

TRIAL CIRCULAR

To all YSA members

Dear Comrades:

On December 28, 1963, five comrades of the Revolutionary Tendency, Lynne Harper, Larry Ireland, Shane Mage, Jim Robertson, and Geoff White, were expelled from the SWP because of their "disloyal conduct," although, as a matter of fact, no violations of conduct were cited, no acts of indiscipline were charged. This drastic action was taken as a result of "investigations" by the Control Commission whose report characterized the "Robertson-Mage-White" minority as having a "hostile and disloyal attitude toward the party," this attitude having been "clearly manifested" by adroitly selected extracts of material written over a year prior to the investigations. No statutes violated, no acts committed, no charges, no trial, only "disloyal attitudes."

Then, on February 13, 1964, another supporter of the Revolutionary Tendency, Roger Abrams, was expelled from the party, ostensibly for having joined a picket line against Queen Frederika of Greece "without prior consultation or approval of the branch," although it was explained in a report to the branch that he did this awful thing because he was "disloyal."

Again, on March 5, 1964, five more supporters of the RT, Comrades Price Chatham, Charlotte Michaels, Edith Olsen, Al Nelson, and Harry Turner were expelled from the party, this time for having voted against an organizer's report that characterized the "Spartacist splitters" as "enemies of the party," indicating thereby their intentions to act as "agents" of these "enemies." Their trial, it was reported, indicated that they couldn't be "trusted" because of their "disloyalty." Once more, no acts of indiscipline were charged, no party statutes were violated. Only their ideas were questioned, their attitudes, their intentions, their "loyalty". The only activity that was shared by all of these comrades was a consistent, outspoken, principled, political opposition to the political line of the majority leadership--an opposition that is the most fundamental responsibility of any revolutionist that is genuinely loyal to his party and its avowed aims if he feels the majority line to be grossly incorrect.

Witch-hunt into the Youth

Now this attempt to make the SWP "homogeneous," to expel from its ranks all those who, by their political opposition "are not able to be assimilated," now this witch-hunt is continued in the YSA. On June 1, 1964, Comrades Roger Abrams, Charlotte Michaels, and Al Nelson are to go on trial, having been charged with "deliberate violations of discipline in a public action." By this move the fig leaf of organizational independence from the SWP has been torn away, and the YSA is revealed for what it really is and has been since 1961: a subordinate arm of the SWP majority.

The present Minority in the YSA and SWP was formed initially as a party minority at the 1961 SWP Convention in opposition to the Majority's line on the Cuban Revolution. At that time the Party Minority was a majority in the national leadership of the YSA. The majority leadership of the SWP, generally wary of the "experiment" of a youth group as a source of dissident or critical opinions, and specifically fearful of the Minority's positions winning acceptance in the youth, instituted a policy to bring the YSA directly under the control of the party. Party loyalty was reduced to the small change of seeking to prohibit the presentation in the YSA of any other position on Cuba except the "loyal" one--that of the SWP majority. Any other views were characterized as "disloyal." It didn't take long for criticism or political opposition to the majority leadership to be equated with "disloyalty" to the party. The party minority sought to prevent the YSA from being reduced to just a front group of the party, and tried to avoid a Cuban discussion that was only a simple reflex of the Party discussion. However, the discussion went through, and party members were permitted to present their views in the youth, but the first step of taking in the YSA was made with the appointment of Comrade Feingold as party representative to the youth to carefully supervise the discussion. Then, at the urging of Comrade Cannon, further steps were taken by the party leadership in the latter part of 1961 that resulted in a criminal deformation of the Leninist principles of party-youth relations traditional to our movement--i.e., political solidarity and subordination, but organizational independence. Through various devices, the YSA leadership was removed and replaced by one that was more docile and which is dependent organizationally on the party. Attempts by Minority supporters to discuss and protest these moves were prohibited by directives of the party Political Committee, first at the YSA National Conference of December, 1961, and then at the SWP National Convention of June, 1963.

Leninist Party-Youth Relations

It is indicative of the decomposition of the political fiber of the leadership of the SWP as well as the YSA, that it has reached the point where it will ban a subject from discussion if it is especially hard for them to deal with and is directly embarrassing to them--particularly when the issue is a complete reversal of their previous, correct position:

" The concept of the responsibility of a minority to confine its struggle basically to the party has never implied limiting the freedom of expression of supporters of a minority within a revolutionary youth organization, whatever the exact relation of such an organization to the party. As a matter of fact, all the great struggles within the party were invariably paralleled in the youth organization. Or, as you mentioned, under certain circumstances, found their major arena in the youth movement. Such was the case with regard to the left-wing in the international social-democracy. And no one who held the Leninist view of the revolutionary party's

relation to the youth movement has, to my knowledge, ever attempted to introduce the practice of a party fraction in the youth movement. This has been the case in the history of our movement in the U.S. and internationally, the early period of the Communist Party, the social-democracy before World War I, and the Russian Bolsheviks after the revolution. Only the Stalinist and social-democratic bureaucracies ultimately imposed their control over the radical youth-- in the name of party discipline and "no factionalism." [From Circular Letter of SWP Political Committee Policy on Youth/Party Relations--by Murry Weiss, June 14, 1957.]

So it is, then, that the fraudulent nature of the charges against us is revealed, when seen in the context of the development of the Minority's political struggles with the party leadership and the history of youth-party relations. The charges represent only a carefully contrived technicality to cover up a timetable for cleaning the ranks of the YSA and SWP of dissident opinions. Since the only views tolerated in the YSA are those of the party majority, it is consistent with the whole degeneration of the SWP and YSA that they should now seek to expel supporters of the Spartacist even though there is no constitutional or historical reasons why the same division of labor in public actions, that formally exists between the SWP and YSA members, should not also apply to Spartacist supporters. Although we have been expelled from the SWP since March and have, since then, on frequent occasions, functioned publicly as supporters of the Spartacist (e.g., Yale Socialist Forum, sales, etc.), the YSA leadership has, until now, felt restrained by involvement in their own witch-hunt case of the comrades in Bloomington. It would be rather embarrassing if expulsions of a witch-hunt character were to take place while public attention was still sharply focused on the YSA from its victory of March 20.

Bolshevik Discipline

Certainly there are occasions when working-class organizations have found it necessary to expel members from their ranks. But these organizational measures are usually resorted to only in extreme cases. In all cases, there is always some political substance to the violation and charges; some harm has been done to the organization, there has been a clash of some kind. This is not the case here at all. Rather, this is more of a formal test case that was carefully planned and set up in advance, complete with dialogue. It resembles a "speed trap" more than any actual "deliberate violation of discipline."

Our participation in the May 2 Demonstration in no way contradicted YSA policies concerning the action. Supporters of the Spartacist had been openly supporting and participating in the May 2 Committee since it was initially formed at the Yale Socialist Forum on March 14. All this was known by the local YSA and National Office. Concerning the demonstration itself, the charges are

not entirely accurate. We did not reply that we were "under the discipline" of the Spartacist but rather that we were participating in the demonstration as representatives of the Spartacist. Comrades Charlotte and Al were on the united Defense Squad. As a matter of fact, our tendency participated much more fully and honestly in the action than did the New York YSA local as a whole. After the demonstration it was learned that YSA members had, before the action, been instructed to gradually fall to the rear of the line of marchers and drop out and blend into the crowd when the march approached Times Square. Those who wished to continue had their signs taken away. The reason advanced for this cowardly and pusillanimous behavior was that there would probably be trouble with the police, and arrests. The whole concept of revolutionary leadership is violated by this vulgarization of a legitimate practice--avoiding unnecessary dangers to one's cadre. It is not we who should be up on charges.

Degeneration

But organizational practices and procedures do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they flow from and reflect the character and needs of revolutionary politics, and are subordinated to political purposes. Starting with the Majority's even more than uncritical endorsement of the Castro government, its removal from the Permanent Revolution of its most essential aspect--the struggle to win workers' power as a prerequisite to successful colonial revolution, seeing proletarian democracy as an optional rather than a vital condition for opening the road to socialism, and, in general, viewing its role as only an auxiliary to larger, more impressive movements (Castro in Cuba; Ben Bella in Algeria; the Black Muslims), the Majority has been necessarily led to deny in its political positions and in practice, the need for a conscious vanguard party of the working class. Having accepted this role, those organizational practices that, in the past, have been necessary to sharpen the theoretical tools of the revolutionary party are now seen as dispensable. This tendency towards a bureaucratic, organizational solution to political opposition has characterized every revolutionary organization that has lost sight of its historical role. In the case of the SWP and YSA, their tradition and reputation as Trotskyists does not permit them to declare the real political motives for their acts. Rather they have resorted to the old Stalinist devices of slander, manufactured crimes, and frame-ups.

To a certain extent, we tell the working class how we'll rule by how we exist in our own organizations. Sharp differences always result in a harsh fight with a great deal of heat generated. This is a part of the high overhead of factional struggle, a struggle that is warranted only by the continued existence of differences of the most serious nature. But at all times this must be a principled fight. In addition to the responsibilities of a minority, the majority must know how to use its power, for democratic-centralism is a two-edged sword. As Trotsky said in his article Middle of the Road: "Discipline is built by education.

Organizational measures should be resorted to only in extreme cases. It was the elastic life within it which allowed the Bolshevik Party to build its discipline."

So, Comrades, if you don't think there's any room in our movement for dissenting opinion, for the right to hold and seek to win others to views that are critical of the majority leadership, to political controversy and struggle that has as its primary effect the sharpening of the majority line and the strengthening of the revolutionary party, with the concomitant political development of YSA members as young Marxist apprentices, then sit there and do nothing. But, if you have any doubt concerning the validity of these actions against us and the political motivation for them, then you cannot remain silent and still consider yourselves honest revolutionists. Revolutionary integrity is not to be taken lightly. Whenever this has given way to a rationalization of a series of "necessary evils," it has marked the beginning of the end of any organization as a viable, revolutionary instrument. Although the YSA and SWP have gone very far on the road of political revision and bureaucratic organizational practice, the process is not irreversible. There is still time to make a choice, to call a halt and leave open the way back to a revolutionary future for the YSA and the SWP.

Therefore, we call upon all YSA members, locals, and individual NC members to send in letters and statements to the National Office calling for the charges to be withdrawn, and the reaffirmation of our right to exist as a political tendency in the YSA.

Roger Abrams
Charlotte Michaels
Al Nelson

Info copies to all SWP
branches

C O P Y

Charges filed against Comrades Al S., Roger A., and Charlotte on May 7, 1964, by the New York local YSA executive committee.

At the April 25, 1964 meeting of the New York local of the YSA the following motion was passed under point 5 on the agenda dealing with the May 2 demonstration against the war in Vietnam.

"Motion: that the local mobilize for this demonstration.

passed"

At this meeting the report on the demonstration included assignments for the demonstration for each member of the local which were read aloud, and members were instructed to meet at 11 a.m. on May 2 at the YSA hall for final instructions on the mobilization. This report was unanimously approved. It was then asked whether there were any requests to change assignments. Neither Comrade Al S. or Comrade Roger A., who were present at this meeting, requested assignment changes. Comrade Charlotte was absent. These three comrades were assigned to carry posters bearing the name of the YSA containing slogans against the war in Vietnam.

The executive committee on April 30, 1964, appointed a committee of Barry S., Jack M., and Jan G., to direct the participation of the YSA at the demonstration and the membership was informed of this at the 11 a.m. mobilization on May 2 at the YSA hall.

At the demonstration, Barry Sheppard, National Chairman of the YSA and member of the YSA directing committee for the demonstration, asked Comrade Al S. if he would carry a YSA sign as he had been assigned. Comrade Al S. said "No." Barry then asked Al S. if he were under YSA discipline at the demonstration, and Al answered that he was under the discipline of the "Spartacist", a political group located primarily in New York, which publishes a newspaper called "Spartacist". Barry then instructed Al to carry a YSA sign, and Al again refused. Barry asked Al if he were sure he knew the choice he was making. Al replied that he was sure.

Comrade Charlotte was also asked by Barry to carry a YSA sign. Charlotte refused. Barry asked Charlotte if she were under YSA discipline and she said that she was at the demonstration working for the "May 2 Committee". Barry then instructed her to carry a YSA sign. Charlotte again refused. Barry asked her if she were aware of the choice she was making. She said she was.

Comrade Roger A. was asked by Jack M., member of the committee in charge of YSA participation in the demonstration, to carry a YSA sign, or sell the YS, or distribute YSA leaflets. Roger A. refused and stated that he was under "Spartacist" discipline.

The executive committee of the New York local charges that the above actions were deliberate violations of discipline in a

public action and are thus in violation of YSA policies. In accordance with Article IX section 1 of the Constitution of the YSA these charges are filed with the New York local YSA in the cases of Comrade Roger A. and Comrade Charlotte. They are filed with the National Executive Committee in the case of Comrade Al S., who is an alternate member of the National Committee.

The New York local will meet in trial at its regular meeting on Saturday May 30, 1964, in the cases of Roger A. and Charlotte.

/s/ Jack Barnes - NY local organizer
for the unanimous executive
committee

The NEC will meet in trial on the case of Al S. following the YSA local meeting on Saturday May 30, 1964.

/s/ Barry Sheppard, National Chair-
man of the YSA for the National
Executive Committee

Charges mailed to defendants by registered mail on May 8, 1964.

Constitution

ARTICLE IX TRIAL PROCEDURE

Section 1. Any member or body of the YSA may bring charges against any member for violation of the constitutional articles, program or policies of the YSA. The charges must be initially presented in writing to the highest body of which the accused is a member. That body may constitute itself as the trial committee or may refer the charges to a lower body of which the accused is a member. Charges may be dismissed at any time by the body having jurisdiction at that time.

Section 2. No body shall meet as a trial committee unless all members have been informed in advance of the business at hand. The accused must be given notice of the trial date and a copy of the charges at least 15 days preceeding the trial. Failure to appear or to send a letter of defense in the absense of excuse for such failure shall be grounds for conducting the trial in absentia.

Section 3. The disciplinary measures which are available in the event the accused is found guilty are, in increasing order of severity: censure, private or public, suspension and expulsion. These measures may be applied only as a result of the trial procedures outlined in this article. To censure or suspend a simple majority vote is needed, to expell a two thirds vote majority is required.

Section 4. The accused or accuser may appeal the decision (dismissal of charges, guilt or innocence, or the severity of discipline) of any body to the next higher one, up to and including the National Convention whose decision shall be final. An appeal must be filed within 15 days after the action being appealed.