

Build the Youth Movement

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

The resolution of the thirteenth Plenum of the CC of our Party lays much stress upon the building of the YCL. This is very timely. The question of organizing the youth is a particularly vital one and it grows more acute every day.

The role of the youth in the American class struggle is highly and increasingly important. This is indicated, among many other facts, by the relative youth of American workers in general and the constantly lowering of age levels in the industries, by the energetic (and too successful) efforts of the capitalist to draw the youth into its gigantic militarist and strike-breaking plans, by the position of the youth as a bridge between the adult foreign-born and native workers, by the huge masses of proletarian youth in the capitalist high schools and political activity of American workers, we have no broad cadres of trained adult leading forces but must look chiefly to the youth for their development. In every phase of our struggle—strike activities, unemployed campaigns, work among Negroes, etc.—the question of the organization of the youth becomes more and more a decisive matter.

But we have made little progress in this vital task. The YCL is still extremely weak which constitutes a great handicap in our every field of work. This must be drastically remedied. Large numbers of the militant young fighters of the working-class must be drawn into our ranks and activities. And they, like the adult workers, are becoming ripe in large masses for our leadership. The YCL is destined to be a powerful weapon of our Party, but at this stage of the development, it needs most active Party support.

The Party must therefore, take seriously in hand the building of the YCL. To do this the Party must develop much more of an orientation upon the youth. There is in many instances a definite underestimation, not only of the special methods of organizing young workers, but of the whole question of the youth. Consequently there is a tendency to relegate this entire matter to the YCL as its special task, instead of recognizing it as a central task of the Party, to which our best forces must be applied. The YCL has been looked upon too much as a stepchild,

Consequently, the work of building YCL nuclei has been neglected and youth activities in the mass organization have been slighted, and in many instances, the YCL finds itself in more or less of a struggle with the districts to maintain its own minimum of leading forces. All this, of course, robbing the League of its initiative. The struggle with the youth over the question of forces should cease—the Party can well afford even to lean backward in this respect. The YCL must have adequate forces of its own, and more than that, leading Party workers must devote part of their time to the practical work of the League. The same principle must apply to organizers of the TUUL unions—they must not leave the building of the youth sections and the development of youth activities simply to the young workers.

On the other hand, the YCL must develop a sharp turn towards the factories, towards mass work. It must consciously arrive against separatist, sectarian tendencies it must link up its work with that of the party in general. As part of this orientation towards mass work, the YCL must broaden its conceptions of what is youth work. Like the Party, it must definitely assign strong forces for leading positions in mass organizations. Such organizers must also, of course, systematically build the YCL and youth activities generally. Like the Party, the building of the YCL is bound up directly with the strengthening of the mass struggles and mass organizations.

There are at present distinct signs of a turn of the YCL towards the shops and mass work, and for coordination with the Party's campaigns. This is evidenced by the resolutions of the sixth convention of the YCL, by the League's increasing activities in strikes and by its genuine effort to mobilize its forces into Pittsburgh for the Party's major concentration in the coal and steel industries. All this is only a beginning, of course. But it is progress in the right direction and it must be energetically supported by the Party.

At present the Party is developing a strong recruiting campaign. Conditions are ripe for enlisting thousands of militant workers into the Party. But this membership drive will fail of its purpose if it does not put in the very center

bureaucratic methods of work, of activating the membership, of having them lay down the policies, and making all decisions for the trade unions.

It will only be possible to root out the bureaucratic tendencies, to establish a real trade union democracy, to eliminate the method of commanding and ordering and have the trade unions function normally, when we will have regular meeting days, when the meetings will be held in orderly manner, when the members of the elected committees will come to the meetings regularly, when the agendas for the meetings will be worked out beforehand and will be sent to the members, when all the members of the elected committees will be supplied with the necessary material before the meeting which will help them orientate themselves in the questions, will give them the possibility of expressing their opinion and of deciding the questions.

Trade union democracy has as its aim the participation of the whole membership in the work of the union, means that not one decision can or should be put through without the knowledge and preliminary discussion of the whole membership. It presupposes the encouragement of initiative and work of the rank and file members, who must be assigned definite tasks and the carrying out of the assignments must be checked up. Cases where all the work is done by the paid functionary only, who is managing the work, when most of the elected committees are not assigned any concrete tasks, have no definite functions, are not permeated with the feeling of responsibility for their work, when the membership finds out about decisions made accidentally, when decisions are made without their participation and knowledge, having nothing to do with the first principles of trade union democracy.

We must carry on a struggle against "paper" leadership, the lack of constant contact between the leadership and the membership, the lack of collective leadership in the trade union

the question of building of the YCL. But the building of the YCL like the Party, is not a matter of simple recruitment. It is primarily a question of strengthening the mass activities the mass activities of the youth in every direction. The whole question of the building of the YCL deserve the greatest attention of the Party. It presents itself as one of our most urgent and decisive tasks.