

REPORT ON YWLL CONVENTION

by Geoff Mirelowitz

The purpose of the report is to give comrades a general idea of what happened at the YWLL Convention, and to make some generalizations about where the YWLL stands from what we can tell from their convention.

There was no basic change in their political line as expressed in the line reports to the convention. Comrades should read, if they haven't already, the draft resolution, the fairly lengthy document that was available publicly prior to their convention. What I want to do is not to go over each report but just to go through them and pick out a couple of the highlights of the reports or the discussion. One thing that we should note is that in the discussion on the political report, a number of the key national leaders of the YWLL took the floor to speak particularly on the "ideological struggle" and, more explicitly, on the fight against Trotskyism. A fairly lengthy section of the report on the elections was a major attack on our campaign, going into the usual slanders against our campaign. They pointed out that the real problem with our campaign is that we take on the liberals instead of taking on Wallace. In fact, they made a point of singling out Pulley and attacking him because previously he ran in California against Dellums, "a progressive."

In the report on the antiwar movement, they state they have made a mistake in not doing enough work in the antiwar movement. One of the specific projections that was made in the report, that we should keep our eyes open for, is that they plan to build Student Union for Peace and Justice formations on the campuses and in the high schools. They have attempted to do that in New York over the past few weeks and, in fact, have already done it, starting a few months ago, in Los Angeles.

In the Black report they say that there are 202 Angela Davis Defense Committees that have been set up over the past year and that half of them were initiated by the YWLL. They said in the report that they've doubled their Black membership since the founding convention. That's indicated not only from the fact that they say it, but from the convention registration. One thing that is clear from the reports is that they've recruited most of these Black members out of their work in Angela Davis Defense Committees, as well as social activities.

They held workshops, rather than reports, on women, high school students, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and campus work.

Now, I want to go into some detail on the Organization Report to the Convention. The first thing they did was to state the main tasks they had agreed upon in the Political report, which is the fight against the war, against Nixon's economic policies, and the

Angela Davis Defense work. In the Organization Report they again say that they've not been involved enough in the mass movements. That's also indicated from the Draft Resolution. They cite again especially the antiwar movement, and they indicate in the Organization Report that they feel that has been a problem for their recruitment. They've not recruited enough people out of the struggles that are going on today and they think that is something they have to try to change.

They singled out in the Organization Report something that is gone into in the political report and is also dealt with in some detail in the draft resolution, which is the problem of "sectarianism" in the YWLL. What it comes down to essentially is that they feel standards have been too high in the YWLL.

Now a few other things on some of their internal difficulties. They mentioned that one of the most important needs for them is to solidify their new membership. That's not something that's at all surprising; it's a problem we have as well and that any organization is bound to have. But they have it in a greater degree because many of the people they recruit do not come out of any political activity and therefore it's more difficult and it takes more work to consolidate those people.

They also spent a good deal of the organizational report discussing the financial problems they have, and the fact that there is a very low financial consciousness in the YWLL. As Matty Berkelhammer put it in the report, they have a real need to "fight for a dues and sustainer policy" in the YWLL. They also mentioned that only half of their members paid dues and their convention assessment prior to the convention.

Now on the Young Worker, which comrades may be aware, if they've seen the latest issue, they're attempting to professionalize. They planned at their convention to make it a monthly. And they also suggested and adopted doing some things which would professionalize the operation, like establishing an editorial board.

They also said that they had not met the projections on sales and subscriptions that they had made before and they projected 5,000 sales per month and 5,000 subs for fall. They also indicated that they haven't been responsible for the Young Worker financially. The last thing they mentioned on their magazine is that many areas of the country don't sell the Young Worker and don't pay for it.

Finally, they set a goal of 5,000 members and 120 branches by 1974, in two years.

There's just one other point that should be made on the reports to the convention. There was virtually no substantial disagreement that took place on any of the reports that were given to the convention, from what we could tell.

According to the Credentials Report, 571 people registered for the convention. That's smaller than their founding convention. Of those 571, 170 were delegates, 29 were alternates, and 202 were observers. All three of those categories are members of YWLL. There were 69 guests and those are people who are not members.

On the composition of the convention; 298 of the people who attended were male and 223 were female; 298 were workers and 74 were unemployed; 46 were high school students and 143 were college students. They report that the attendance included 210 Blacks, 15 Chicanos, 18 Puerto Ricans, and six Asians. The only breakdown on age of the convention was 80 percent were under 25 and 18 percent were between 18 and 20.

What I want to do now is make a couple of general comments and observations about things we could tell from the convention.

In the first place, they are clearly our major opponent and they are growing. They've obviously made some progress in establishing a youth organization. There has been significant growth in the YWLL since their founding convention, and a sizeable number of the people they have recruited have been Black.

There was a general agreement on their political projections and tasks at their convention. The general tone of their convention was spirited--it was not a demoralized convention. They have developed some leadership and are building a cadre of a certain sort. The people who were at this convention were primarily, from what we could tell, the more hardened elements of the YWLL, people who had been in for a longer period of time, who have more experience in Stalinist politics.

On the other hand, their convention also indicated some real weaknesses. Their convention was smaller than their founding convention. They could not decide whether or not they wanted to build it. They wanted on the one hand to build it like a YSA convention. But they had a problem in doing it, and in fact, the convention was not an open convention. The only people who were admitted were people who were vouched for by branches of the YWLL. Apparently, they were not able to whip up an excited, enthusiastic spirit throughout the organization that would have brought out a higher turn-out of members of the YWLL to the convention.

Secondly, while they are developing leadership, much of their national and particularly their central leadership had not changed since the days of the DuBois Clubs. The same figures who have been the leaders of the CP youth organizations and CP youth activity for seven or eight years, during which the YSA has gone through several layers of youth leadership, that layer for them is still essentially the same people--Jarvis

Tyner, Mike Zagarell, Tony Monteiro, Judy Edelman, people like that, are still playing a major role in youth work.

Another weakness indicated by their convention and that we've noticed before is that nationalist sentiment does exist among the Black, Puerto Rican, and Chicano youth who were at the convention. It was clear by the nationalist buttons that were worn by the people who attended the convention and by some of the discussions that we were able to have with people. Their position on nationalism is bound to catch up with them at some point and it's going to create some problems for them.

Their attitude toward us, which was displayed at their convention, is also bound to turn out to be a problem for them. On the one hand they tell their membership that we are their main opponent. On the other hand, they also tell their membership that they can ignore us, that we're sectarian, that it's not necessary to deal with the "Trotskyites."

Now I want to go over some of the aspects of our intervention at the convention. Comrades should understand that it was extremely limited. This was not an open, public convention. We were not even able to have a literature table in the main thoroughfare of the convention where people would see it. Our intervention consisted of having a literature room in the hotel, of having comrades in the lobby and at the doors of the convention passing out campaign material, selling The Militant, and talking to people about our politics and about the YWLL.

However, it was a successful intervention, if comrades understand the context in which it took place. We were able to raise with a number of people at least some of our ideas about the YWLL and about politics in general.