

# THE YOUTH AND THE ELECTIONS

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**B**OURGEOIS democracy is the dictatorship of the capitalist class cloaked in democratic forms, and giving the workers the illusion that they are the real rulers by having regular elections based on universal suffrage. This is the present-day form of bourgeois democracy, what is termed "government with the consent of the governed" by the theorizers of the capitalist system. But this is the stage which has been reached after a long period of development, and is adhered to only so long as the capitalist class feels sufficiently secure in the saddle of state power. Any threat to the power of the ruling class results in the most brutal abrogation of all the "political rights" of the masses and the institution of open dictatorship. And at the beginning of capitalist rule, before it was firmly established, before it felt itself sufficiently strong to make these gestures to the masses, the capitalist class was very careful not to have universal suffrage, and even propounded all sorts of theories on this basis. Universal suffrage as it exists to-day is of comparatively recent origin, and short duration, as an examination of the present situation in the countries of the world will show.

The favorite method of disfranchisement for the toiling masses was the institution of property qualifications, which have existed till very recently, and which are even in force at the present time in many "democratic" countries. In Japan, the elections of 1928 were the first that were based upon property qualifications. This method is obvious, since it makes the basis of the rule of the bourgeoisie—the ownership of property—the qualification for participation in elections. As the bourgeoisie consolidates its power, harnesses in its service all the instruments with which to mould the ideology of the masses (newspapers, schools, movies, etc.) and develops its powerful political parties, it gradually drops the property qualifications, and enters the period of "pure democracy", thus creating among the workers and the farmers the illusion that they themselves are the government, and if they desire any changes, they can make them.

However, the property qualification is not the only method the bourgeoisie uses to disfranchise its class enemies. At the present time, there are two other methods in wide use in every capitalist

country in the world—the disfranchisement of the women, and the disfranchisement of the youth. Even in that citadel of “democracy” the United States of America, women did not receive the vote until 1920, and even this was a war measure introduced in January, 1918. In all other countries, with very few exceptions women do not vote.

### THE DISFRANCHISEMENT OF THE YOUTH

The youth is completely disfranchised. There is not a single capitalist country where the youth has any political rights. The age of 21 seems to have been established as the absolute minimum, below which the capitalist class will not make any concessions. Even this age is not universal, and has been reached by a similar process as the property requirement. Generally, the age limit was at first 30, then 25 and finally 21. In Japan, at the present time, 25 is the voting age. In England, voting for women is limited to 30 years of age and over, and in many other “democratic” countries, voting is limited to those who are 25 or 30 years of age and over, in addition to other restrictions.

Of course, when it comes to running for office, the youth is entirely eliminated. It is a well-known fact that our “law-makers” are generally old men. The theory behind this disfranchisement of the youth is that the young people are too “unstable” (shall we read “not sufficiently conservative”?) and can not be depended upon to maintain the established order. The reasoning is much the same as in the case of the property qualifications—the need for eliminating from the franchise those elements who are not yet tightly bound to the capitalist system. In the one case, it is a property tie, in the other it is an ideological tie. And of course, the property ties of the youth are very slim.

The one exception is the Soviet Union. In the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, the toiling youth not only have a vote, but are also eligible for all offices. Here the only requirement is—to be a producer. All visitors to the Soviet Union have remarked on the number of young delegates to the various Soviet Congresses. Even in the highest government organs, young workers and peasants are found in official capacities. In the Soviet Union, where the proletarian dictatorship rests upon the participation of the broad masses of the toilers in the political activity of the country, the political interests of the young workers and peasants also find expression in the activities of the governmental bodies.

Mussolini, while entirely eliminating the franchise for the toiling masses, extends it to the youth between the ages of 18 and

21 on one condition—that they are married and have children. Mussolini is willing to use the franchise as a bribe for the production of cannon-fodder in mass quantities.

In capitalist countries, the youth displays little interest in elections. Whatever interest the young workers have is generally a result of curiosity—curiosity aroused by the campaigns in the press, etc. But the youth knows well that their interests find no expression in the election campaigns thru the capitalist parties. Because of this, they also are led to the erroneous conclusion that their interests are not involved in any way in the elections. The capitalist politicians are interested in the youth only insofar as they are voters, that is those who are already over 21 years of age, and especially at the present time, because of the general apathy displayed in elections by the working class, “a special drive is being made” according to an announcement by John Hays Hammond, head of the Department of Political Education of the National Civic Federation, “to arouse interest among 7,000,000 young men and young women who will cast their first votes at the 1928 Presidential election. Efforts to reach them will be made through Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and other junior organizations.” As part of this drive, the capitalist parties will undoubtedly include some fake “youth planks” in their program, in order to create the illusion that they fight for the interests of the youth.

#### COMMUNISTS AND YOUNG WORKERS

Different from the “Socialist” youth organizations, past and present, who tried to limit the political activity of the youth to doing the dirty work for the Socialist Parties during elections; and from the bourgeois youth organizations who smother all signs of political interest of the youth, of class-consciousness, the Communist youth organizations, as political organizations representing and fighting for all the interests of the toiling youth of town and country, comes forward with a program and calls upon the toiling youth to participate actively in the election campaign and fight for their interests.

The Communist Youth Leagues are the only youth organizations throughout the world that participate in election campaigns. The Communist Youth League in this country, the Young Workers (Communist) League of America, is the only organization that brings forward a program of demands for the toiling youth, and it is the only organization that is capable of actually leading the toiling youth in a struggle for these demands. In participating in

the election campaign, the revolutionary youth have no illusions about the possibility of their demands being granted by the capitalists. Only the victory of the proletariat will enable the youth to come into its own—will reorganize the conditions of youth labor upon a Socialist basis. The aim of the Communist Youth League is to draw the masses of the young workers and farmers into the struggles in their own interests, to arouse their interest in political questions and to awaken their class-consciousness.

The Young Workers (Communist) League of America puts forward as its first demand in the elections the extension of the political franchise to the youth between 18 and 21. The motto of the Young Workers (Communist) League is: Old enough to work, old enough to vote. The bosses will reject this demand. The parties of the bosses will likewise reject this demand. This will open the eyes of thousands of young workers and will demonstrate to them that "democracy" is a sham, and that all the fairy tales they have been taught in the public schools belong together with Grimm's in the fairy tale book.

#### EXPLOITATION OF THE YOUNG WORKERS

The Young Workers (Communist) League also puts before the youth its program as a basis for social legislation for the young workers. Young workers are becoming a more and more important factor in industry, and in production generally. The rationalization of industry is drawing them in as participators in the productive process in ever greater numbers. In the industries, they are ruthlessly exploited, they receive no protection either from government or trade union. They are thrown into industry pell-mell, without any preparation. The Young Workers (Communist) League has a program which can remedy this condition if it were applied. The program includes: The six-hour day and the five-day week for young workers; complete abolition of child labor and the state maintenance of the child worker; a minimum wage of twenty dollars a week for all young workers; youth protection—no night work, no work in dangerous occupations, no underground work and effective accident compensation; four weeks vacation with pay; and the proper regulation of the entry of young workers into industry through the organization of work-schools, modelled on the Soviet work-schools. This is a program which embraces the interests of the entire working-class youth, and for which the entire working-class youth must struggle, not only during election time, but during the entire year. At the same time, the Young Workers (Communist) League realizes that the interests and struggles of the youth are not and

cannot be separated from the interests and struggles of the working class as a whole. The fight of the youth is only a part of the general fight of the working class. Therefore the youth must turn their eyes toward the broader struggle, and take part in it. The League calls upon the toiling youth to promote the political separation of the working class from the parties of their masters and organize a political Party of their own, a Labor Party, based on the mass organizations and political Parties of the workers.

It is also necessary that the young workers themselves, those who agree with our basic demands but are not yet ready to join our ranks, must have an instrument through which they can help build and strengthen the Labor Party. Therefore, wherever there are strong Labor Parties, the Young Workers (Communist) League will support the formation of Labor Party Youth Clubs and Farmer-Labor Youth Clubs, which shall be based on support of the Labor Parties, and must have their own youth demands and fill some of the needs of the young workers and farmers. In this manner, the young workers will rapidly become convinced that only under the leadership of the Communist Youth organization, the Young Workers (Communist) League, can they advance toward the social reorganization of the basis of youth's place in society.

This election campaign will be but a step in the political awakening of the working-class youth. And under the leadership of the Communist Youth International, the youth will march forward, hand in hand with their older brothers, in the struggle against the common enemy for the victory of the toiling masses.