

REPORT TO THE EDITORIAL BOARD OF THE YOUNG SOCIALIST
ON THE LABOR DAY YSL AND YSL-YPSL CONVENTIONS

by Tim Wohlforth

The following is a report based on attending the most important sessions of the recent YSL convention held on Friday, Aug. 29, and the joint YSL-YPSL convention held on Saturday the 30 and Sunday the 31. The YSL-YPSL represents our only major competitor on the college campus for new youth. The Stalinists have as yet made no bid for these youth, conducting whatever youth activity they have on an underground basis. The Stalinists still are a threat to us in relation to the ex-LYers, but they do not as yet represent a significant counter-pull to the new young people who are now becoming radical.

It is therefore extremely important for all the comrades to read this report carefully. We must follow the developments in this field very closely as we will be meeting these people again and again in the next period. In a way the political strength of the Young Socialist tendency will be tested in its ability to win more youth to it than the social-democratic youth can.

This report is not a chronological one and therefore events that occurred on different days or at different conventions may be lumped together under general subject matters.

I. The Strength of the YSL-YPSL:

The YSL convention was attended by delegates representing the following areas: Seattle, Berkeley, Denver (by proxy), Chicago, Pittsburgh, New York City, New Haven, Buffalo, and Philly. Membership of approximately 100 was represented though they claim a total membership of 140-50. They report greatest strength in NYC, Berkeley, Chicago, Seattle. Following the loss of the left wing of the YSL the organization reportedly stagnated for two-three months. Then growth began due to extensive tours throughout the country. They report a weakness in publications. However, one pamphlet, "What is the YSL," was reprinted 3 times.

Berkeley: This area reports 18 members, 2/3 of which are on campus. They are primarily graduate students. They credit their growth to sending in some good people who then rooted themselves in the campus. They are now thinking of getting an office. They sold 200 of the last issue of Anvil. They report need for tours and a newspaper.

Buffalo: Members are not on campus and have not done much. This fall two will be on campus and they are planning some sort of campus club. They plan a debate between Harrington and Aptheker. Average attendance at meetings is 14-18.

Chicago: Until this summer they didn't recruit much. Recruited five new members over summer period. They are planning a YPSL chapter and a Politics Club at UC this fall. The united YPSL-YSL will have 25 members here to begin with.

Los Angeles: Unit has no contacts, morale, formal organization. Can't collect dues. Two semi-active members. YPSL reported in just as bad shape. Arlon Tussing (Seattle) reported that the presence of the Conference of Young Socialists which has operated in a flexible way has made things very difficult for the YSL in the area.

New York: Claim about 50 members right now in YPSL and YSL. However they claim that counting those guaranteed to join the merged organization they will start with 60-65 members. They will have clubs this fall at Columbia, Brooklyn, and CCONY, with possibilities at NYU, Queens, and three high schools. Average meeting attendance is 34-40 and seven new members were recruited over the summer. They claim they felt YSA competition at the beginning but do not feel it now.

Denver, Albuquerque: Have four new young members in Denver and expect to have a club at Denver U. At Albuquerque members are active in a campus UO committee and have 12-15 members of a socialist discussion club.

Pittsburgh: Report no other socialist tendencies to compete with. The campus is opening up.

Philadelphia: Have eight members -- most of them recently recruited. Will have two YPSL's at Temple, and a Dissent forum at Penn. Report contact with Stalinists.

Seattle: Report intense activity at the U. of Washington. Average attendance is 50 at campus club meetings though some meetings are upwards of 250. Plan to set up a student liberal party like SLATE in the fall. However a number of members are leaving area so they will be down to five members this fall, three of whom are active.

New Haven: Have seven members, four of whom are leaving the area. Have run a George Orwell forum at Yale successfully.

Anvil: 2,750 copies sold and printed of last fall issue. Of the spring issue, 4,500 were printed of which about 2,000 have been paid for. Report good contact with "Universities and Left Review" in England. Costs have doubled recently and they need money.

Sane: The YSL and YPSL report very good headway in Sane and have been in on the launching of the student Sane groups. They have been recruiting out of this arena. Two YSL members are on the national committee of the student Sane group.

NSA: Harrington attended NSA national convention. He reported that YSL and YPSL had no delegates at all at the convention. He also reported that everybody there had heard of the YS and asked if he were connected with it. He also reported a healthy left wing present at the convention, including people from the South, and urged that the YSL-YPSL enter into the NSA in the coming year.

YPSL: It was obvious throughout the proceedings of both conventions that the YPSL was hardly in existence at all. They had few members, virtually all of which were delegates and most of these were probably funneled into the YPSL by the YSL, which in many areas was splitting its recruits 50-50 with the YPSL. The YPSL reported very few functioning "circles" but a number of members at large. The only areas represented by YPSL where the YSL is not were Rutgers, Cambridge and Ann Arbor. The joint organizations have set themselves a goal of 500 members by next year. They presently will start with about 200 members (50 YPSLs plus the claimed 150 YSLers).

II. Progress Towards "Unity":

The present state of unity between the ISL-YSL-SP-SDF-YPSL is rather confusing. However an understanding of it is very important to understanding the current situation within the social democracy. While the prospect of allowing the ISL to enter the SP-SDF passed in the SP-SDF by a slim majority (54% of the referendum vote, according to Harrington) it has not been implemented as yet. There seems to be a desire on the part of the SP-SDF leadership to put off the ISL entry for a while for fear that it will force out some of the right-wingers. In fact, the most optimistic date for consummation of this long-sought-after union is two or three months. There was even some gloomy mention of it never coming to pass. However the YSL and YPSL will go to bed, so to speak, prior to the official marriage. While the official unity of the two organizations will wait for unity in the adult field (in order to give Shachtman a little remaining bargaining power) the practical unity is already in effect. The joint convention has elected a joint National Committee to formally function after the unity is consummated. The YSL NAC has been empowered to dissolve the YSL when the ISL gets in. The two youth groups will in effect be one starting immediately, though they will be in a somewhat embarrassed position to explain the formal situation to anyone.

III. Shachtman Crawls: The convention was not without its revolting aspects, the most revolting being the conduct of brother Shachtman who just isn't physically built for the task of crawling and fawning which he was forced to perform before his young disciples. Shachtman gave two addresses: one to the YSL and the other to the combined convention. His first talk to the YSL was aimed at smashing some of the illusions he had fostered a year ago in order to counteract the left wing and corral the youth behind his rightward move. First he pointed out that "we" must accept the SP-SDF as it is, pointing out that we should not expect it to change appreciably for quite a while. It will stay a small propaganda group with right-wing politics and an inactive membership for the coming period. So gone were the illusions of the imminent magical transformation of the SP-SDF into a mass party. Secondly, he stressed strongly that "we" must be totally uninterested in fighting for "our" program within the SP-SDF or even debating it. He said "we" should "ignore the SP-SDF." "We" should not try to convince anyone of "our" views but leave things just as they are. That is the only way unity will be possible. In his talk before the combined organization, Shachtman emphasized that they had given up everything they possessed. They did not ask for a press, for a formal unity, for representation on any committees, etc. They had no more to give. The only thing left to give was themselves, which they would not do. Therefore under no conditions could the youth comrades unite with the YPSL prior to the entry of the adult comrades. The one thing we must retain is the idea that either we all go in or none of us go in. He combined this with the usual obsequious tributes to "Comrade Thomas" who was also there. Various people before and after made pledges to get "Comrade Thomas" the largest student audiences they could, etc. etc.

IV. "Aims and Tasks of Democratic Socialism." The bitterest pill for the young social-democrats to swallow was the program of the social democracy itself. The joint YSL-YPSL negotiating committee presented to the conference the document "Aims and Tasks of Democratic Socialism," the most recent policy statement of the Second International, as the political basis for unity. However, a rank-and-file leftist opposition made up of both YSLers and YPSLs just couldn't stomach such a clear statement of the politics to which they were subordinating themselves. So a discussion ensued, first at the YSL convention and then again at the joint con-

vention. The most outspoken critics were two former Libertarian Leaguers who are presently in the YPSL. They attacked the "Collective security" section, pointing out that this was the watchword of the Lebanon intervention. They attacked another section which read, "But democracy has the right and duty to protect itself against those who exploit its opportunities only in order to destroy it." This they said should be read: SMITH ACT. They attacked the document's support of the UN. Others complained that the document wasn't broad but narrow. It would alienate pacifists and others who opposed collective security. The Denitch supporters in the YSL also spoke out against it. In fact, it soon looked as if a YSL-YPSL left bloc would be able to table action on the document. Therefore Harrington offered a compromise which consisted of an additional statement by the YPSL disclaiming full agreement with the document. This swung all the YSLers. However seven YPSLs still held out and voted to table the document. So the document was finally passed with a disclaimer.

V. Conclusions:

It is clear from the above report that the YSL-YPSL enters the coming period with considerable strength. They have gained over the last year, largely from new students on the campuses. It is largely their campus orientation plus their already existing apparatus and cadre that allowed them to recruit in this period. Many of the people who joined either organization in this period could just as well have joined us if they had come into contact with us first. Many at the actual convention saw the YS for the first time when we distributed it there. We should not underestimate the strength of the social-democratic youth. They enter the coming school year with stronger forces on campus than we have. However the power of our ideas and our paper outbalance this. There were frequent mentions during the conventions of the desirability of setting up a monthly paper -- a sign of the impression we have made.

It is clear that in the coming year the group which orients itself the best for work among American students will advance the most. We will be competing primarily with the YSL-YPSL for the allegiance of the newly radicalized college student.

We have three things in our favor that give us the possibility of winning out in this competition.

1. Our Politics: There is no doubt that the YSL-YPSL politics are so bad that most of the membership of these organizations are ashamed of it. Our clear revolutionary socialist program is far more appealing to youth than rationalizing about "collective security." However the effect of our politics is somewhat offset in these circles by what these people call our "stalincia" politics. While part of this attack is nothing but adaptation to bourgeois "anti-communism," some of it is a genuine feeling that we are conciliating to Stalinism just as the social democrats are conciliating to the State Department. The simplest solution to this is simply to present our principled opposition to Stalinism and support to the workers' struggle in the Soviet orbit for workers democracy.

In addition we should carry on a campaign of pointing out the real politics of the YSL-YPSL and demanding that they either support them or repudiate them. We have begun this already in our letter to the YSL-YPSL which referred to the Rusher affair -- something which they did not mention in their answer (appended). During the "Aims and Tasks" debate one YSLer came up to me and said: "It must be your birthday. They are giving you a present," referring to this document. And he was correct.

2. Our Independence: The YSL-YPSL answer to our letter indicates they are extremely weak on the question of independence of the youth. Their dogmatic insistence on the necessity of submitting to adult domination will not go over very well with new young people who are striving in their own way for independence, not dependence. This point should be continually stressed. However, it is not enough to stress it alone while ignoring the above-mentioned political points.

3. Our Militancy: There is no doubt that our militancy and vitality which is expressed through the fighting spirit of our paper and our supporters has been one of the most attractive features of our operation for the last year. It will become increasingly so in contrast to the super-intellectual petty bourgeois discussion-club approach of the social democrats. We must prove in action the difference between ourselves and the social democracy, as well as proving it in theory.

Finally I should mention that this growth on the part of our competition demands an all-around greater exertion of our own forces. The national tour increases in importance because of this. In addition the necessity of organizing our forces nationally also increases in importance. Only a national body of revolutionary youth can effectively intervene on the campuses and counteract social-democratic strength, can effectively enter into Sane on a nationwide scale, enter the YSA, and in other ways reach the new youth who are just now awakening to politics. Only such a body can act as a pole of attraction to the disillusioned left-wing youth in the YSL-YPSL.