



# **Young Communists**

**AND**

# **Unity of the Youth**

**BY GIL GREEN**

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## Young Communists and Unity of the Youth\*

By GIL GREEN

COMRADES, the masterful report of Comrade Dimitroff, whose name arouses the deepest love and respect in the ranks of the toiling youth, has great significance for the work of our Party in the United States. In the past months we witnessed a growing development of united action on the part of the workers; a tendency towards mass breakaways from the two traditional parties of American capitalism; an increasing sentiment for independent political action on the part of the toilers; and side by side with these a growth of fascist tendencies.

The correctness of the line of Comrade Dimitroff's report has already been proven to our Party by life itself, in the course of the struggle for the unity of the masses in defense of their economic interests, for peace and against fascism. The experiences of our Party in the struggle for the unity of the young generation especially emphasize the tremendous possibilities inherent in the present situation in the United States for the creation of a broad people's movement against reaction and fascism.

As has already been mentioned here, our Party and Young Communist League can record certain achievements in helping to weld the unity of the young generation. In the period of less than one year, with the active participation of the Young Communist League, a broad united front has been established representing more than one million organized youth. This united front has succeeded in defeating three consecutive attempts to establish reactionary youth movements and has a growing influence and popularity among the youth.

\* Speech delivered at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International.

While we in the United States recognize the importance of this youth movement, we are, however, under no illusion "that the path to fascism has been barred" in the ranks of the youth. We realize that on the youth front the anti-fascist forces have at best won but a few skirmishes and that the major battles are yet to come. Why do I emphasize this point? Because as the resolution on the report of Comrade Dimitroff correctly states, any such illusions and overestimation on our part could only result in "self-satisfied sectarianism" and in "fostering passivity" while fascism gathers its forces.

### Struggle for the Youth

A sharp struggle has begun in the United States for the young generation. The press, the government, the educational authorities have never been so active in trying to win the youth, have never been so alarmed over the growing signs of political consciousness and activity among the youth. In this struggle for the youth, we in the United States have certain advantages. First, no one can say to the youth as they did in Germany, "We are poor because we were defeated in the war". American youth realize that they live in the wealthiest country in the world. Second, the youth of America are learning from Germany and Italy. Third, the initiative has come into the hands of the anti-fascist youth who have unified their forces, have developed a far broader program and appeal to the young generation; have correctly utilized the rich revolutionary traditions of the American people; have recognized the natural love of youth for the land of their birth, and connected this with the need for taking this land and its wealth out of the hands of the plutocrats; and through all of these, have created increased enthusiasm and activity among the youth.

However, we must not over-estimate these factors, as important as they are. We also face innumerable difficulties. The united front is not yet consolidated and rooted among the decisive masses of youth. The bulk of the youth represented in the united front have not yet been won and activized behind its program.

Furthermore, American capitalism is still capable of many maneuvers. The National Youth Administration established in the last weeks by the Roosevelt administration is only a first step in this direction. Definite concessions, in the form of bribes, can still be offered to sections of the youth, particularly the petty bourgeois youth.

### Threat of Fascism

At the same time, there is no question but that the growth of the anti-fascist united front will in turn also result in a certain unification of the forces of reaction and fascism. Up to now these have remained scattered. A solid united front has not yet been achieved against the Youth Congress. We, of course, must work to keep these forces from uniting, but that the attempt will be made time and again we can have no doubt. The reactionary forces are increasing their demagogic appeals to the youth as can already be seen in the movements of Huey Long and Father Coughlin.

But the masses of American youth who face no future under capitalism can and must be won for peace and against fascism. For in no country of the world, with the exception of Germany, does the problem of the young generation take on such sharp proportions as in the United States. Heretofore, especially as compared with today, a land of relative security and opportunity for youth, America has become the land of greatest unemployment, homelessness and insecurity for youth. Millions of youth have never had the opportunity to work, while other millions are being drawn into industry at far lower wages than adult workers.

But to win the young generation necessitates on our part first of all an intensification of our whole struggle against sectarianism. The section of the report of Comrade Dimitroff which deals with this struggle has more meaning for the Young Communist League and its sections than for any other part of our revolutionary movement. And if our American Young Communist League can record certain small achievements in applying the

tactic of the united front, it is only due to the fact that a stubborn struggle was conducted against our traditional sectarianism.

### Hesitancy Overcome

A year ago, when we learned that a fascist group, with the aid of the government, had called a congress of youth for support of a reactionary program, we made our first important break with sectarianism. We decided to go to the Congress and meet the enemy face to face. There were some comrades who hesitated to take this step, who feared we were too weak to oppose such powerful forces. However, together with other anti-fascist youth, we defeated the enemy and turned the Youth Congress into a broad united front around the immediate needs of the youth. From this we learn the important lesson of the need for fighting fascist movements as soon as they rear their heads, instead of waiting for them to develop and grow.

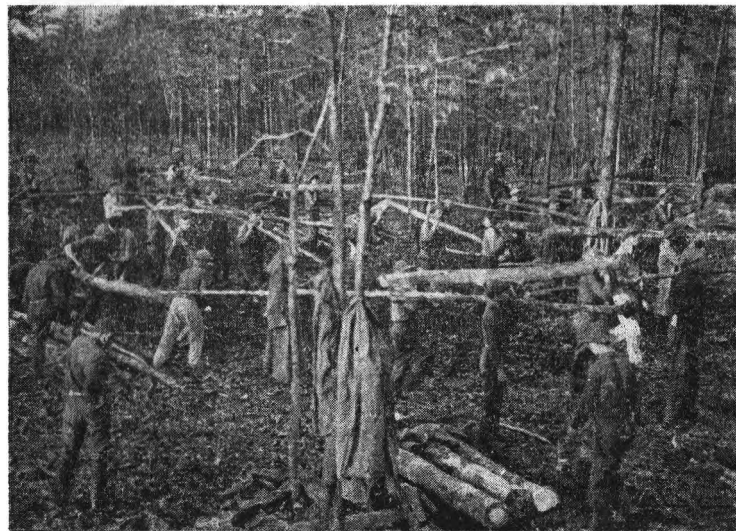
Then we faced a second struggle with sectarianism. There were some of us who felt a bit uneasy in such strange company. We thought maybe it would be best to narrow the movement a bit. We were afraid of the mixed class composition of the united front. But with the aid of the Central Committee of our Party we decided to help develop this movement on the broadest possible basis, to work together with every person or organization ready to unite on the immediate needs of the young generation.

In the course of developing this movement we constantly met up with other sectarian obstacles that had to be overcome. We now can state that our Young Communist League has definitely broken from its sectarian past, although it still must eradicate many sectarian conceptions and methods of work.

Of great importance in this connection for the whole Young Communist League is the establishment of a correct estimation of, and approach to, the large mass organizations of youth controlled or influenced by the bourgeoisie. Through these organizations and through the schools, the bourgeoisie maintains and develops its influence among the youth. In the United States these organizations have the decisive influence on the toiling youth.

Comrade Dimitroff has in the sharpest manner placed before the Young Communist Leagues the need for penetrating these organizations. However, it is necessary to understand how the Young Communist Leagues are to work in these organizations so as to avoid past sectarian errors. Our Young Communist Leagues must enter these organizations not with the purpose of destroying or weakening them, but to work to transform them from centers of bourgeois influence into centers for united front struggle, of proletarian influence. We must understand that the masses of youth look upon these organizations as their own. Only if we work to make this a reality, to see to it that these organizations really reflect the needs and interests of the youth and are led by them, can we develop mass influence.

This is the line we have begun to apply in the United States, and because of this, we are influencing larger masses of youth and are accepted by large numbers of them as a constructive force. In these organizations we found innumerable functionaries and cadres who are ready to fight with us against reaction. We learned to speak to them and win their confidence. Through



"ROOSEVELT LABOR CAMPS": The C.C.C.



pursuing such a policy in the course of less than a year our Young Communist League built 175 units within these mass organizations and through these has begun to anchor the united front down below.

Together with working in these organizations our Young Communist League must also improve its work of penetrating the Roosevelt labor camps. By the end of this year these camps will include some 600,000 youth. We must not underestimate the influence that these army-controlled camps can have in militarizing and fascizing the unemployed youth. In these camps we must fight against every step at militarization and for the improvement of the living and working conditions of these youth.

### Approach to Socialists

Another question of great importance is our attitude towards the Socialist youth leadership. The resolution before us points out the need for adopting a differentiated approach towards various groups and individuals in the Socialist leadership. In applying this to the work with the Socialist youth, we can go even further. As far as the United States is concerned, we can state quite definitely that the Socialist youth organization and movement does not have a bureaucracy in the sense of the one that exists within the Socialist Party. The leading cadres among the Socialist youth have entered the movement in the past years of crisis, reflect to a certain extent the growing militancy of the masses, and can in large numbers be won for the united front and even for Communism.

This is not yet understood by our entire Young Communist League. Much greater headway could have been made towards united action in such districts as New York had we adopted a more friendly, comradely and persistent approach towards the active cadres in the ranks of the Socialist youth and treated them as class brothers instead of, as we often did, class enemies. The fact that among the student youth a correct approach was adopted explains in large measure the splendid united front actions organized in this field, and the fact that in the very near future we aim to achieve organic unity in the ranks of the students.

### Non-Proletarian Strata

In building the broad people's movements, much attention will have to be devoted to developing a correct approach towards the non-proletarian strata, to the winning of the Negro youth, farm youth and student youth. In the American Youth Congress we can see a living example of how unity between the proletarian and middle class youth is possible. In the past years our Young Communist League has radically broken with its previous sectarian approach towards the middle class youth, especially the student youth. Only this has made possible the development of such powerful student actions as the April 12 student strike against war and fascism, on which day 184,000 students walked out of their classrooms at one given moment, in the greatest demonstration of youth solidarity ever witnessed in our country.

But much is still to be desired on this score. In many sections of our Young Communist League we still accept student youth into our ranks as something of a necessary evil; and when drawing them into the united front we seem to get a great satisfaction out of emphasizing that their role is negligible and that by permitting them to join we are doing them a great favor. Can we hope to win these masses with such an approach? Can we effectively combat the fascists who especially concentrate on these strata and heap flattery upon them, if we in turn treat them as undesirables, as second-class citizens? Of course not! Through united front struggle and life itself these youth will with our help learn to understand the leading role of the proletariat, but not through any sectarian mechanical approaches.

This question has a great practical significance for us, as the bourgeoisie is especially alarmed over the success of the united front among the students and is cleverly working to break the students from the working youth. This is the explanation as to why the recent Roosevelt statement on the youth places such emphasis on the needs of the student youth, and relatively more funds are allotted for their aid.

## Trade Unions Attracted

We must, however, understand that the broader the unity with the middle class youth, *the deeper and firmer must be our roots among the proletarian youth*, especially the youth in industry. In the United States the working youth have played a most active part in the strike waves and in the unemployed struggles of the past three years, and are also becoming more and more active within the trade unions. It is this industrial youth which must give backbone and firmness to our united front and by their activity guarantee the proletarian hegemony over this movement. This important question we have understood in the past months, with the result that at the Second American Youth Congress 150 trade unions participated and six important Central Trades and Labor Councils.

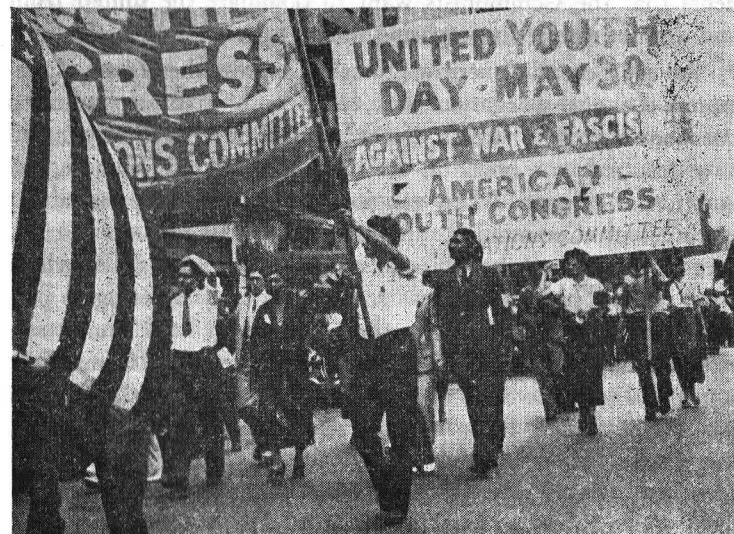
The point in the resolution which warns against tendencies to "overestimate the degree of revolutionization of the masses" has also great practical significance for our united front activity. While basing ourselves on the tremendous mass upsurge that is taking place in the United States, it would be fatal to also fail to see the special American characteristics of this radicalization, its uneven character, and its as yet low political level.

Why is this point so important for our Young Communist League at the present moment? Because in the past we took too much for granted. We failed to speak to the youth in their own language and on those questions which they understood and were ready to accept. Let us take the question of fascism. We often think that the masses of youth understand what fascism is, but, sad to say, this is not yet the case. We had an illuminating example of this recently. The Hearst fascist press put forward the slogan: Against Communism and Fascism. Certain youth in the united front thought this was a good slogan. They even asked how it was possible for Communists to unite in defense of democratic rights and against fascism, when the Communists themselves want dictatorship. Some even thought that Communism and fascism were close relatives. And yet, we often shout general slogans against fascism, sometimes calling everything

fascism, forgetting that it is necessary to answer the most elementary questions to the youth in order to fight against fascism. In the United States we must utilize the strong democratic traditions to unite with the youth who are ready to defend their democratic rights even though they as yet do not understand the connection between the increasing political reaction and fascism.

## Sectarian Errors

By all means we must be careful not to force our views upon youth who are not yet ready to accept them. In the last year we made a number of sectarian errors because we failed to understand the level of the united front and tried to force on these organizations and masses our forms of militant class struggle. We found many youth who were ready to cooperate with us against war and fascism, but who were not yet ready to demonstrate in the streets. This does not mean that we must have less street actions of the youth, but it does mean that we must also



"TOWARDS A NEW '76": The United Youth Day march in New York, May, 1935.

help develop those forms and methods of struggle that these wide masses, due to custom and habit, can accept as their own, and gradually lead them to more developed actions and more militant struggles.

The failure to learn to develop the broadest forms of activity, the widest educational work, will only result in creating a break between the politically advanced and the politically backward masses of youth. This must not take place. I would also like to place stress on what appear to us often as small, trivial matters, but which take on great meaning to the non-Communist masses in the united front. Such matters as the habit of some of our comrades and lower organizations to exaggerate facts; tendencies on our part to take all the credit for united front actions; tendencies to ignore the views of other youth and to push these youth aside instead of drawing them into leadership, etc. Our experience teaches us that it is precisely such small sectarian errors which give credence to the charge of our opponents that the Communists want to dominate the united front and are not sincere in proposing united action.

At the Second American Youth Congress the Young Communist League delegation was faced with many complicated questions any one of which, if not handled in a broad way, could have resulted in a break in the united front. For example, the question of religion. Many religious youth were skeptical about uniting with Communists, although they were against fascism, because they feared that this was a trap to force our atheist views upon them. This problem was solved by simply agreeing to permit all the religious youth in the Congress to hold church services Sunday morning. This did not compromise the Communist youth and yet showed to the masses of religious youth that this was not a united front against religion but against political reaction.

Another question was that of the Roosevelt youth project which had as its immediate aim the throwing of confusion within the ranks of youth. We did not answer this project with the usual word: demagoguery. Despite the fact that this project of the

government is cloaked with demagoguery and attacks the conditions of certain youth, nevertheless, the mere fact that Roosevelt was forced to set aside \$50,000,000 for immediate youth relief is a definite concession. The united front points this out, and shows that this concession is a result of the growing youth unity. At the same time it exposes its inadequacies and its attacks. Thus it turns this project of Roosevelt from a weapon against the Youth Congress into an instrument for mobilizing the youth for increased government aid.

### Learn from the Masses

The point that Comrade Dimitroff made that Communists must not alone teach the masses but also learn from them, our Young Communist League began to understand only in the course of this united front movement. Before that we had the idea, and sections of our Young Communist League still suffer from this, that whatever we say must be right, that we have nothing to learn from other people and the masses. To think we can seriously apply the tactic of the united front with such an outlook is simply stupid. We Communists learned much from the masses of youth and we are going to learn a lot more. One thing we learned was to change much of our trite, stereotyped language. And if the Declaration of Rights of American Youth, adopted at the Second American Youth Congress, speaks the language of youth, it is because we did all in our power to see to it that as many youth and their organizations as possible were drawn in to help formulate and finalize this document. By working in this manner we did not weaken the prestige of the Young Communist League but strengthened it, we showed large numbers of youth that the Young Communist League had no narrow interests but that its main concern was to broaden the Youth Congress and make it the most effective mass movement against reaction and for the immediate needs of the youth.

All of these things require that our Young Communist League, from top to bottom, begin to think not in the terms of the thousands in our ranks, but of the broad masses of youth, the hundreds of thousands. Too often we feel satisfied when we



reach a few more thousand, but if our Young Communist League is to play an important role in this united front it must begin to reach the broad masses with its full program. We have made a few small steps in this direction. We have increased the circulation of our youth press and in certain special numbers have reached a circulation as high as 135,000 and 200,000 copies. However, these are barely beginnings. The broader the united front, the more must we develop our special Young Communist League activity and literature, so that at all times we can raise the movement to a higher level and recruit the most advanced masses of youth for our Young Communist League and Party. Especially must we strengthen our Young Communist League work among the industrial youth and deepen our roots within the factories and trade unions.

### Attention of Communist Parties

This leads me to my next and last point. What is necessary to break finally with the sectarianism of our international youth movement and to develop real mass work among the young generation? From our experiences in the United States we believe we can indicate some of the general answers.

First, it is absolutely necessary that the Communist Parties seriously give leadership and help to the Young Communist Leagues and take up as one of their central tasks that of winning the young generation for the struggle against fascism, for socialism. If our Young Communist League in the United States has made progress, and it has, great credit must be given to the Central Committee of our Party and especially to the General Secretary of our Party, Comrade Browder, who has been giving more and more attention to the problems of the youth. Our achievements in the united front would not have been possible without the closest guidance from our Party. This of course also indicates to what extent our Party has broken from sectarianism, as without this the best intentions would not have helped.

Second, it is necessary to help the Young Communist League establish a firm, stable, developed leadership over a period of

years. Our Party for the last years has had a critical attitude towards the work of the Young Communist League leadership, but at the same time it did not follow the policy of dismembering this leadership even when important errors were made, of course, never tolerating opportunist tendencies. The result has been that a whole number of trained youth cadres have been developed. The conception of many Parties that politically qualified mature leadership is not needed for youth work lies at the bottom of many of the ills of our present Young Communist Leagues.

### Development of Initiative

Third, it is necessary to give the individual national sections of the Young Communist League room for individual initiative and development. The youth movement cannot be placed in a strait-jacket or molded to like proportions in all parts of the world. And yet, we must say that in the period since the Sixth Congress of the Comintern there has been on the part of all of us in the international youth movement the tendency towards solving our problems with general formulas and recipes. For a long time any new idea was treated as if it were an internal enemy.

New ideas and methods must be welcome and frequent guests in the ranks of our Young Communist Leagues, otherwise we are not going to develop mass youth movements. The Young Communist League must also more effectively give the international experiences of the youth movement to its various sections.

In concluding, I want to remind this Congress of the words of Comrade Lenin to the Russian Bolsheviks in 1905. He wrote:

"These are war times. The youth decide the outcome of the struggle, first of all the working youth but also the student youth."

Thirty years have passed since then, but I do not know of words which more fittingly express the burning need for winning the present young generation against the offensive of fascism and for socialism.



*Have you read this pamphlet?*

# **HAPPY DAYS FOR AMERICAN YOUTH**

*by*

**MAX WEISS**

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