



# Revolt On The Campus

The Student Movement in the 1930's

by Tim Wohlforth

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## PREFACE

The wave of American student radicalism in the nineteen thirties was not a movement isolated from the international events of the period. On the contrary, the relationship was so intimate, if complex, that the successive international crises of the time serve as a demarcation of the several periods within the American youth movement of the decade.

At bottom a special responsiveness to world events and the seeking after generalizations by student youth in motion, stem not only from a daily absorption in learning, but also from a lack of immediate economic and personal responsibilities. Thus from their footloose and intermediate position students have been an outstanding "social barometer." However, this was never a simple, uniform expression.

In the Europe of the 1930's the combination of urgent political crises, background of bitter workingclass failures and the largely upper class origins of the student strata brought out their fascist potential, though substantial radical student formations were by no means absent. In the United States the right wing was stunted and the bulk of militant American students, along with the unemployed youth, were deeply moved by their bleak prospects in the long depression to identify with the labor struggles of the sit-down strikes and the rise of the CIO.

While the depression set the youth in motion, the goals of the student movement were shaped by the whole world context. The vanguard of the left wing students, organized into the socialist and communist youth leagues, carried into the broader movement their various orientations within the United States based on their interpretations of international events and of world motion as a whole.

The first great event after the onset of the depression was the fascist victory in Germany in 1933. Hitler came to power through a demonstrated incapacity and narrowness of the German Communist Party and the Communist International which was qualitatively comparable to that of the Social Democrats whose failings as workingclass leaders had been notorious beginning with their capitulation to the Kaiser's government in 1914.

Hard on Hitler's heels, the year 1934 featured the following - an abortive Socialist uprising in Spain, the riotous assault on the French government by fascists, and the victory in Austria of clerical fascism in armed struggle with the social-democratic lead workingclass. When these setbacks are taken into consideration it becomes understandable why a two-fold shift in the allegiance of the most militant and perceptive youth should be shown. There was a tendency to draw away from both the old Second and Third Internationals and, during this process, for growth and activity of left wings in the Second International parties whose less uniformly bureaucratic structures permitted expression at times for the extensive reevaluations going on. Thus the central task of the decade was set - the creation of a new, viable revolutionary international.

In the second half of the 1930's the Spanish Revolution and Civil War was the great rallying ground on which the international workingclass attempted to hurl back fascism. But this hope died as the intrigues of "liberal" capitalism abetted by Stalinism gradually choked off the revolution and returned Loyalist Spain to the old channels, while the bloodletting continued until 1939, when Stalin to facilitate signing the pact with Hitler, quickly closed out his Spanish "experiments."

History, as old Hegel was fond of saying, moves in spirals. The cycle from 1933-40 ended in a defeat. But the self-exhaustion of the capitalist-imperialist system through the Second World War, evidenced above all by the Chinese victory, shows the cycle of the 1960's, not at the same level as before, but a bit up the spiral. None-the-less, revolutionary Marxists can take no comfort from any view of some "automatic" decomposition of world imperialism giving victory to the working people. For another element in that very decomposition is summarized by the war threat of the imperialists, and with that threat its modern corollary - human annihilation on our planet - the ultimate decomposition.

The conscious, historically sophisticated, active intervention of the youth and workers of the metropolitan power-centers to put an end to imperialism is the urgent task of the epoch. And to this task, the Young Socialist Alliance is above all devoted.

BD & JR

NOTE ON THE COVER - the photograph shows the Student Peace Strike, April 1938, at Sather Gate, a center for student radical activities at the University of California at Berkeley. These rallies were nation-wide annual demonstrations.

## INTRODUCTION

The year 1960 may go down in the history of the American campus as the pre-natal period in the birth of a new student movement. Several thousand students have been engaged in activities such as anti-war demonstrations, civil rights protests, which cannot fail to recall similar actions of students on a far grander scale in the 1930's.

When one studies the student movement in the Thirties and then takes a fresh look at current student actions, these appear like the re-make of an old film. The actors are different and the color of the period contrasts, but the plot remains much the same. Re-making a film allows one to better, or for that matter worsen, the plot. A study of history allows participants in contemporary history at least the attempt to reshape current developments so that some of the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

The drama of the student movement in the 1930's could do with quite a bit of revision. It started with a bang in the period of 1932-34. It had a wonderful freshness and spirit to it; for the first time in American history students began to act on their own. Just as the movement was beginning to build up strength its leadership proved inadequate. It adapted the student movement to society rather than channeling the militant spirit of the student in the direction of changing society. The final act was an abysmal flop as the students of the 30's marched off to fight another War-to-end-all-Wars with the American Communists and right-wing socialists cheering from the sidelines.

We undertook the effort to bring the story of the student movement of the 1930's to the attention of the new generation of young radicals in the hope that an understanding of the successes and failures of American students in the 1930's can lead to even greater successes today. This work is written for and dedicated to the American students who kept vigil all night before the State of California murdered Caryl Chessman; who were washed down the steps of the San Francisco Court House the day the Un-American boys came to town; who were carted away from the New York City Hall Park in paddy wagons during the civil defense drill; and above all to the students who were corralled, beaten and jailed for asking for "a cup of coffee and a seat" in a Southern dime store. They will understand this story for it deals with people like them in another period. We hope it will be of some help to them in the student struggles to come.

--Tim Wohlforth  
National Chairman,  
Young Socialist Alliance  
September 16, 1960

## THE BIRTH OF RADICALISM

### The American Campus of the 1920's

We are all quite familiar with the images conjured up by phrases such as "The Roaring 20's" and "The Jazz Age". No doubt the average American student didn't live quite as wild a life as American movies would have us think. Surely there were students who didn't wear raccoon coats; some may not have even owned a flask or known how to Charleston. But this clichéd and romantized view of the student in the 1920's does have a certain element of truth to it.

The students in the 1920's were by and large personally oriented, seeking little more than their own personal advancement in a society that seemed to have been specially constructed to make their advancement easy. The college student came by and large from an upper income family and was not, therefore, motivated by the intense drive to get ahead that affects so many lower income students today. He was ahead to start with. Politics was to him a dirty business, to be left to professionals of lesser import than himself. It was certainly the last thing to occupy his mind.

Within this general environment of self-centeredness and apathy toward politics and broader social issues, there did exist a minor current of students who were politically interested. These included the liberals in the Intercollegiate Liberal League. This organization, which was mainly concerned with the entrance of the U.S. into the League of Nations, later merged with the National Student Committee for the Limitation of Armaments which published the New Student. This magazine, very much under the influence of H. L. Mencken, viewed the students as an intellectual élite above social class which would better society through their superior intellects.

Another important political group in this period was the famous Intercollegiate Socialist Society which in an earlier period was associated with such persons as Jack London and Upton Sinclair. In the later 1920's this group became the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID). The politics of the bulk of the socialists of this period also reflected the general atmosphere on the campus--an atmosphere which dominated all sections of the middle classes. Their political interest tended to be abstracted from reality--to have an abstract and utopian character to it. Socialism was presented as an interesting way to run society, rather than as the program of a social class struggling for power. Emphasis was on discussion rather than on involvement in society and on action. Even the radical student remained aloof from the working class, infected at times with the liberal's conception of students as a sort of intellectual élite.

There were occasional outbursts of activity on the campuses, especially in response to repressive actions of the administration, but there was no real campus movement in this period.

The attitude of the students in the 1920's on war is quite indicative of the outlook of even the best students. Nearly everyone opposed war, but the issue did not have any burning immediacy to it. The students felt that there

was no real threat of war and that intelligent people certainly would never again go to war. Some students were active in liberal efforts supporting the League of Nations. Outside this, most anti-war activity was channelled into the individualistic moral, and religious approach of the pacifists. There were several instances of pacifists refusing on grounds of conscience to participate in ROTC and there was widespread sympathy for them. But there was no concept of any sort of mass student action against war--certainly no concept of linking the student struggle with the workers in a serious campaign to end war through the victory of socialism. Rebellion on this as on all other issues remained personal, sporadic and out of touch with the rest of American society.

In this sense the campus of the 20's seems familiar to anyone who knew the campus of the 50's with the important difference that the world of the 20's--at least to the extent it affected the United States--gave far greater credence to the apathy of the students than did the world of the Chinese Revolution and the Korean War.

### 1932--The Beginning of the Change

The beginning of the Depression in 1929 brought no sharp change in the atmosphere on the campus. The American student, even more than the population as a whole, was stunned by the crash and refused to believe that anything had really changed. He continued along with most Americans to believe sincerely that "prosperity was just around the corner" and to look on the Depression as a sort of personal crisis rather than the shaking of the very foundations of capitalist society.

It took until 1932 for the impact of the depression to sink in--and once it had sunk in the American student was never quite the same again. The student faced the same crisis that affected the middle class as a whole except it hit him harder than it did any other section of his class and he hit back harder in response. The world was no longer created specifically for his own advancement. Instead he faced the prospect of completing his education, if he could afford to stay in school, only to go onto the breadline. There were few jobs available and older people held on to almost all of them. James Wechsler summed it up in this fashion:

Before it (capitalism) died that system was to destroy--had already begun to destroy--the 'privilege' illusion of the student. He was to return to the ranks of ordinary citizens, increasingly subject to the ills of an order whose decline would accelerate an ancient conflict between those who own and those who work. And in that struggle the vast majority of students, the sons of a sinking middle class, would find themselves steadily propelled into the camp of the dispossessed. (James Wechsler, Revolt on the Campus (New York, 1935) p. 96).

As part of its inheritance from the middle-class radicalism of the 1920's, there existed on the campus in 1931 and early 1932 only one radical organization--the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID). This organization, while beginning to show signs of growth at this time, was ideologically very much a part of the past. It had no orientation that would help it meet the

problems that the student faced in the Depression. It was, however, going to undergo an evolution and to play an important role in campus politics. The main political force in the organization was the Young People's Socialist League, youth group of the Socialist Party, and SLID can be looked upon as the student arm of the YPSL.

By 1932 the Communist Party youth, the Young Communist League, was beginning to gain influence on a few important campuses. It led a split from SLID, forming the New York Students League and a few months later in 1932, the National Students League. In 1932 the CP was still in its "Third Period" of ultra-radicalism during which it considered the SP to be "social fascist." The split in SLID was an expression on the youth level of this policy.

The National Students League was to the YCL what the SLID was to the YPSL. It was the student arm of the YCL. It was basically the organization of Communist students and those students who looked to the Communist students for leadership. Little effort was made, especially in the earlier period, to disassociate the NSL from its connections with the CP. This, rather than hindering the NSL, was to help it. In 1932, Communism, even of the Stalinist variety, was quite an attractive alternative to the collapse of capitalism.

The left line of the CP was also a help to the NSL. The more grotesque elements of the CP line in this period seemed to play a somewhat less important role in its campus work, while the genuine radical sentiments of many of the young Communists of this period--their sincere attachment to the working class and to the Soviet Union--allowed the CP youth to function in a militant fashion on the campus at a time when the students were in need of militant leadership.

It was in fact during these early radical years of the YCL that they recruited their best and most loyal members who were to stick to the CP through the days of the building of the CIO, the war period and many of them right down to the crisis engendered by the Hungarian Revolution and the Russian 20th Congress.

The CP's ability to play an important role in the organization of the CIO, a role which gave it an influential position in the trade union movement for many years to come, can be largely attributed to its recruitment of a young cadre out of the early NSL period. Many a former NSL activist at CCNY or the University of Chicago or Cal was to turn up in a later period as an important trade union organizer or official. Many of the recruits of the later right-wing period did not last long once the CP-liberal honeymoon broke up.

### Pilgrimage to Kentucky

The first really important action of the National Students League was its famous Pilgrimage to Kentucky. The concept was a simple and dramatic one--it was timed just right and it was to catch the imagination of the American student and fire it in a way no similar event in the past had done.

In Harlan County, Kentucky, 15,000 miners led by the National Miners Union were on strike against coal operators who were fronting for some of the biggest capitalists in the U.S. The strike was bloody and Harlan County was being run under the martial law of the operators through the "legal" form of Sheriff's deputies. In the meantime the miners were facing literal starvation.

The NSL proposed that the American students should at least find out what was going on in Kentucky. It suggested that a pilgrimage of representative students of all political persuasions take buses to Harlan County, interview the miners and operators and report their findings back to their fellow students. On March 23rd, 1932, the first bus left the Columbia University campus headed for Kentucky. These students left the isolated ivory tower campuses of middle class America to come face to face with reality--not in a textbook--but at the border of Kentucky.

At Cumberland Gap, the mountain pass into Kentucky, the full impact of Kentucky law and order descended. The road was almost black when the bus turned the corner over the boundary; out of the approaching night the scowling faces of a mob of more than 200 people greeted the visitors. Cars drove up and surrounded the bus; most of the throng were armed, wearing badges of deputy sheriffs. District Attorney Smith and Attorney Cleon Calvert strode into the bus and proceeded to fire provocative questions without waiting for answers. When a student sought to address the crowd to explain the peaceful purpose of the delegation, he found that his auditors had been incited too intensely before the arrival to heed any reason. There were derisive cat-calls, then the ominous lynch-cry: "String 'em up." (ibid. p. 101)

The students were taken to a nearby courthouse under armed guard, they were denied the right to get a lawyer, and then in the morning they were escorted out of the state.

With the crowd inflamed to the point of mob action, the students were driven out of the courthouse, pushed into their bus and forcibly propelled down the road whence they had come. They were admittedly fortunate to escape. The return journey was accompanied by an enforced escort of two attorneys and three armed deputies; one of the deputies twisted a girl's arm until it almost broke for 'disobeying orders!'; when another student sought to intercede, he was knocked down by another guardian of order--who drew a revolver. A third official--dead drunk--stood in the back waving a pistol around and declaiming: "What I say goes in Kentucky. I would as soon shoot now a United States Marshall between the eyes as I shot Germans in the war." (ibid. p. 103)

The other buses were headed off and never got near Kentucky. Appeals by the students to the Governors of Kentucky and Tennessee, needless to say, got nowhere.

The pilgrimage symbolized the journey a section of the American students were to traverse. The isolated campus of the 1920's was gone and its utopian world with it. The American student could no longer remain isolated from his society. He had either to travel the road of the Kentucky pilgrims seeking to link himself with the growing working class movement or

else ally himself openly with the capitalist class and its agents--be they drunk or sober. That so many students took the former road is a credit to the generation of the 30's and a good portent for the future.

The image of drunken deputies barring inquiring students from even entering one of the states of this "democratic" country had a profound impact on many students. Editorials of protest were written in campus papers from coast to coast. Students in the Midwest area were soon to organize their own pilgrimage to the Illinois coal fields and to meet with a similar reaction.

The NSL played a key role in another event that was to rock American campuses from coast to coast--the Reed Harris expulsion and the Columbia strike. One can look upon the Kentucky Pilgrimage as an anticipation of the radical student activity of the 1930's while the Reed Harris Affair was the actual beginning.

### The Reed Harris Strike

Reed Harris was a fighting liberal--clearly not a radical--who was editor of the Columbia University Spectator. He editorialized in the Spectator on the issues that were at that time stirring campus liberals; compulsory ROTC, the Kentucky Pilgrimage, etc. And then he touched an issue, possibly not as earth-shattering as the others, which came too close to home for the Columbia administration--the cafeteria in John Jay Hall. He accused the administration of running the cafeteria for profit rather than for the good of the student body.

Immediately the Dean expelled him from the University. The reaction on campus was instantaneous and the local chapter of the NSL took advantage of it. It rallied 4,000 students from New York City colleges to a mass meeting on the library steps. At this meeting it was decided to go on strike and more than 75 per cent of the Columbia student body--some 1,400 students--went out on strike.

This bold move, the first student strike in the postwar period, electrified the American campus. The strike was supported by students on campuses across the country and it served as a model to students everywhere for militant action. The student strike was to far outlive the particular individual around whom it was first used--a liberal who never again played an important role in this country.

## STUDENTS VS. WAR

### At the Beginning it was ROTC

No issue was to stir American students more during the 1930's than the issue of war. The students quite naturally resented any plans which included their use as cannon fodder in a future war. Students not only resented war but they felt it was possible for them in some fashion or other to prevent war from occurring. True, many of the students had a liberal conception that war would somehow be prevented by the League of Nations or by disarmament commissions (illusions which the CP today still spreads); true, many other students had a pacifist ideology, seeing in their own refusal to fight the way out of war. But tens of thousands were opposed to war and many of them were willing to fight against those who were seeking to perpetrate war. It is in this latter respect that the student of the 30's differed from the student of the 20's.

Let us see the extent of anti-war sentiments during this period. A poll conducted in 1933 at Columbia University produced the following results: 31 per cent of Columbia students considered themselves absolute pacifists; 52 per cent said they would bear arms only in case of the invasion of the United States; while only eight per cent were willing to fight under any circumstances. (George Rawick, New Deal and Youth, PHD Thesis (University of Wisconsin, 1957) p. 282). A poll of seventy colleges, conducted in 1933, revealed that 39 per cent of students would not participate in any war and another 33 per cent would only fight if the U.S. were invaded. (ibid. p. 282)

The first form that anti-war activity was to take was agitation for the abolition of compulsory ROTC. The requirement of land grant colleges and some other institutions that all students must attend two years of ROTC has been a thorn in the side of students since its institution. During the 1920's ROTC was fought largely by individual pacifists through abstention from drills. Thus no widespread movement was created around this issue.

In the 1930's ROTC agitation began to take on a mass action character. No longer did students simply rely on individual abstention; no longer were only pacifist students involved. Large sections of the student population began to move in opposition to ROTC as a symbol of the role of militarism on the campus. Many of those active in this campaign may have lacked a clear idea of what they were fighting--that by opposing ROTC they were opposing the capitalist system. Through ROTC the rulers of America attempt to indoctrinate youth in militaristic and patriotic ideas so as to make them pliable should capitalism need to go to war to protect its world economic interests. But thousands of students did react to the immediate manifestation of militarism and they wanted no part of it.

Mass protest campaigns were held on a number of campuses. At the University of Minnesota, for example, over 1,500 students participated in a mass demonstration opposing ROTC held on the same day as the annual ROTC review. Mass protests forced the University of Wisconsin to abolish compulsory ROTC and it was able to reinstate it once more only in the war period. Throughout the 1930's virtually every anti-war conference or demonstration was to advocate the abolition of ROTC--at least until 1938 when the YCL stabbed the anti-ROTC movement in the back!

## The Pledge from Oxford

In the middle of February 1933 after a stormy session at the Oxford Union at the famous British University, the undergraduates voted 275 to 153 that "This House will not fight for King and Country in any war". What would seem on the surface to be just another formal debate in a highly conservative institution turned out to be an action that had repercussions among students in almost all countries of the world. Within a few weeks the Oxford Pledge spread to most other British colleges and was adopted by the student bodies with large majorities. Simultaneously with its spread through Britain it was picked up in the United States and college papers throughout the country commented on it.

The Pledge itself was simple enough. It declared that those who signed the pledge would not go to war for their country. It was supported by a broad array of forces. Some were pacifists and therefore refused to go to war for any country. Others were liberals who had no worked out views on war but were sure that under no conditions could they participate in another "patriotic" war like the last one. A small but important number of participants and initiators of the Pledge movement were socialists who refused to support the war policies of their capitalist government. The Oxford Pledge movement allowed socialist students to engage in a broad anti-war action with non-socialist students and in the course of the action to point out the need for the anti-war movement to take on a socialist orientation if it was to become successful. A student movement, even of the massive size of the Oxford Pledge movement, could not prevent war, the socialists felt. It could only mobilize the students in an anti-war action and thereby educate many of these students.

War, socialists hold, is conducted by capitalist governments to gain concrete national economic ends. To put an end to war, it is necessary to abolish the social system that breeds war and replace it with a socialist society. This can only be done by the working class. Therefore, the only way the student anti-war struggle could be victorious, according to the socialist view, is through linking the student struggle with the working class struggles. (See: Shane Mage, Fight Against War, Young Socialist Educational Bulletin #4, 1960).

The Oxford Pledge not only received editorial support in American college newspapers; on campus after campus the students followed the lead of the British students and declared their support to the Pledge. The Oxford Pledge was to become, along with the demand to abolish compulsory ROTC, a regular feature of all student anti-war activity in this period.

## Conference and Strikes

During December of 1932 more than 600 delegates from colleges all over the country assembled at Mandel Hall on the University of Chicago campus to attend what was to be the first of a never-ending series of anti-war conferences that was to plague (or bless, depending on your viewpoint) the student anti-war movement in the 1930's. The Chicago Conference was called by the NSL but representation was quite broad including sizable contingents of liberals, pacifists, YPSLs and some Trotskyist youth (Spartacus Youth League).

The political line of the Chicago Conference was quite important for it was to dominate the anti-war movement in large part until 1936. Basically this line was based on a Stalinist-pacifist bloc which had its reflection internationally in the Barbusse Amsterdam Anti-War Conference.

The general approach was one of emphasizing an all-class anti-war movement which would force all governments to relinquish war as a method of solving their differences. Such a line fitted in with the desire at the time of the USSR bureaucracy to be left alone by all capitalist nations while it proceeded with its forced march five-year plans. This attitude was to change shortly to one of seeking an alliance with one of the imperialist blocs of nations against the other. This change was to have a grave impact on the American anti-war movement. But for the moment the USSR encouraged this sort of vague multi-class anti-war activity.

At this conference the Spartacus Youth League members as well as some dissident YPSLs and YCLers attacked this program, pointing out that peace could only be achieved through the struggle of the working class against the capitalist class whose policies were leading us to war. They attacked the vague classless verbiage and sought to stiffen the formulations of the resolutions. The Trotskyist youth claimed that this reliance for the prevention of war upon movements not oriented to the working class flowed from Stalin's concept of socialism in one country and his desertion of the world revolution.

The Chicago program had, of course, its positive elements--it opposed ROTC, it was militant in spirit, it even contained vague, guarded references to capitalism and imperialism as the cause of war. Later the Chicago Conference forces were to support the Oxford Pledge and to take the leadership in the peace strike movement. It was these more progressive features of their program that were to be scuttled after 1935 by the Stalinists.

On April 13, 1934, the first nationwide student peace strike was held. Students were to leave classes from 11 a.m. to 12 noon and hold mass meetings to declare their support to the Oxford Pledge and their opposition to war. The strike was called jointly by the NSL and SLID.

Twenty-five thousand students responded to the strike call throughout the country--some 10,000 from New York campuses alone. The strike was the most militant of those conducted throughout the Thirties and for this reason the most effective even though future strikes were to be larger. The political line that dominated the strike was that of the Chicago Conference though the strike locally tended to take on the coloration of whatever forces organized it. The strike also elicited a strong counter response from the capitalists through the college administrations and through the daily papers which were quite shook up by the development. In the institutions which the capitalists had endowed and which they ran through the boards of trustees in order to ensure the creation of a new generation of capitalists, the students were actually flaunting the basic patriotic ideology of the capitalists.

Wechsler gives us a little of the color of the strike:

...Their spectacular, colorful, and dynamic qualities will not soon be forgotten. In 1934 undergraduates at Springfield planted

white crosses on the campus on the eve of the walkout to commemorate the betrayal of 1917. At Vassar a throng of girls marched behind impressive placards declaring, not some illusion-tinged ode to peace, but "We Fight Imperialist War." Several weeks before the demonstration, students at the University of Washington hired a truck, draped it with appropriate jingoist placards and joined the Army Day parade sponsored by the American Legion. As the procession reached the center of Seattle, the students suddenly reversed their placards; on the other side were appeals to "Fight Against War." Legionnaires attacked the students, hurling them from the trucks; police arrived to arrest the victims of the attack. But the episode had served its purpose." (Wechsler, op. cit. p. 176).

In 1935 another strike was held and this time 175,000 students came out with some 30,000 from New York City alone. But by this time the political impact of the strike movement was lessened by the Stalinist search for broadness. A process of evolution had begun that was to kill the strike movement--with success.

#### AMERICAN STUDENT UNION AND THE AMERICAN YOUTH CONGRESS

##### Birth of the American Student Union

During 1934 and 1935 the two nationwide radical student organizations, SLID and NSL, worked hand in hand on almost every issue which came up. These two organizations encompassed between them most active radical and liberal students on American campuses. There did exist another national student organization--the National Student Federation. This was a semi-official organization similar to the National Students Association of today and like the NSA it was ineffectual and had no real influence on the campus. If something happened on an American campus it was one of the two radical student groups, or both together, that was behind it.

The organizations were not large; but then the student population in the 1930's was only a fraction of what it is today and these organizations tended to be composed of the activist element on the campus. At the time of the merger of the two groups, SLID claimed 2,700 members and the NSL claimed 3,000 members. The NSL membership was "harder" than the SLID membership and the NSL was a far more influential body on campus than SLID--far more than the slightly larger membership would indicate. The unity of the two groups in late 1935 was the product of the political evolution of the motive forces of the two groups--the YCL and the YPSL.

The social democratic youth in the YPSL were not satisfied with the vague reformist program of the SP. The times called for a truly radical Marxist solution to the problems the working class faced. By 1934 the YPSL leadership was politically evolving away from the SP, first in the direction of the CP, and later to the left of the CP in the direction of the Trotskyists.

At the same time the CP and its youth were also in evolution away from their Third Period radicalism towards the popular front. This evolution first took the form of an orientation toward united action with the SP. It was later to by-pass the SP and rush into the arms of FDR.

The unity of the SLID and NSL occurred when the two forces, moving in opposite directions, temporarily found themselves in the same political spot. The unity convention was held Christmas week 1935 in Columbus, Ohio. There were three major bones of contention at the conference; the attitude the proposed organization would take towards the USSR, affiliation with the American League Against War and Fascism, and the Oxford Pledge. The first two issues involved resistance on the part of SLID members to too close an identity with the CP. A compromise formulation on the character of the USSR as a "non-imperialist country" was agreed on and it was decided not to affiliate with the League, which was closely identified with the CP.

At issue in the Oxford Pledge dispute was the evolution of the CP. In 1935 the CP was in the process of moving from its bloc with pacifism to an alignment with the "democratic" capitalist countries against the Axis through a policy of "collective security." It was therefore seeking to dump as quietly as possible the entire anti-war movement. This was expressed in 1935 through an attempt to prevent endorsement of the Pledge. However, a motion of support to the Oxford Pledge, introduced by Hal Draper who was to become a leader of the Trotskyist YPSL-Fourth, was passed. The CP youth who soon gained control of the merged organization proceeded to ignore the Pledge in actual fact for the next two years.

Shortly after its formation the YCL forces were able to get a working majority on most issues in the leading bodies of the American Student Union. It accomplished this because of the politically superior character of its cadres in the merged organization which gave it a natural edge over the YPSL forces and through the winning over of several SLID leaders, most notably Joseph Lash (today of the New York Post-edited by ex-NSLer James Wechsler), to its popular front point of view. The future history of the ASU was to be largely dependent on the political evolution of the CP.

### American Youth Congress--What it really was

We come now to the strangest organization of all--The American Youth Congress. This was not a strictly student organization; rather it sought to be the representative organ of all young people in the U.S.

The original organizer of the AYC was a strange person by the name of Viola Ilma. She was one of those quixotic persons in the Thirties whose vision of the ideal society was one run by a YMCA secretary with whip in hand. Thus her early affinity was toward Mussolini and fascism. She later became enamoured with FDR--possibly noting the not entirely superficial resemblances between the New Deal bureaucracy and that of Hitler and Mussolini.

In any event, in 1935, with the unofficial backing of the Administration she called a youth congress open to all to be held in Washington, D.C. She was clearly hoping to turn the youth congress into a youth movement in

support of the New Deal. Up to this time the New Deal had no real youth organization supporting its program.

A rather broad array of youth workers turned up for the conference representing most religious, labor, and political youth organizations in the country. But from the opening session, the conference was under the control of the YCL-YPSL caucus. The YCL and YPSL were represented not only through their official representatives; they also influenced many of the YFCA secretaries and religious youth group leaders. This forced Viola Ilma to bolt her own conference and to go back to the obscurity she so richly deserved.

The general tenor of the American Youth Congress in those days was quite radical. Several anti-Roosevelt resolutions were passed, the trade union movement was supported, and the AYC adopted an anti-war position similar to that of the American Student Union. The AYC, rather than being a representative spokesman of youth in general, became a coalition of left-wing youth formed to put pressure on the Administration to do something to help American youth. As a representative of youth in general it could say nothing, for young people have little more in common than their biological state. But as a militant spokesman for working class youth, for unemployed youth, for minority youth, for students, there was much it could say and did say.

A good deal of the AYC's activity in the ensuing years was to focus around lobbying for an American Youth Act. The original Bill was quite militant and served as a way of uniting working class youth and students in a joint project which pitted them against the New Deal Administration. Here are, in summary, the major points of the first Bill drawn up by the AYC in 1935:

- 1) A government sponsored system of vocational training and employment on public enterprises for those between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. The wages were to be 'equal to the prevailing rates for the work performed as established by the recognized organizations of labor in each community,' and should not be less than \$15 per week plus \$3 for each dependent;

- 2) A government sponsored system of supporting students; all tuition plus average weekly living expenses of needy students in high schools and vocational schools--the minimum was to be \$15 per month plus fees;

- 3) The establishment of a 'system of regular employment on college projects for the purpose of providing regular wages for needy undergraduate and graduate students in colleges. These projects shall be of academic nature in accordance with the educational purposes of the institutions of higher learning'. These jobs should be paid at prevailing wages, but should be no less than \$25 per month;

- 4) The minimum compensation shall be increased in conformity with the rise in the cost of living;

5) The Act to be administered by youth commissions, composed one-third of representatives of youth organizations, one-third of organized labor, and one-third of local social service, education and consumers' organizations;

6) All the work projects authorized under the act to be beneficial to the community, and none of them shall be 'directly or indirectly of a military character or designed to subsidize any private profit-making enterprise'; there is to be no discrimination because of nativity, sex, race, color, religious or political opinion, or trade union activity;

7) Taxation needed for the Act 'shall be levied on inheritance, gifts, and individual and corporation incomes of \$5,000 a year or over.' (Rawick, op. cit., pp. 325-27).

Needless to say the Bill was never enacted, though it was supported in Congress by various Farmer-Labor members and by some left-wing New Dealers. It was given full Congressional hearings twice and was the focal point of a lot of national activity on the part of AYC and affiliated groups.

The American Youth Congress claimed at one point to represent "4,000,000 American youth" but this figure was obtained by adding up the memberships of all groups officially or unofficially represented at their congresses. A more meaningful figure was the 4,000 it was able to mobilize in Washington in 1937 to lobby for the Youth Act and the several thousand it was able to mobilize for other conferences and activities. This was a rather presentable figure for it reflected a body of youth leaders who did have considerable influence among young people.

The AYC, as we have noted, was under the domination of a YCL-YPSL caucus from its very inception and therefore underwent the same political evolution as the American Student Union. By a series of stages over the 1935-1938 period the Young Communist League became the dominant force in the AYC and the YPSL dropped by the wayside. In both groups effective control of the organizational apparatus by the YCL came quite soon after the organizations' formation. But it took a good deal longer to remove oppositional elements from membership or even to be sure that oppositional combinations could not get resolutions passed at congresses. In general, the political evolution of the AYC can be taken along with the political evolution of the ASU as a manifestation of the evolution of the CP.

#### AYC and ASU on the Run

Beginning in 1934 and reaching a fever pitch by 1938 the CP changed its basic political line through the development of what is called the Popular Front. The Soviet Union had long since given up a perspective of relying on the working-class revolution in the Western countries as the way to defend the USSR. The country was controlled by an authoritarian bureaucracy which didn't even trust its own workers, not to mention banking on the working class of other countries. It sought to work out a modus vivendi with the capitalist powers and to subordinate the CP's throughout the world to this task.

With the advent of Hitler to power in Germany and the perspective of a possible utilization of Hitler by the capitalists to smash the USSR, the Soviet Union attempted to develop an alliance with Hitler's enemies--mainly England, France, and the U.S. In order to achieve this, Stalin subordinated those working class movements in these countries over which he had any influence to the liberal capitalist elements. In France this led to the Popular Front Government which, for the sake of ties with Britain, refused to come to the aid of the Spanish Republic.

In the United States the CP policy was to orient more and more in the direction of support to Roosevelt and the New Deal. As we have already noted in our discussion of the NSL-SLID unity, this led to a break from the previous anti-war agitation of the CP. In the youth field this had a disastrous effect. The YCL was undoubtedly the dominant radical force on the American campus in the 1930's and a change in its line had repercussions on a host of organizations and activities.

As early as 1935 the YCL attempted to dump the Oxford Pledge from the official program of the ASU. From 1935 to 1937 the Oxford Pledge played little or no role in the activity of the ASU. The Pledge was effectively dropped through the refusal of the ASU national leadership to activate it. In 1937 after a fight by Hal Draper and others in the YPSL to retain the Oxford Pledge, it was officially dropped by the ASU and a pro-collective security position adopted.

A similar evolution affected the peace strike movement. The militant peace strike was turned into a series of mass "peace meetings" which began to parrot the FDR collective security line. With this political change the peace strike became, rather than a fighting mass demonstration suppressed by the administration and red-baited by the press, a respectable event in which many university presidents participated. In fact in Minnesota the Farmer-Labor Administration declared a school holiday on the day of the peace strike. This explains the figures of 500,000 for the 1936 "strike" and one million for the 1937 one.

As the last blow the ASU actually went so far in 1938 as to give up its opposition to compulsory ROTC--~~that basic minimum of anti-war policy.~~ The evolution of the AYC on the war question roughly paralleled that of the ASU. However the war question was never as crucial to the AYC as it was to the campus-based ASU.

The evolution of the AYC shows clearly the complete about-face of the CP in its attitude toward the New Deal. As late as 1935 the AYC expressed a highly critical attitude toward the New Deal. However, during 1936 and 1937 the AYC was transformed into an ersatz New Deal youth organization. It worked hand and glove with Aubrey Williams of the National Youth Administration and devoted much time to constant luncheons with Cabinet members, the President, and above all the guardian angel of the AYC, Mrs. Roosevelt. It watered down the provisions of its American Youth Act so as not to embarrass the Administration. Rather than fighting the Administration it became a transmission belt to young people for the New Deal's pro-capitalist ideology.

During this honeymoon period the AYC came to be looked upon as a semi-official governmental agency in the youth field. Roosevelt and Williams

devoted a good deal of energy trying to bring the Catholic youth into reconciliation with the AYC, for FDR depended heavily on the Democratic city machine Catholic vote. It was not the objections of the YCLers that prevented this "unity" but rather the rigidity of the Catholic hierarchy who were not willing to cooperate with anyone when it came to indoctrinating the youth.

Along with these political changes in the ASU and AYC came a change in the spirit of the organizations. They began to lose their militancy and fighting spirit. The ASU of 1938 could never have sent a pilgrimage of students to the Kentucky coalfields or have led a strike of students against the administration as at Columbia. It could only meekly beg for crumbs at the table of capitalist Roosevelt. Bruce Bliven gives us this account of an ASU convention in 1939, an account the reader would do well to contrast with Wechsler's picture of the Kentucky Pilgrimage quoted earlier:

Their enthusiasm reached its peak at the jamboree in the huge jumbo jai-alai auditorium of the Hippodrome (seating capacity 4,500) which was filled to its loftiest tier. There were a quintet of white-flanneled cheer leaders; a swing band and shaggers doing the Campus Stomp ('. . .everybody's doing it, ASUing it')--confetti. There were ASU feathers and buttons, a brief musical comedy by the Mob Theatre and pretty ushers in academic caps and gowns. All the trappings of a big game rally were present and the difference was that they were cheering, not the Crimson to beat the Blue, but Democracy to beat Reaction. To me, it bordered just alongside the phoney. (Bruce Bliven, "Citizens of Tomorrow", New Republic, Jan. 11, 1939)

The same phoney "all-American feller" type of approach can be seen in this quote from the University of Wisconsin's Young Communist League Bulletin:

Some people have the idea that a YCLer is politically minded, that nothing outside of politics means anything. Gosh, no. They have a few simple problems. There is the problem of getting good men on the baseball team this spring, of opposition from other ping-pong teams, of dating girls, etc. We go to shows, parties, dances, and all that. In short, the YCL and its members are no different from other people except that we believe in dialectical materialism as the solution to all problems. (quoted in Challenge of Youth, Vol. II, No. 6, June, 1939).

So went the YCL--from militant fighters against injustice to a bunch of fun-loving dialectical ping-pong players!

### Final Flip-Flop

No account of the AYC is complete without mention of its final evolution. In 1939 with the signing of the Stalin-Hitler Pact the AYC made its final flip-flop, back to opposition to the Roosevelt Administration. The New Deal honeymoon was over--at least the marriage partners were temporarily estranged. The American Youth Congress suddenly found that Roosevelt was a war monger (which he was), that the New Deal was capitalist to the core, if not outright fascist, and that the AYC must fight against conscription.

The YCL faction within the AYC was able to carry the organization on all these issues and for a brief weird period the AYC went on a radical bent. The effect of the Stalin-Hitler Pact on the ASU was identical.

It was of course not surprising that the AYC made this flip-flop as it had been under dominant CP influence since 1937; it was also not surprising that some of its leaders like Joe Lash and James Wechsler took this opportunity to fly the coop. What was really surprising was that the CP carried many of the non-CP activists along with it and that the AYC remained basically intact. This tended to prove the ersatz character of the AYC's New Dealism: the fact that in reality it always was an organization of radical youth though during most of its existence it pretended to be something else. It was precisely this radicalism, grotesquely distorted though it was, rather than the liberal veneer that gave the AYC what vitality it did have.

### REVOLUTIONARY YOUTH MOVEMENT

#### The Spartacus Youth League

Revolutionary Marxist politics have always had a special attraction for young people. Youth tend to be freer from all the ideological and economic bonds that conservatize even the most revolutionary class in capitalist society--the working class. At every critical stage in the history of the world socialist movement when revolutionary Marxism has been threatened, the youth have always played a decisive role in defense of these ideas. During World War I it was the youth movement of the West European social democracies that refused to go along with the betrayal of the leadership which supported the war policies of their governments. The youth movements played an important role in the building of the fledgling Communist Parties in the immediate postwar period and many of the national leaders of the Communist Parties were recent graduates of the social democratic youth movements. (See History of the International Socialist Youth Movement--to 1929, Young Socialist Educational Bulletin # 3, 1959).

In this country the Young Workers League, and later the Young Communist League, was created partially out of the SP's YPSL. Throughout the 1920's it drew into its organization many young people out of the YPSL, as well as many new people. While the Communist Party youth did not in the period of the 1920's play a significant role on the American campus, they did keep alive Marxist ideas among some young people.

In 1928 a small group of Communists under the leadership of James P. Cannon, Martin Abern, and Max Shachtman were expelled from the CP for their support of Leon Trotsky and the policies of the Russian Left Opposition. This group opposed the degeneration of the Russian Revolution which, like the betrayal of the social democracy in World War I, threatened revolutionary Marxism. This degeneration had led to the bureaucratization of the USSR and the betrayal by Stalin of the international struggle for socialism under the motto of "Socialism in One Country." James P. Cannon had been an active CP leader, enjoying, along with William Z. Foster, support among

the trade unionists in the Party. Shachtman and Abern had both been important leaders in the CP youth organization.

From the very beginning this small group of Trotskyists attracted support among young people, especially dissidents within the Young Communist League. However, the building of an actual youth organization was a slow process as the Left Opposition forces in the United States were quite small.

In 1932 the Communist League of America (as the Opposition was then called) was able to gather together enough young people to start on a provisional basis the Spartacus Youth League and its paper the Young Spartacus. The Young Spartacus was quite a good newspaper and remains of interest to this day. It contained a considerable amount of highly political articles aimed at reaching YCL militants with its views. It followed the political evolution of the YCL and other radical youth groups closely, noting the effect of the CP's ultra-leftist Third Period line on the YCL. It sought time and time again to fuse the radical forces in action through united fronts--a proposal that was always rejected by the YCL, which was more concerned with beating up SYLers than working with them in common action.

Despite the hostility of the YCL leadership it is quite clear from the pages of the Young Spartacus that its campaign had an effect. Reports were published of small groups of YCLers who broke from the Young Communist League to join the SYL. Even with its limited forces the Spartacus Youth League was able at least to make its presence known to many of the YCL cadre. That it did not make heavier inroads into the YCL was due to the ultra-leftist line of the CP. This line covered up the real policies of the CP and gave the CP a radical coloration. The political impact of the critique of Stalinist policies by the Trotskyist youth was to have a greater effect in the later period of Stalinist popular front tactics than in this period.

Another feature of the Young Spartacus was its emphasis on educating the youth in the traditions of the international Marxist movement. Many articles were written on the history of the early socialist youth movements, on the views of such working-class heroes as Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and V. I. Lenin. Outside the ranks of the revolutionary youth little or nothing was known of the traditions of Marxism upon which the youth movement was supposed to be built.

The main orientation of the Young Spartacus and the SYL outside of its opposition work in the Communist movement was directed towards the young workers. However, as time went on the SYL began to become active on the American campus so that by the time of its 1934 convention, when it was officially formed, campus work was a major point on the agenda and a major bone of contention at the convention.

The dispute on the student question at this convention is quite interesting for it reflects a certain groping in the right direction on this issue. The majority recognized the necessity of carrying on campus work and correctly analysed the impact of the Depression on the middle-class students. However, it opposed the concept of an independent student organization, stating that should the SYL win a majority in the National Students League it would simply dissolve the organization, asking the

militants to join the SYL. With such an orientation it was of course out of the question that the SYL would ever win a majority in the NSL! The rationalization for this position was based on a mechanical class analysis which noted the obvious fact that students weren't one of the two major classes in society and jumped to the conclusion that they could therefore have no independent organization.

The minority correctly favored the concept of an independent youth organization but went on to develop the extreme viewpoint that student members of the SYL should have separate locals from the young workers. On this point the majority correctly emphasized the necessity of unifying the two elements in a common local and national structure though having separate student fractions, just as one had separate trade union fractions.

The SYL combined this hostility toward independent student organization and activity with a hostility towards independent anti-war activity. Thus while participating in anti-war conferences like the 1932 Chicago Conference for the purpose of presenting its views, it generally abstained from the anti-war actions of the period, including the peace strikes and the Oxford Pledge movement. We find both these errors reflected in the treatment the Young Spartacus gave student and anti-war events. For instance, the crucial Columbia strike of 1932 was covered in a short article on page two of the paper, The first peace strike in 1934 which mobilized 25,000 students merited only a short box on page four. The same issue which slighted this concrete anti-war action devoted almost a whole page to an abstract discussion on the war question. Thus we see the SYL's tendency to ignore the real anti-war struggle, from which it abstained out of sectarian motives, while carrying on anti-war propaganda that was abstract and unrelated to the real struggle.

Whatever mistakes the SYL may have made in its early days they were the mistakes of immaturity, mistakes which the young revolutionists quickly overcame as they gathered more experience in youth activity. As time went on more and more attention was paid to the campus and a more sensible approach was worked out by those engaged in practical work on the campus. Increased emphasis was given to the YPSL as it began to show greater signs of receptivity to revolutionary ideas than the YCL, which suddenly swung to the most gross forms of reformism that would have shamed a traditional social democratic party.

Above all the SYL kept alive the ideas of Marxism and passed these ideas on to a new generation. This activity not only made the development of the YPSL-Fourth possible in the later Thirties, but it contributed to the continuity of revolutionary ideas in the United States which is expressed today in the Young Socialist Alliance.

### The YPSL-Fourth

As we have noted earlier, during the 1930's the Socialist Party and its youth affiliate, the YPSL, underwent a radical evolution. This was reflected first in a veer on the part of many of its members in the direction of the Communist Party.

However, as the Communist Party oriented more and more to the right, becoming little more than a "left" cover for the New Deal, the newly radicalized forces in the Socialist Party and the Young People's Socialist League began to look elsewhere for a home. The center elements in the SP won control in the middle 1930's and the old guard left to form the Social Democratic Federation which, like the CP, became apologists for the New Deal. It was at this time that the Trotskyists, who had just gone through a merger with A. J. Muste's American Worker's Party, approached the SP leadership with the proposition that they join the SP in response to the SP's open invitation to all socialists to join it.

The entry of the Trotskyists (then called Workers Party) into the SP meant that its youth affiliate, the SYL, would merge with the YPSL. Shortly after the entry the former SYLers fused with the left-wingers in the YPSL who were among the most radical in the SP and this new left wing became the overwhelming majority force in the YPSL. Among the most prominent YPSL leaders to join with the Trotskyists was Hal Draper who was YPSL's representative on the National Committee of the American Student Union.

Within a year after the entry, the Trotskyists were expelled from the SP because of their revolutionary views on the Spanish Civil War and their opposition to the leadership's policy of support to LaGuardia in the New York City elections. The YPSL as an organization decided to leave with the expelled left-wing (soon called the Socialist Worker's Party) and shortly thereafter affiliated with the Fourth International. Thus came into being the YPSL-Fourth. A small group of right-wingers held a rump convention and formed an "official" YPSL which was to have little influence in this period.

At the time of the split the YPSL-Fourth had about 1,000 members, a figure it was never to top. However in the course of the next few years it was to qualitatively better the character of its members with the less serious dropping out and the more serious growing in their political education.

While the YPSL-Fourth was a small organization when compared with the YCL, it nevertheless played a quite important role on the American campus during the years of 1937-1940. It was the only effective opposition to the YCL on the American campus and it opposed the YCL from the left--a fact which never ceased to embarrass the YCL. Its most effective concentrations of student forces were in New York City, especially at CCNY, at the University of Chicago where its forces almost equaled those of the YCL, and at the University of California at Berkeley where its organization was considerably smaller than the YCL but still quite effective.

A good deal of its activities on the campus and in the ASU and AYC in this period centered around its opposition to the YCL's "collective security" line. It won considerable influence among radically inclined circles because it continued to oppose the American war drive rather than apologize for it as did the YCL. It was finally forced to split from the ASU and the AYC when these organizations in late 1937 and early 1938 definitively supported Roosevelt's war policies.

The ability of the YPSL-Fourth to wage a campaign against the Stalinist betrayal of the anti-war struggle was possible only because the revolutionary youth had matured in their thinking since the days of the SYL. Rather than abstaining from organizational involvement in the student anti-war movement, dealing with the war question only in abstractions, the YPSL-Fourth aggressively fought in the ASU and in the Oxford Pledge movement for an anti-war program. Rather than insisting that students must adhere to its full revolutionary program before it would work with them, the YPSL-Fourth made the retention of the Oxford Pledge the central issue in its fight. Had it taken any other course it would have left the CP unchallenged. While the YPSL-Fourth did not win out against the overwhelmingly larger CP forces, the revolutionary socialist view on war got far greater circulation through this student-based campaign than in any other activity of the revolutionary movement in the 1930's.

Part of the credit for intensifying interest in and breaking sectarian attitudes toward the anti-war movement must go to Leon Trotsky. It was Trotsky who urged his supporters in all countries to take the lead in the struggle against the pro-war policies of the Stalinists and the social democrats. In particular Trotsky urged his American supporters to participate in even such an amorphous anti-war movement as that which called for the passing of a constitutional amendment that would make war impossible without a referendum of the population.

The organ of the YPSL-Fourth was the Challenge of Youth which it inherited from the SP. The main orientation of the paper was toward the mass of young workers and unemployed youth. In addition in the late Thirties it ran a fine campaign in opposition to the growing fascist threat surrounding the rise of Father Coughlin and others of his ilk. However, the political level of the paper was not as high as that of the Young Spartacus and its treatment of the problems of young workers had a certain artificiality to it. It seemed to be written so as to appeal to what the middle-class editors thought young workers were interested in. A more serious limitation of the paper was its failure to treat adequately the highly important student work many of its members were active in. Possibly because of the above shortcomings the Challenge of Youth was not as widely circulated as the size of the YPSL-Fourth's membership and its real influence would seem to indicate.

The YPSL-Fourth marked the high water mark in the history of revolutionary socialist youth in the United States. In the critical period of the late 1930's it was the only youth organization to oppose the Young Communist League on the American campus or anywhere else. That the bulk of its youth had deserted the Socialist Party for Trotskyism was proof of the inability of the social democracy to offer any meaningful program in the 1930's. The Socialist Party was never to fully recover from this blow. Only two radical forces emerged from the 1930's with any influence among the youth, and therefore with any future--the Communist Party and the Trotskyists.

THE STUDENT AND REVOLUTION

Radicals and the Student Movement

The flip-flop of the American Youth Congress was final proof of the inability of liberalism to organize an effective youth movement in the 1930's. With state power and even some important reforms to point to as achievements, the liberals were powerless to inspire youth to the point of real conviction. Only the radicals in the 1930's were able to organize effective youth organizations.

What were the reasons for such a complete failure of the liberals on the campus? The answer goes deeper than those guilt-ridden moans that emanate from the liberals today who in their youth worked closely with the CP in various organizations (e.g. Diana Trilling). Greater "understanding" of the "Communist Menace" would have helped the liberals little for those liberals that did remain independent of the AYC and ASU were unable to produce a significant youth organization.

The reasons lie elsewhere--in the nature of the American campus and of liberalism itself. Every serious struggle of the students in the 1930's was to be conducted in opposition to the administration and in defiance of the ruling class forces which stood behind the administration. The mass mobilization of students even on such simple issues as the cafeteria in John Jay Hall at Columbia University could only be organized by forces which do not fear opposition from the powers that be--in fact forces that expect such opposition. In other words actions which were objectively radical in that they pitted the student against the ruling class could only be led by subjectively radical students, even though the bulk of the students who followed the radical leadership were not yet conscious of the full implications of their actions.

Liberalism as a political movement lacked in the 1930's the vitality that it once had. It is one thing to struggle for reforms within a healthy, fresh, expanding system as the progressives did in an earlier era. It is quite another thing to acquiesce to reforms only to keep a decaying social order from completely caving in. The former has an honest freshness to it that appeals to youth while the latter has the smell of duplicity which many youth may be willing to go along with--but which inspires few.

Pro-New Deal sentiment on the campus in the 1930's was undoubtedly widespread--far more than was socialist sentiment. But the New Dealers felt no compulsion to organize themselves and attempt to lead their fellow students. Their New Deal views were more a personal political viewpoint or the necessary adjunct for a successful career in government service rather than a crusading ideal one sacrificed everything for.

What was true of liberalism in the 1930's is even more true now. Today the liberal movement is far more discredited. It is the liberalism of the War Deal and the Cold War Deal. The next upsurge of student battles will again be led by the radicals, not the corrupt liberals.

Does it therefore follow that only a student organization with a consistent radical ideology can lead students during an upsurge on the campus? Decidedly not! The insistence of the NSL and ASU on limiting its program largely to campus issues and those issues which directly affect students such as the anti-war struggle was a correct one. An effective student organization must of necessity mobilize students in action which is objectively anti-capitalist but at a time when the students themselves may hold illusions about capitalism. Such an organization, then, is a coalition of student militants within which radicals play a natural leadership role due to their greater political consciousness. It is only in this sense that we speak of a radical-led student movement. But this radical ingredient is crucial for, as the experience of the 30's shows, without it even the most active student militants cannot organize themselves effectively.

We do not wish to give the impression that either the National Students' League or the American Student Union was the ideal form of such an organization. In fact the NSL and ASU suffered from two diseases. One was a sectarian tendency which characterized all CP activity in broader groupings even during its most right-wing periods and has created the label of "front group". The YCLers tended to line up the NSL or ASU artificially on any issue the CP was interested in no matter how extraneous it was to the student movement and no matter how much resistance to such a political line there may have been among non-YCLers in the organizations. The second disease was an opportunist tendency to consciously espouse liberal ideas in the name of the organization and pretend that everyone in the organization was an innocent liberal. This tendency was especially apparent in the ASU but was quite noticeable in the NSL as well.

A correctly organized militant student movement would limit itself to those actions that both non-socialist and socialist militants supported in common without either pretending that the organization was liberal or forcing socialist views on those who were in the process of making up their minds politically. Revolutionists within such an organization would of course have complete freedom to express their full views and would on their part guarantee this right to the non-socialists in the organization.

The YCL functioned in the student anti-war organizations as they did in the NSL and the ASU, with similar results. The YCL made no distinction between a united front action movement and a propaganda movement in the anti-war field. It produced a muddled compromise program which mixed some fine action demands, some decent semi-radical anti-war propaganda, and a good dose of pacifist and liberal illusions. The anti-war movement should have worked out a common program of action demands that all could agree on--socialist, liberal and pacifist. The radicals would of course continue independently of the anti-war organization to promote their class struggle views on the war question, hoping in the course of joint action to win over the others in the organization to these views.

### Students and Society

The student in capitalist society is by definition middle class. In America, to a greater extent than in any other capitalist country, students are recruited from all social strata with the middle classes producing the

bulk of the recruits. The upper class, which seeks through education to produce a "cultured" future member of the ruling class rather than a practical technician, did not dominate the American colleges in the 1930's except possibly for a few Eastern ones. The working class and the depressed sections of the middle class, while producing a substantial number of students, also did not make their mark on the campus. These students attended college precisely in order to leave their social class and become part of the educated middle-class professional, managerial, and white collar strata. In fact, some of these working-class elements tended to be among the more conservative on the campus due to their intense striving to enter another social class which necessitated a certain ideological adaptation to that class. In many cases it was the student who took his middle class position for granted who was forced in a radical direction by the crisis that rocked that class.

Capitalist society creates in the student a rather peculiar phenomenon, which while basically a part of the middle class is more subject to non-middle class influence than is the class as a whole. Students are separated from their family and organized into a concentrated social grouping on the campus. There the student is more susceptible to organization than is true of the middle classes generally and he is able to play a partially independent role in society due to the cohesiveness and organizational possibilities that flow out of his separation, if only temporary, from the rest of middle-class society.

In fact one can say that, outside of the special case of the barracks, the campus is the only place in capitalist society that young people are organized separately from adults and where they are forced into a common situation with common problems. It is, therefore, only in his role as a student (excepting again the soldier) that a young person can exert an influence and play a political role in capitalist society.

This concentrated section of the middle class shares all the problems which face the middle class as a whole. However it shares them with a vengeance. The older middle classes retain, even in a depression, a certain stability flowing from the retention by many middle-class persons of their jobs. The student is by definition "unemployed" in the sense that he is thrown on the labor market upon leaving college. Thus, with unemployment hitting middle-class jobs, the college student faces a world in which whatever jobs are open are filled by older persons with experience and seniority in that line of work. This means when a crisis like that which rocked the middle classes in the 30's occurs, it hits the student harder than his class as a whole.

Not only does it hit him harder, but he is in a position to do something about it. The very rootlessness and transitional status of the student helps to free him from conservatizing influences. He is pulled out of his home and his role in that home as a dependent and sent to college as a transition to his seeking his own employment and setting up his own household. During the interim of college life he is freed somewhat from the dominating influence of his parents and has yet to enmesh himself in all the economic and social entanglements that flow from establishing a career and raising a family.

Finally, when he enters college he places himself in a certain new relation in society. He finds that as a student he has interests in common with other students and that these interests bring him into conflict with the administration. The administration in an American university is the instrument of the ruling class to control the student. This explains the role of the administration in the 1930's in opposing every attempt of the student to protest war, to support the working class, to investigate new and radical ideas.

In addition the administration attempts to replace the parent as the regulator of the student's personal life. As the student struggles to be recognized as a responsible adult in society he must fight the administration for control over his own personal life--where he eats, where he lives, the hours he keeps, his social and sexual life.

In his opposition to the administration the student finds no ally in the middle class. This class is too compromised by its ties with the established order to put up much of a fight against any aspect of the Establishment. It is rather the working class which is the natural ally of the student. This is the only class in capitalist society which also opposes the ruling class and so has nothing to lose from supporting the students. In return the working class needs the support of the student, both to help it with the student's intellectual skills which the workers are not allowed to acquire under capitalism, and also as a broader base of support in society as a whole for its struggles. This explains the widespread sympathy for the workers that dominated liberal and radical circles on the campus in the 1930's. The Kentucky Pilgrimage was no isolated phenomenon--it symbolized a real relationship between the most radical section of the middle class and the class that would eventually free all of mankind.

### On a Student Orientation

This real role of students in society was never fully understood by young radicals in the 1930's. The typical radical student seemed ashamed of his own class origins, never fully realizing the role students could play in society as an important supporting movement to the working class struggle. At times the young radical students even indulged in the masquerade of pretending to be workers. Such attempts fooled no one--least of all the workers who were the last people of all to wish to remain workers. Some lost sight of the fact that the socialist goal is aimed at emancipating the workers from being workers--not turning the middle classes into pseudo-workers.

Both the Spartacus Youth League and the YPSL-Fourth suffered to some extent from this same error in orientation--a mistake which, while not negating their positive achievements, lessened the total impact these organizations might have made in the 1930's.

The reasoning of both groups went something like this: we are politically a working-class organization with a specific orientation towards young people. Therefore we should direct all our energies towards winning

young workers to our organization even though on a practical level most of our recruits are coming off of the campuses. We do not stop all campus work, they explained, but rather subordinate our campus work to the more important task of winning over young workers.

The existence of an independent youth organization must be justified on some other basis than age differential. If what is involved is simply supplying a junior version of the adult radical party so as to make the education of the youth easier, then an independent youth group is a waste of energy--special classes for young people or even "youth branches" can serve these functions just as well without setting up the cumbersome national organization with its conventions, plenums, discussion bulletins, separate press, etc. An independent youth organization can only be justified on the basis of the existence of an independent stratum of youth with separate problems, separate institutions, etc., within which the youth organization devotes its energies.

As we have pointed out earlier, capitalist society organizes youth separately only as students on campuses. The campus is to the youth what the factory is to the working class. It is where capitalist society concentrates a social grouping, organizes it, and therefore creates out of it a powerful counterforce to the ruling class. It follows that a youth organization must in all periods orient toward the campus and the student just as the adult radical party orients toward the factory and the factory worker.

The correctness of such an orientation is borne out in the history of the 30's both in a positive sense and in a negative sense. All radical youth groups which engaged in campus work grew and became influential in the Depression period. The student had a real impact on society in the Thirties, especially through anti-war activities. The student became a force that was to be reckoned with--even though it was a mere anticipation of what the student could become and will become. The radical student played an important auxiliary role, giving the working class some solid support in society as a whole.

Negatively this orientation is proven by the general ineffectiveness of radical youth groups in "young worker" activity and by the lack of impact young workers made on society as young workers in this period. Though the editors of the radical youth press searched and searched they could find little young worker activity as such to report in their papers.

Does this mean that the young worker is of no import to the radical movement? Decidedly not. The young worker is the potentially most radical section of the working class just as the student is the potentially most radical section of the middle class. The young worker plays a role in society not as a "youth" but rather as a trade union militant. To the extent that a radical party orients toward the working class to that extent it orients toward young workers who are the most oppressed section of the workers and who are the freest from entanglements in capitalist society. However such young workers cannot be recruited in large numbers by a youth organization alone for a youth organization cannot by itself give them what they need. It is the duty of the radical party which has cadres in the unions and which develops union fraction organizations and caucuses of militants to recruit and educate the young worker.

Many young workers may wish to join the youth organization when they join the party because they may feel more at ease in a young, more fluid organization, and because they seek the educational opportunities a youth group offers. Such membership of young workers should be encouraged, for not only is it helpful to the young workers but it helps in the education of the students by bringing them into direct contact with the working class and its problems. In this sense a radical youth organization should always strive to be made up of both young workers and students.

Does this mean that the middle-class students can replace the working class and lead the socialist revolution? To even suggest such an idea is to show ignorance of the real function of a youth organization. A youth organization is not created to lead a revolution. It is an auxiliary force to the working-class movement and must play a subordinate rôle to it.

The youth organization must be organizationally independent of the adult party so that it can freely carry on its work on the campus. But it must look to the direction of the working-class party and ally itself with this party. As long as the youth movement does this and does it consciously it need not worry about its middle-class composition. But once it pretends its composition is otherwise and attempts to play the rôle of a party then it is headed towards trouble. (Was this not the experience of the Shachtmanites? See: What Makes Shachtman Run? by Tim Wohlforth, 1957)

The future growth of the radical youth movement depends on the assimilation of the lessons of the 1930's. We have attempted in this essay to outline the historical development of the student movement in the Depression era and to suggest what we feel is the meaning of these developments for radical youth today.

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