



YSA

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Young Socialist Alliance

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Introduction to Revised Draft Resolution 'Youth and the
Black Revolt'

The draft resolution contained in this bulletin (Vol. 7 No. 6) is a revision of the earlier NEC Draft (Vol. 7, No. 5). The first draft was produced without adequate editing in the haste to get it into the hands of the membership, and we feel that certain formulations contained in the first draft are subject to mis-interpretation.

The revised resolution follows the line of the original draft, and the changes incorporated into it makes that line more clear.

--NEC Majority
August 27, 1963

YOUTH AND THE BLACK REVOLT

(NEC Draft Resolution)

The New Hood

The Black American is taking the initiative at a critical moment in this country's history in demanding Freedom Here, Freedom Now, and All Freedoms. He is tired, fed up, enraged with the gradualism and tokenism which has characterized the integration battle for Negro equality. Expressing themselves in a growing mood of defiance, Negroes are indicating through their actions and by their demands that white Jim Crow America must go. It has been over 300 years since the enslavement of Africans began in America, and over 100 years since the Emancipation Proclamation was issued; that is long enough to "wait and see."

The Black Revolt sweeping capitalist America and threatening the "white power structure" takes the form of massive disaffection and a growing mood among Negroes for independence from white society, for "blackness." The tenor of the Negro people today is that they are no longer willing to leave the future of interracial relations in the hands of whites. They are determined to decide their own destinies in an effort to satisfy their demands. The present mood for blackness is being conditioned by the objective situation of the mid-twentieth century. It is in part a response to the colonial revolutions and resultant independence of the Afro-Asian states, the urbanization of the Negro during the last War which helped in the creation of the present-day big city ghettos, and the pressures of the Cold War.

These situations and forces prompted a series of Supreme Court decisions that marked the beginning of a new confrontation between black and white America.

With the Black Revolt there is a general rejection of "gradualism" which is either an apology for weak action or mere acceptance of the status quo in a slightly modified form. The gradualists believe that their program can be carried out by the institutions of the present system if a little pressure is applied in the right places. Following this false assumption, they ask the Negro to let Jim Crow courts solve racial conflicts, to permit a Congress dominated by Dixiecrats propose civil rights legislation, to have faith that racist cops will maintain law and order. This has brought tokenism, moderation and hypocrisy; but not substantive change.

On jobs, the Negro is still the last one hired and first one fired. He is expected to do the heaviest, dirtiest, least skilled job at the lowest pay. In housing, urban renewal means Negro removal and slum redevelopment projects simply redevelop slum conditions more intensely for the Negro ghetto. In education, school drop-out means Negro drop-out, while school construction builds more understaffed, inadequate segregated facilities. Emancipation is a hundred years of broken promises, democracy is hypocrisy, and integration is tokenism. The federal government issues appeals for a "cooling off period" or considers mass demonstrations "ill-timed."

Every institution in America -- government, schools, churches, corporations, and even trade unions -- is imbued with racism.

The Freedom Now mood indicates impatience with the slow pace of desegregation, frustration over continued deprivation and a healthy disdain for tokenism. Advances reveal the precise nature of the ruling class: naked and violent power organized to maintain racial exploitation and oppression. Experience in the school of hard knocks, in struggle, has exposed the lies and myths about "democratic capitalism."

The Black Revolt is a revolt against liberalism and the "middle class ethic." There is a growing gap between the middle-class liberals and the Negro middle-class on the one hand and the Negro masses on the other. The liberals do not encourage whites to hurry up and fulfill the promises of emancipation. Instead they tell the Negro to slow down, wait, get back. The all-or-nothing sentiment of the Birmingham struggle pin-pointed the shift in attitude of the Negroes; "they ain't gonna wait no more," white is no longer right, black need not stay back.

The mass struggles in Birmingham, Albany and Jackson have marked a new stage in the Southern struggle and in the struggle nationwide. While the more sustained actions in the South involve a small cadre of militants, mainly around SNCC, the increase in direct mass actions is noticeable. What happens in Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia has had immediate repercussions upon the moods of the movement in the North. This was dramatized by the struggle against the high unemployment among Negroes in the North which followed the incidents in Birmingham.

There are distinct differences between the struggle for civil rights down South and "Up South." While the struggle in the South has been to gain the formal "equality" prevalent in the North, the Northern movement has demanded the complete and total elimination of all vestiges of racial discrimination, in housing, political representation, employment, etc.

The nation-wide struggle is beginning to sense an identity between colonial oppression abroad and racial oppression at home. Black pride and the world-wide "revolution of rising expectations" have upped the ante in America. Negro militants today are measuring their progress not by the slavery of the past, nor by the "progress of the last 100 years," but by strides other non-white peoples are making elsewhere now. The world revolutionary upsurge against colonialism and capitalism is closely related to the emancipation of the Afro-American.

For Black Americans, the African revolution means a rediscovered cultural heritage, a renewed pride in their history and a new sense of dignity as black men. Many see Africa's struggle for freedom as part of their own struggle for equality. And now, in the Western hemisphere, Cuba has taken the road of revolution against U.S. domination and kindled new hope and self-confidence among oppressed peoples of the Americas. The failure of tokenism at home and the success of the colonial revolution abroad has contributed to the Negro's dissatisfaction in this country. The nationalism of these revolutions has accelerated the growth of "black nationalism" here.

Black Nationalism

The mood of the Black Revolt, of militancy and boldness, is being conditioned by a new sense of self-respect and self-esteem. The Negro middle-class and some Negro leaders aspire to be assimilated into the society of whites. Among the Negro masses, however, this is not so, particularly today. The Negro people are rejecting many of the white man's values, codes of conduct, and forms of struggle.

There has not been a clearly defined territorial nor lingual base for the creation of a homeland or national economy for the Negro in the U.S. Nevertheless, anti-Negro prejudice as a phenomenon of American capitalism has fostered racial-national sentiments among American Negroes for over 300 years. Segregation means that the Negro's position in society is special as an oppressed national minority. Jim Crow segregates the Negro into second-rate neighborhoods, second-best schools, secondary jobs and second-

class citizenship. Since there has been no social assimilation of Negroes in Jim Crow America the black ghetto has banded together in a common resentment against racial injustice. While confined to the ghetto the Negro is stripped of his personal identity; he is denied his heritage and his rights -- he is simply available to be commercially exploited.

There is an unwillingness to accept the bankrupt values of American class society and the dissolution of Negro heritage, character and culture into the "broad" stream of American life. This consciousness among Negroes to determine their own destiny, to define it clearly, is commonly referred to a "black nationalism."

The growth of black nationalism is a reaction to racial oppression, and its appearance on such a wide scale and to such profound degree indicates a vote of "no confidence" in gradualism. The militants, suspicious of gradualist Negro leaders influenced by white liberals, are now calling for black leadership. They have asserted the independence of the ghetto from white society and challenge the Negro middle class seeking individual assimilation into Jim Crow America. Nationalism expresses the feeling of Negroes that U.S. capitalist society is degenerate and doomed by history.

Black nationalism has found expression in the Black Revolt in different ways and in different degrees. In general, there is racial pride in the Negro's resistance to centuries of enslavement and in the vital, decisive role he has played in his own emancipation. It is expressed in integrationist as well as separatist tendencies within the civil rights movement.

The black nationalists want to build an independent movement as a vehicle to realize their goal of human equality -- whether through integration or separation. Both integrationists and separatists wish to unite the Negro masses, both hope to force the ruling class to concede to their demands.

Many cannot understand how integrationists can also be black nationalists. The two are not necessarily contradictory. Integration, when viewed as a social process consciously directed, is a strategy toward achieving racial equality. If integration were more than strategy, that is, a goal, then we would have to say that "token integration" is progressive --but tokenism is an obstacle to real human progress. The objective goal is not integration per se, but human freedom.

All nationalists are not separatists. The separatists advocate the creation of a separate nation and a complete break with American society. Black nationalism implies a desire by Negroes to decide their own destiny, including attitudes toward a separate nation, and an incisive rejection of the existing society.

There is no major contradiction between the organization of the black masses along independent lines and the necessity of achieving alliances with other sections of the population, namely the white working class. It is just as true that white workers cannot win their rights while Negroes are oppressed. Negroes are doubly exploited, as blacks, and as workers. Their struggle for equality has an impact upon the social and political life of Jim Crow America out of proportion to their numbers; their special demands inject progressive class elements into the consciousness of the general working class, and their independent action incites other, even larger forces into motion.

While the labor movement and the Negro movement are traveling along different roads of struggle and at a different pace, they nevertheless move toward a common objective. Both can achieve their victory against a common foe through a concerted struggle against capitalism. This does not mean that the Negro movement must wait for Labor. No! The Negro movement should and will push ahead, initiate a new course, and spur other sections into action. This is essential today where Negroes are gaining momentum and becoming radicalized while Labor remains relatively inactive and conservative.

White liberals, labor bureaucrats, and Negro gradualists are insisting that the Negroes must slow down, wait for whites to "have a change of heart." Some radicals do the same when they exaggerate the dangers of Negroes "going it alone" and polemicize against the growing sentiment of black nationalism. The YSA, on the other hand, supports all movements expressing the desire of Negroes to lead their own struggles and assert their right to independent organization. We do this because we recognize the Negro struggle as separate from, though connected to the class struggle. This movement must therefore have independent organization. Black nationalism is progressive since it contributes to the creation of such an independent movement for the unification and mobilization of the black masses. We welcome the growth of black nationalism as a vehicle of struggle against racial oppression. We assert that revolutionary socialists and black nationalists are complementary forces which should seek to unite in action and to collaborate in thought.

The Nation of Islam, popularly known as the Black Muslims, has become a significant sector of the Black Revolt. The Muslim movement has gained in prominence due to the growing impatience of American Negroes who admire the aggressiveness and boldness of Muslims in telling off whites and "putting down white America." The Muslims articulate the feelings and aspirations of Negroes in the Northern ghettos more incisively than any other tendency. According to a hostile NEWSWEEK opinion poll (July 29, 1963), one out of eight Negroes in the U.S. (i.e. over two million) are overtly sympathetic to the Muslims.

The Muslims are a well disciplined cadre organization deeply rooted in the slums of the Northern cities, potentially revolutionary in both leadership and rank-and-file. Their religion is more political and black nationalist than obscurantist. They are not primarily oriented towards nor rooted in the Southern Negro struggle.

The fierce and intransigent rejection of American society and values, the urge to separate, geographically or otherwise, from that society, and the orientation toward building a black power base independent of white (capitalist) society spell serious trouble ahead for the status quo in America, and cast a revolutionary shadow on future events.

The Muslims have been instrumental in forcing other organizations to take a more determined stand against tokenism and gradualism and are forcing the entire Negro struggle in the direction of greater militancy at this stage. The Muslims themselves are grappling with, and have not yet solved, the problem of combining their long-range view of breaking free from U.S. domination and contributing to the downfall of U.S. power with the immediate struggles which more closely occupy the attention of the black masses.

In the coming period, we are likely to confront any number of young militants who are "Muslims minus the religion." We must learn how to work with these individuals or small groups, and learn from them. The Muslims must be defended against repressive attacks by the government and police.

The Labor Movement

Today the gap between organized labor and the Negro movement is overwhelmingly apparent. The tie between the labor bureaucracy and Jim Crow society and the blatant discriminatory policies of many unions has made labor's relation with the black masses strained. These Jim Crow policies adopted by the labor leadership indicate that this top

bureaucracy is not merely a drag on the struggle for equality in the labor movement -- it is a bitter opponent of the struggle. If this were not the case then there would be no need to form separate Negro caucuses dedicated to the fight for equal rights for all union members. It is obvious that this bureaucracy must be replaced if workers are to gain real economic security. Such a change is necessary if Negroes are to change their attitudes toward labor.

The Negro movement has preceeded and outpaced labor in its struggle against capitalist domination and oppression. The fact that the tempos of development of these two movements are uneven is understandable since their origins and history are different. While the Negro ghetto is predominately working class, its consciousness is influenced by racial as well as class factors. Though the majority of the black population is a part of the general working class, its position in society is special. The Negro movement is a distinct and independent movement having particular origins and special characteristics, including special methods of action. These independent traits also determine the independent nature of the Negro struggle. Though independent, the Negro movement remains related to the labor movement due to its class content and interests.

Unlike labor, the Negro movement is becoming radicalized. Negroes are beginning to realize that the "democratic process" ignore his right to equal opportunity, especially the right to economic security. Since the ruling class is unwilling to grant the demand for simple democratic rights, the struggle tends to merge with the broader struggle to abolish Jim Crow capitalism. Through their own experience in fighting for democracy, Negroes learn to reject myths about "share the wealth", "free world" American society. In the Black Revolt the black masses reach deeply radical conclusions, ahead of the general labor force. As the other sectors merely drag their heels in the civil rights issue the Negro movement declares its independence and attempts to go it alone.

This process of independence and radicalization will bring about common action with organized labor eventually but on a new basis. The independent organization of the Negro people is a step toward a future alliance with labor as an equal partner in the fight against working class oppression. Such independence sets the working class into motion -- the more the Negroes move and the more independently they move, the more they shake up the status quo, and the faster will whit white workers be forced to move.

The Negro movement must ally itself with the labor movement to compensate for it being a numerical minority and to insure the most effective struggle against the ruling class. This alliance must be achieved as a partnership of equals so that the demands and needs of the Negro movement are not neglected or betrayed by their allies. Negroes must insist that priority be given to supporting the Black Revolt, and that the alliance cannot be based on subordination or gradualism. The independence of the Negro movement is primary and if a choice must be made between an immediate alliance at the cost of independence, or a postponement until conditions permit better terms, the alliance must be postponed.

Our propaganda tasks are seriously affected by the gap between the labor movement and the Negro movement.

Impact of Cuba

The Cuban Revolution successfully eliminated racial discrimination and has accomplished more in several years through revolutionary action than has been achieved by 100 years of gradualism in the U.S. The main feature of the revolution in the area of race relations is that it confronted economic discrimination, the basic source of racism in the Americas. In tackling problems of poverty, slums and unemployment as well as illiteracy and social discrimination the revolution changed the attitudes of whites and Negroes alike. Cuba's victory demonstrates that a minority -- a racial minority such as the Afro-Cuban -- can win freedom through a victorious socialist revolution made in unison with the vast majority of the Cuban people.

Cuba's method of abolishing Jim Crow was by striking directly at the economic and social roots of Jim Crow, not by futile appeals to the hearts and good will of those who profit from racism. The pacifist-minded youth who insist Negroes fight their struggle with hearts, bellies and by turning the other cheek should be reminded that Cuba was able to accomplish the destruction of discrimination much faster, much surer, and with far less bloodshed through direct struggle. Revolutionary Cuba destroys the concept that Negroes can never win freedom where they are a minority of the population. The Afro-Cubans fought as part of their class, as black peasants or black workers, united with the whole of the Cuban workers and peasants. Through class struggle they achieved race freedom.

With the victory of the proletarian revolution, Cuban Negroes simultaneously with the white people of Cuba won their economic, social and political freedom. Without one, there never would have been the other. Revolutionary methods of example, re-education and strict law enforcement demonstrate how socialism can do away with racism. It did not take "another 100 years" nor "another generation of progress" to get human freedom. It took a socialist revolution. To those who maintain the Negro is going too fast in his demands for equality, we can point to Cuba -- the Cubans didn't wait. They fought a revolution and by doing so won respect and an end to racial oppression.

Independent Political Action

The Black Revolt is characterized by increasing self-reliance of the Negro people on their own ability to destroy the power of the white supremacists. Many militants are confronting the issue of whether political power is to remain in the hands of the racists and gradualists who have demonstrated time and time again their unwillingness to alleviate the humiliating and oppressive conditions of the black masses. Black Freedom Fighters have seen the consistent hypocrisy, filibustering and lip service by both Republicans and Democrats and are beginning to expose the vise-like grip of the Dixicrats in Congress. With the Black Revolt upsetting the national political equilibrium and advancing the political education of the working class, now is the time for the militants to develop independent political organization and action.

Under the banner of Freedom Now the present is the time to break the political power of the racists by entering the political arena as an independent force. Yet, it is precisely in this area of struggle that the developing independent Negro movement is still tied to the status quo. Some militants favor the ASTOOT policy of "All Sitting This One Out Together" which amounts to little more than maintaining the present political power structure. Others support a policy which usually means vote for an Uncle Tom Democrat or Republican. There is no effective alternative offered by the two major parties who either expound racism or give support to the racists by their political abstention.

There is no adequate Negro representation in Congress. The few Negroes there represent their own self-interest and/or bourgeois party interest. Negroes want representatives who represent the masses, who are imbued with the impatience of the Negro of "waiting for more progress" and who will not accept tokenism. They are out for power. The achievements of black Americans should be acknowledged NOW. They are fed up with promises of legislation, they have lost faith in the abil-

ity of courts to enforce legislation on the books, and they are tired of waiting.

The racists have been able to force an actual decline in Negro voting registration in the South in spite of the voter registration drives. They use intimidation, economic reprisals, illegal purges from the registration rolls and outright violence to keep Negroes from the polls. The federal government has proved it is unwilling to make good the guarantees of the Constitution. Voting laws are obviously useless to Southern Negroes who fear for their lives and for the safety of their families if they register to vote.

The voter registration drive in the South represents an initial thrust by the independent Negro movement pitted against the Southern regime. Though they have no hope of getting immediate benefits from voting, the Southern movement is conscious that it must strive for political power. It is not surprising that many are willing to face threats to their jobs and credit, their homes and even their lives in an attempt to get the vote. This was evident too at a recent SNCC conference where the youth leadership called for the formation of a "second party." For the present however, election prospects for Southern Negroes are : "It isn't whom you vote for; it's whether you vote at all." Northern Negro leaders are constantly criticizing the ghetto for not exercising its voting rights. Yet, these same leaders do not think in terms of providing Negroes with a meaningful choice at the polling booth. With independent candidates of their own choice instead of major party "lesser evils" there would be no problem of turning out the Negro vote. Today individuals around the country are probing the possibilities of developing a Freedom Now Party. The sentiment for such a party has a base in the ghetto. The concentration of Negroes in segregated neighborhoods provides a base for initiating an independent party to act as political spokesman of the Black Revolt.

The implication of forming an independent Negro party should not be underestimated. It is obvious that in a number of big cities the Negro vote is decisive.

The first steps in this direction are now being taken in local campaigns in New Haven, Newark, on the West Coast, in Brooklyn, and elsewhere. The appearance of such a party on a national scale will shake up the political scene and deal a mortal blow to the two-party shell game. It will open up many new opportunities for youth, black and white, both in political activity as such and in year-round neighborhood activities.