win the leadership over the masses of the young workers. "Without for a moment forfeiting the task already set by the Second World Congress, of organizing the entire youth into our ranks, all Leagues of the Y. C. I. must devote the greatest attention to the so-called non-political organizations of the working youth (trade union youth sections, sport and cultural organizations, etc.) and set themselves to the serious task of capturing the leadership of these masses. We must make an end to the conception that regards these organizations as enemy units to be destroyed. These

are the organizations that we must win and lead. Experience with the Jungsturm in Germany have proven that not only can we utilize similar organizations, but also that we can and must create, on our own initiative, such organizations for the winning and leading of the broad masses of the non-Party youth. The utilization of all possibilities of leading the working youth must in no way lead to the confusion of the role of the Communist youth as laid down by the Second and Third World Congresses. We must, however, relentlessly extirpate the hitherto prevailing fetishism in this field." This paragraph in the decision of the last plenum deserves to be memorized by every member of the Y. C. I. and adopted as the watchword by every League, and if the idea expressed here is grasped by the various Leagues and carried out in their actual, every-day work, then the transformation of these Leagues into mass organizations will be brought more than one step nearer completion.

Internal Life.

The plenum also dealt with the large fluctuation of membership in the Leagues, and the inability of a League to recruit membership in the same degree that it increases its political influence. In some countries, the League is the actual leader of the working youth and yet organizationally it remains a small sect. The plenum established that "the chief reason for the fluctuation (and for the poor recruiting—H. Z.) is an insufficient, narrow, poor internal life of the League not commensurate with its political recruiting power and incapable of integrating the newly won members in the every-day work of the League. Our Leagues do not yet understand how to give the young workers everything or at least most of the things that they need. This must be changed decidedly." How can this be done? Surely not by regarding every other activity except economic trade union work as something to be eliminated but by a proper union of such activities with our central task as an organization of struggle. "In certain Leagues, the initial efforts have been noticeable toward carrying out the decisions of the last Enlarged Executive with regard to supplementing our methods of work by means of greater satisfaction of the cultural needs of the young workers. This enrichment of working methods is to be welcomed. Despite the dangers which it brings with it (if its significance for the development of the League is overestimated, or if it is countered against the other battle methods of the Y. C. I.) it is and remains a vitally necessary complement to our methods for the winning and leading of the working youth. The formal schematic conception which hitherto predominated in our ranks and which stood hostile to all new forms of winning the masses must be energetically combated. Our Leagues are strong enough to try out and apply every meth-

od, every form of work on all fields of struggle in the fight for the youth, for their organization in our ranks, and for our leadership insofar as they are outside of our ranks. Every initiative in this field must be welcomed and carefully studied."

The other problems that confront the Y. C. I. and its various sections were also dealt with in the same manner, from the same standpoint, and the greater increase in activity, in membership and in influence will be the living proof of the correct solutions that the plenum made for these problems.

America at the Plenum.

For America, this plenum was especially important. It was important generally insofar as whatever has been said above of the necessity for broadening out the activities of the Leagues, for establishing a wider area of contact with the working youth and for developing more avenues of approach to them, for enriching the life of the League to make it possible to obtain and hold greater masses of young workers, applies with doubled emphasis to the American League, where we are only now fulfilling the first prerequisites for the development of a mass youth organization, where the great majority of the young workers are hostile to our program, aims and organization, and where the bourgeois organizations still hold almost undisputed sway. It was important, however, also for another reason. The present position of America as the ruling imperialist power of the world, and its increasing economic grip on the rest of the world, makes the Communist movement in this country of world importance, for it will have a tremendous role to play in the struggle against world imperialism. The Young Workers (Communist) League therefore received special attention at the plenum. The situation of the young workers in America was more thoroughly gone into than ever before. The work of the League was critically examined, its tasks were taken up in a realistic manner, and the work outlined for it is more concrete, and more in harmony with the conditions in America than ever before.

Tasks of the American League.

The Young Workers (Communist) League of America has some extremely difficult tasks before it. These tasks are even more difficult owing to the fact that the League itself is only recently coming into the position where it can successfully tackle the tremendous work that lies before it. In our country the task is not only to broaden the activities of the League thru the application of new methods, but just as much to really utilize the old methods of which only a beginning has been made. We must develop an organization capable of carrying out our tasks—old and new. At the same time we must make every effort to adopt

special methods for working among the American youth.

Already at the last convention of the League, these difficulties began to be evident. The convention declared that the League "is in no sense a mass organization" but the significance of these words was lost in the smoke of the factional struggle and the concrete measures for changing this situation were not even discussed. The plenum has strengthened this analysis, "We have in the United States a League which, due to its composition and activities is completely separated from the masses of the American young workers and is a sect, and therefore, does not comply with the requirements of a young workers' mass organization." Only by facing the facts, by looking realities in the face can we obtain solutions for our problems, and no amount of exaggeration or of picture painting can cover the sectarian nature of the League and the difficulties which it faces.

The Position of the Young Workers in America.

The fundamental task of the League is to set the young workers in motion. In the carrying out of this task it will be able to develop its own organization and influence. Without the beginning of movement in the direction of the working class struggle on the part of the young workers, the development of the Communist mass organization of the youth in America is impossible. America, the only country which emerged stronger as a result of the war, is at present enjoying the profits from the exploitation of millions of workers not merely within its own boundaries, and not merely in backward countries, but also in the so-called civilized countries like Germany, Italy, etc. As a result, capitalism is still powerful, still on the up-grade and still exerts an almost exclusive influence on the workers, especially on the young workers. The young workers, who have no experience in the class struggle, readily fall under the influence of the numerous bourgeois organizations, the tremendous state apparatus at the disposal of the capitalist class and every other means of influencing the minds of the workers that modern development makes possible, and which is still the monopoly of the capitalists. On the other hand, even in America, the young workers are the most exploited section of the working class, receive the lowest wages, work the longest hours and have the poorest conditions. No amount of bourgeois propaganda can do away with this fact. The tasks of the League, therefore, altho very difficult, are founded in objective conditions which lend themselves to our work. By proper utilization of our forces, by making use of every opportunity for strengthening our contact with the young workers, by initiative and elasticity in our work, by close adhesion to the line of the Y. C. I., will we be able

to overcome all difficulties and emerge triumphant.

This can be accomplished only thru activities that will set the young workers into action. Any step in this direction must be welcomed and it will be the duty of the League not to be the only organization to take this step, but to urge and work for other organizations to do so also. Especially important are broad representative youth conferences as well as campaigns for the unionization of the youth, into which the trade unions must be drawn. The organization of workers' sports, struggle against child labor, against militarism—all these must also be utilized for this purpose. The League will grow in the degree in which it succeeds in awakening the young workers out of their apathy and make them think as workers.

Discover America!

The League must strike out along new ways. It must become an American League, both in composition and in activity. We have had only too many experiences in the past to demonstrate to us the necessity for these steps. The tendency manifested by certain comrades only recently against the election of committees by youth conferences, a tendency that leads to the immediate reduction of these conferences to the Communists and their immediate sympathizers, is only one indication of the sectarianism which is still prevalent, even in the leading strata of the League. The failure of the League to react to important youth events in America, its lack of knowledge of the conditions of the young workers, its ignorance of the strength of its enemies are indications that the League is not an American League. It still has the task before it of "discovering America" politically.

On the question of the election of committees by youth conferences, the resolution on the American question is very emphatic. "Young Workers' Conferences shall be organized on an extensive manner. At these conferences, the election of committees shall not be neglected." And again, "The most important form of United Front tactics in the United States today is the organization of broad youth conferences and the election of committees thru them." Further, not only at general youth conferences, but also at trade union youth conferences, the election of committees is absolutely essential to gain the benefits of the conference. "Also the trade unions and Central Labor Councils shall be urged, particularly in connection with the unionization campaign, to organize youth conferences at which campaign committees shall be elected."

Greater Initiative!

Hitherto, the League has shown great reluctance to solve its problems on its own initiative, to adapt itself to the American conditions, and to broaden itself to become more attractive to

the young workers. The plenum emphasized, for all Leagues, but especially for the American League, which has problems so different from the problems of the other Leagues, the necessity for greater initiative, greater elasticity, and less fear of approaching the young workers. "The Young Workers' League must be a broad and open organization, accessible for all young workers. It must understand how to apply broad and flexible methods and forms in all activities." And further, "the League must show greater initiative in developing the special means of approach to the American young workers."

The League and the Party.

A word to the Party members and to the adult workers. The Comintern has laid down that a proper attitude toward the youth is one of the characteristics of a Bolshevik Party. Altho this has been recognized by all in theory, it has not yet been carried out in practice. The last plenum has again emphasized this matter. "The creation of a Party core in the League, and the attraction of Party members into active work among the youth remains the precondition to a correct relation with the Party." Altho the Social-Democrats have never had a proper attitude toward the youth and have in fact endeavored to exclude the young workers from the struggle, they have known how to maintain their hold on the young workers organizationally. Even at the present time, the S. P. in America is realizing the necessity for winning the youth and is making strenuous efforts to do so thru the unions, Workmen's Circle, etc. It is the duty of the Communists and left wingers to help draw the youth into the revolutionary movement, thus strengthening the struggle against the capitalists, and to build the organization of the revolutionary youth, the Young Workers' (Communist) League. The hold of the bourgeoisie on the youth must be broken, and the adult workers must use all their strength to help in this task.

Without doubt, for the American League, the last plenum has been one of the most important, if not the most important session of the Young Communist International. From this point on, the activities of the Young Workers' (Communist) League, if in line with the decisions made at this plenum, will take on a new form and the League will start on the road to becoming a mass organization of the Communist youth, worthy of taking its place besides its brother Leagues, especially the Leninist Young Communist League of the Soviet Union. It remains now for the comrades to throw themselves into the work, to drive the movement forward and to make these decisions levers for the conquest of the American working youth.