

EDUCATIONAL OUTLINE No. 1.

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HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST

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YOUTH MOVEMENT

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PART I

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FROM ITS ORIGIN TO 1919

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(With thanks to Comrades Gates & Erber for advice and  
for supplying material not available elsewhere)

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Published by:

Provisional National Committee  
for a SOCIALIST YOUTH LEAGUE  
114 W. 14th Street  
New York 11, New York

PRICE: 5¢

# HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST YOUTH MOVEMENT

## PART I

### FROM ITS ORIGIN TO 1919

#### A. IMPETUS

In early capitalist and precapitalist society, the youth played a negligible role which was for the most part confined to the guilds. The increasingly important role of the youth reached its height with the development of the imperialist stage of capitalism which provided a broader economic base for increasing the economic role of the young worker and thereby increasing manifold the role played by the youth in the class struggle. While in the national revolutions of Europe from the beginning of the 19th Century upwards, the youth in large numbers played a significant role, its real participation in class events as an organized force was postponed until the close of the century and the opening of the twentieth.

The growth of invention and industry brought with it structural changes in the economic order, simultaneously changing the role of youth in society. The factory system created entirely new conditions; youth entered industry in vast numbers. With this occurrence came the diminution in importance of the apprentice character of youth labor, and its final liquidation as a decisive problem.

Despite the wrong attitude of the Social Democratic Parties towards the youth, the very existence of an international organization of the working class proved an important influence in the organization of the youth.

#### 1. ANTI-MILITARISM

A number of early youth movements found an impetus for their development on the basis of anti-militarist activity. This was true of the following:

Jeunes Gardes (Young Guards) of Belgium.....	.....1886
Holland Socialist Youth .....	.....1885
Socialist Youth League of Sweden.....	.....1895
Socialist Youth of Switzerland.....	.....1900
Italian Socialist Youth Federation.....	.....1901
Social Democratic Youth League of Norway.....	.....1902

## 2. ORGANIZATIONS OF ECONOMIC STRUGGLE

The exceptional conditions of exploitation was the impetus for the formation of the following youth organizations;

Young Workers League of Austria..... 1894  
 Federation of Free Youth Leagues of  
 Northern Germany ..... 1904

## 3. EDUCATION

The growing need to educate youth for socialism resulted in the formation of the following groups;

Socialist Youth of Spain..... 1903  
 Young Workers Leagues of South Germany ..... 1904

Youth organizations were then organized in Hungary and Denmark (1905) Finland (1906) and the United States (1907)

## B. PARTY - YOUTH RELATIONS

The youth organizations came into being as a result of the initiative of the youth themselves, aided by the support of the revolutionary elements of the Social Democracy. They received the bulk of their support from the left-wing, while officially the parties remained either passive or in direct opposition to the youth organizations and their activities.

The role and activities of the youth organization were becoming a point of dispute in the Second International which rose in sharp form at its Stuttgart conference and the post-Stuttgart period. This struggle was not solved until the formation of the Communist International. As on all questions of a fundamental character, so on the question of the youth, the struggle between the revolutionary and reformist wings of the Second International was extremely bitter. The left-wing contended that the youth organizations must essentially be organizations of struggle in the general field of politics and especially in the sphere of anti-militarist work, not neglecting, of course, the economic struggles of the young workers. The reformist wing tried to limit the activity of the youth organization around the rights of apprentices, economic struggles under the immediate supervision and direction of the Social Democratic trade unions, and to concentrate upon general education and cultural work. The reformists wished to relegate the youth to the background, and thus liquidate the whole problem.

It becomes quite clear then why the Austrian and North German organization mirrored the reformist social-democracy and were vastly different than the militant youth organizations elsewhere. Many factors acted in favor, however, of the left wing forces in the youth movement. It was less weighted down by the parliamentary actions and tradition of the Social Democracy, was more receptive to the theories of Marxism, and hence, was more militant.

The left-wing forces in the Parties were the first to recognize the role of the youth in the class struggle and immediately wished to lend it support and help it in its work. Among the first was Karl Liebknecht\*. The issue of militarism was the first over which he raised his voice. At the international congresses of the Social Democracy in Paris, 1890 and Amsterdam, 1904 the questions were raised from the point of view of adult aid to the youth and for the construction of an international youth organization. Such decisions were adopted through the insistence of Karl Liebknecht, but they were only paper decisions and made only for the record. The Social-Democracy, except for the left wing, really didn't intend to carry them out.

#### C. THE YOUNG GUARD- A MODEL

The activities of the Belgian Young Guard, by far the most important organization at this stage, stands out during this period. A good many of its activities remain as models for the present day organizations. The Young Guard was founded in 1886 during an acute industrial crisis. The strike wave effecting particularly the miners was met with the intervention of the strike breaking army and the shooting down of strikers. In the face of this class struggle background, the youth organization became almost entirely anti-militarist.

The Young Guard issued two papers "Le Conscript" (The Recruit) and "Le Caserne" (The Barrack), in the French and Flemish languages. By 1907, the papers had a circulation of 100,000 copies.

In 1889 a national federation was formed. The movement now held regular anti-militarist demonstrations followed by mass meetings. Protracted activity at the barracks and among the recruits, with astounding results, led to the attempts at suppression by the government. In 1911, Lenin referred to the Belgian youth organization as an example and model for anti-militarist activity.

The activity of the Belgian organization and the splendid traditions associated with it, had a sharp influence upon the other youth organizations. The Italian youth in particular, approximated the activities of the Belgian organization and was destined to play a most important role in later years. The French youth likewise embarked on a course of anti-militarist activity. With the threat of war between Norway and Sweden in 1903, the Swedish youth adopted an anti-war resolution and entered this field of work also.

#### D. THE STUTTGART CONFERENCE

For some time now, there existed a number of individual national youth organizations without international connections or form. Such a condition could not last long. The international character of the class struggle made it imperative to construct an international organization of the youth as well as off the Party.

The Union of Youth Workers of South Germany, at its congress in Sept. 30, 1906 went on record in favor of an international youth organiz-

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\* See Appendix for short biography of Karl Liebknecht

-ation. From this decision a provisional international committee composed of Karl Liebknecht (Germany) and De Man (Belgium) was established. This committee was the organizer of the Stuttgart Conference, the first international youth gathering, held on August 24-26, 1907 immediately following the congress of the social democracy at Stuttgart, Germany.

### 1. Formation of An International Youth Organization

Following the opening report of DeMan, the conference decided to establish an international youth organization and named it "The International Union of Socialist Youth Organizations". The first international bureau whose seat was in Vienna was composed of five members: Liebknecht (Germany), De Man (Belgium), Widarsky (Austria), Heller (Sweden), and Roland-Holst (Holland). De Man was elected international secretary, but in the early part of 1908 he was replaced by Robert Dannerberg, a follower of the reformist Austrian organization. The name of the international was soon shortened to "Socialist Youth International".

### 2. Resolution on War

The conference was divided on the major issues into revolutionary and reformist wings, with the former predominating. While at Social Democratic Congress the revolutionary resolution on the war was more or less a concession to the left-wing on the part of the growing centrist tendency, in the youth movement, the reformist influences were in a distinct minority.

The resolution of the Party congress proposed by Lenin, Luxemburg, and Martov gave the lead to the youth conference. The resolution is very clear in expressing the idea of a struggle against war through revolutionary activity; and if failing in this, prevention of war, to utilise such methods that would turn the imperialist war into a civil war resulting in the destruction of capitalism. The leader in the fight for this view-point at the youth conference was Karl Liebknecht. He made the report on "The Struggle Against Militarism". On the basis of the report he wrote his famous "Militarism and Anti-Militarism" for which he was sentenced to prison for one and a half years. The report which was intended for public consumption had to be compiled in a careful manner, for already the indictment of Liebknecht for high treason had begun. (Hence the conference was closed to outsiders).

### 3. Resolution On Education

The second main question around the discussion of "Socialist Education and Cultural Work", was reported on by Roland-Holst. On this issue also there was expressed in sharp form the differences between the revolutionary and reformist elements. The conference correctly decided that socialist education could not be non-political or divorced from the class struggle itself. General education, separate and apart from the class struggle was the point advocated by the reformist elements of the Social Democracy who tried to prevent the youth from an active participation in the class struggle. Since there were many legal restrictions on the German Party, they wished to permit the youth to act according to the laws of the land but opposed their extra-legal work. The conference, nevertheless, adopted a line of struggle (a) against militarism, (b) against alcoholism; (c) and the economic struggle.

While in essence adopting a correct position, the conference, seemingly as a concession to the right-wing, pitted the relation between education and activity by stating that the education of the youth should predominate over participation in the class struggle. This false conception of theory and practice was finally corrected by the Young Communist International and in the day to day life of the Socialist Youth International.

#### 4. Economic Position Of Youth

The final point of the conference, the "Economic Position of the Apprentices and the Young Workers" was reported on by Alpari. The report went beyond the reformist conceptions of Jannenberg and the Austrian organization, i.e. of protest commissions with the aim of reform pure and simple. Alpari stressed the need of the main concentration upon large scale industries. Up until that time only the Austrian, Hungarian, North German and sections of the South German organizations had concerned themselves with this field of work. Alpari also favored the establishment of "defense commissions" for the apprentices, whose task it would be to watch against excesses in exploitation of the apprentices.

On the whole, the Stuttgart Conference adopted a good program of struggle, in spite of the efforts of the Social Democracy to prevent this. In view of the entire situation, there was a great deal of unclarity at the conference. Still the main line was a revolutionary Marxian approach to problems. The major aim of the conference was the struggle against war and militarism in the spirit of Liebknecht and in line with the proposals of Lenin and Luxemburg, as adopted at the Social Democratic Congress held also at Stuttgart.

#### E. THE WAVE OF REFORMISM AND THE YOUTH

The upward growth of imperialism brought with it a corresponding growth of the right-wing elements; it created a world aristocracy of labor in the ranks of the workers movement. The defeat of the Russian Revolution in 1905 was also an important factor in the ensuing ebb of the youth movement. Reformist leaderships dominated most of the Parties of the Second International. The "History of the Y.C.I." describes this period, "Alas! The declarations of the Stuttgart Congress were not carried out. From 1907 on, first in Germany and then in the majority of European countries, Social Democratic parties and trade unions who had no relations with the organizations of the union of youth, and in many cases (Austria and Switzerland) had persecuted them- suddenly developed a strong affection towards 'inexperienced youth' and resolved to direct them on the 'right road'. First Schultz, and after him other apostles of opportunism, frightened by the revolutionary spirit of the independent organization- proclaimed a liberal-'pedagogical' principle: 'The youth must not mix in politics'. Then in the interests of Social Democracy, Anarchism was discovered among the youth and as a result a theoretical transformation of the young proletarians into helpless children- was formulated, the idea of dissolving the Independent Unions of Youth and setting up Committees of Youth, composed of representatives of parties and trade unions."

This reformist attitude was accompanied by governmental repressions universally, but mainly in Germany. In 1907, the German government issued a decree which forbade youth from belonging to political organizations or from attending political meetings. This decree was enforced by the government with the aid of bayonets, whips and prison. Liebknecht was already sentenced. Various youth sections answered these repressions by intensifying their activity.

Added to this, the reformist wing of the German Social Democracy began to take action against the youth organizations which had until then functioned autonomously. In 1908, at the Hamburg Conference of the Trade Unions, Legion declared in the name of the social democratic trade unions that a separate youth organization was a "mistaken (false) undertaking." In spite of the protests of the youth, the German Party at its congress in September 1908 at Nuremberg proceeded to liquidate the North German, South German and local youth organizations. In its place, it instituted commissions of party district committees to carry forth agitation and education for the youth. In spite of the struggle of Liebknecht's group, they could not prevent the carrying through of these decisions. On January 1st, 1909, the Party's Central Committee of the Working Youth of Germany issued a paper "The Working Youth" in place of the militant "Young Guard". The head of the committee was none other than Fritz Ebert, the first President of the German Republic.

The activity of the youth organizations, now completely dominated by the Party and trade unions became colorless units of a petty-bourgeois character. Education was the chief feature of these groups, but this education was non-political. The groups played games, held social gatherings, etc. In Austria a similar development took place. While the youth maintained their separate existence here, it was nothing less than a formal organization indulging purely in sports and play.

Holland saw the same occurrence enacted as that begun in Germany. In 1910, a split occurred between the revolutionary and reformist elements. The reformists established an organization similar to that of the German, called "The Central Committee of the Working Youth of Holland." In France too, the youth were placed under the direct control of the Party. Soon this process was followed in Bohemia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Finland, Denmark, and America.

This development naturally did not take place everywhere with such ease and thoroughness. The youth organizations of Italy, Sweden, Norway and Switzerland, successfully resisted the effort to destroy their organizations. The Italian youth movement, in particular, played a leading role in this struggle against reformism and for the continuation of a revolutionary struggle against capitalism.

The Italian organization enjoyed a period of tremendous growth, activity and education. Foremost in its activity was anti-militarist work in which respect it mirrored the Belgian Young Guards. Through propangandizing the soldiers via its illegal army groups and its press, the movement came into conflict with the opportunist Party leadership. Following the struggle against the imperialist venture of Italy in Tripoli, the youth organization came into open struggle with the Party regime.

In 1909, the Central Committee of the youth adopted a resolution against the Party regime for its opportunism and reasserted its revolutionary position on the question of war and militarism. In this resolution a call was raised for a second international youth conference and proposed that this conference institute a practical program for international action against war. As the struggle ensued, the Party in 1912 led by the reformist wing proposed liquidation of the youth movement in the manner of the German Social-Democracy. This proposal brought matters to a head and in this struggle the opportunist leadership lost control of the Party to the left wing.

The Swedish and Norwegian youth organizations were extremely active in the Party in the struggle against opportunism; thereby it played a leading role in the Party itself. Following the general strike of 1908, the cleavage between the youth and the Party sharpened, so that the left wing issued their own paper, "Stormklocken". Here, the fight in the Swedish organization was such that workers beyond the age of "youth" entered the youth organization where they could combine with the militants. In time, the relations between the Party and youth improved. It was agreed that the older comrades would re-enter the Party and in turn the Party would lend active support to the youth. At the 1912 Congress, the Swedish youth participated more actively in the inner Party questions with the aim of bolstering the left wing forces.

#### F. COPENHAGEN CONFERENCE

The reformist elements did not wholly succeed in their aim of capturing the youth organizations. The decisions of Stuttgart were full of meaning to the Italian, Swiss, Norwegian youth and to the Left Socialist Youth of Holland, as well as the left opposition of Germany. They kept aloft the banner of internationalism during the great betrayal. However, the international Bureau was inactive due to the leadership of Dannenberg who succumbed to the right wing. Nevertheless, the left groups called for a new international conference.

The second international conference of the youth, held in Copenhagen, September 1910, was represented by 32 delegates plus many visitors. Lieknecht reported on the question of anti-militarist work which was followed by the adoption of a resolution along the lines laid down at Stuttgart. A most important question on the relations between the youth and the Party was introduced with Dannenberg favoring the subordination of the youth to the reformist Party leadership. Nothing was done about this matter; Dannenberg remained head of the Bureau.

#### G. Basle Conference

The outbreak of the Balkan War in 1912, acutely raised the danger of a world conflict. This circumstance brought about the conference of the Social Democratic International which adopted a series of actions against war, only to cast it aside two years later for the most rabid chauvinism. At the time they held their conference, the youth also convened at Basle, on Nov. 25,

Under the leadership of Dannenberg, they proceeded to take measures that meant the liquidation of the youth international. Against



Dannenberg's concepts, the Italian youth proposed a strengthening of the movement, the creation of a genuine international program and a functioning and disciplined bureau. While the struggle really unfolded after the conference, the outbreak of the war only made clearer the deep divisions existing in the workers movement.

#### H. THE WORLD WAR AND THE GROWTH OF THE OPPOSITION

The war brought about a "crisis in opportunism". This tendency in the Socialist International was prepared long before the great betrayal of 1914, but the war gave impetus and open expression to this course. Under the influence of the Parties, a nationalist sentiment existed in some of the youth movement. Hundreds of youth functionaries joined the army and carried on an agitation for war. While the Social Democracy supported the war, the socialist leaders in France and Belgium entered their respective bourgeois governments.

The German youth paper "Die Arbeiter-Jugend" took an unsocialist warmongering position. When the well-known former leader of the South German Young Guard, Ludwig Frank volunteered for military service at the outbreak of the war and died on a French battlefield, his voluntary enlistment and death were hailed in "Die Arbeiter-Jugend" as an heroic act and as an example to be followed by the millions of young German workers.

The war marked the end of the international Bureau. It disappeared from the scene, and thus, the proposal of Dannenberg became a reality. He and the Austrian organization adopted Kautsky's formula for the youth organization: "The International is founded for the purpose of peace and not for wartime." Dannenberg proceeded to hang a black-bordered sign on the door of the office of the youth Bureau in Vienna, which read: "Temporarily closed on account of the war."

The Italian organization again played a leading role in calling for another conference. The first international gathering since the war was a meeting of the Italian and Swiss organizations at Lugano, Sept. 1914 which met at the behest or through the initiative of the Russian Socialists under the leadership of Lenin (they then resided in exile in Switzerland). Lenin regarded the war resolution adopted at this conference, while not clear on the question of internationalism and the revolution, as a revolutionary document, and as representative of a tremendous step forward in the mobilization of the revolutionary current in the workers movement.

The Central Committee of the Swiss youth, headed by Munzenberg addressed the Italian youth on Oct. 10, 1914, inviting them to participate in a gathering at Zurich. A copy

of this letter was sent to Dannenberg by Munzenberg , and the former replied "It is practically impossible to say now if the conference in the spring will be possible. At the present time, I cannot do anything about the proposal. Best greetings ; Dannenberg." As poor a reply as it was, this post card nevertheless was the first sign of life on the part of the Bureau since the war.

No longer recognizing the Bureau as a decisive force, the youth organizations of Sweden, Norway and Denmark issued a call for a new international conference. The Italian and Danish you also decided to participate. The "De Zaaier", the left youth of Holland, who had already broken with the reformist wing of the Dutch Party, accepted the call also. The Central Committee of the German youth ( Eberts group) openly condemned the conference as did the French. The Austrian organization opposed holding the conference during the war. Dannenberg, a member of the Austrian executive committee answered in the name of the Secretariat, somewhat differently, exhibiting the dual role he played as a member of the International and of the Austrian executive. Although he said he could not be present at the conference, he wished it success.

The decision of the French Central Committee found opposition in its midst via the Secretary Strago, who resigned from his post and from the C.C. and proceeded to organize the opposition movement in France.

The reply of the German organization was scandalous. It laughed at the aims and phraseology of the call for the conference and warned the militant youth of its "disasterous " actions. They felt that the tasks set forth by the youth were tasks which only the Party had a right to take up and arrive at a solution. The youth must stop meddling.

I. THE BERNE CONFERENCE

1. Background

This period can best be described as a part of the initial clarification of the revolutionary wing of the movement. The left wing was decentralized along side of a Second International dominated by reformism. The leaders of the right wing turned chauvinist: Vaillant, Bessolati, the Trade Union leaders of Great Britain, the Austrian leadership, etc. Former orthodox Marxist like Plechanov also failed to take a revolutionary position on the war. On the other hand the Bolsheviks, the left opposition in Germany (Merhing, Liebknecht, and Luxemburg, & of the Bremen lefts), groups in France , Austria, Sweden and Norway, Serbia, Bulgaria, & Italy remained true to internationalism. In support of them stood the overwhelming majority of the youth.

In this process of clarification, the left elements were not as yet clear as to the differentiation taking place, especially in regard to the centrists (Kautsky, Haase, MacDonald, Hardie, etc.) Many of the anti-war socialists were actually socialist-pacifists who failed to recognize the need of carrying on the class struggle in their home country as a means of turning the war into a civil war. In Switzerland, especially, under the leadership of the centrist Grimm, much confusion existed.

Under such circumstances, the holding of an international conference of the youth had extreme importance, because it would open up all the issues and force a definitive solution of them. Through the entire period, the Bolsheviks endeavored to steer the oppositional movements completely to the left. Berne marked precisely such a step.

## 2. Work of Conference

Thirteen delegates representing nine countries convened at Berne April 4-6, 1915. The major issue before the conference was "The War and the Attitude of the Social Democratic Parties and Youth organizations." For the first time in the history of the youth international, the socialist youth came to an independent decision and recorded their views in documentary form. The Bureau with the aid of Grimm and Angelica Balabanova presented the thesis on the war which characterized it as one of banditry and the result of capitalist politics. It sharply condemned the class collaborationist policy of the social democracy and pledged itself to the continuation of the class struggle to bring an end to war.

During the third session, the Russian delegation (which walked out of the conference over a dispute over the allotment of votes and returned on the insistence of Lenin) presented Lenin's position on the war. It sharply attacked the chauvinists and centrists, & called for civil war as a solution to the imperialist war. They criticised the left pacifist position of Grimm and Balabanova. Although this resolution was defeated and the resolution that was adopted had many weaknesses, it still signified an essentially progressive step in comparison to previously adopted resolutions by the youth movement.

The Berne Conference elected a new Bureau with Willi Munzenberg \* as international Secretary.

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 \* Munzenberg first entered the Socialist Youth Movement in Germany in 1906 as a young factory worker. He later transferred his activity to Switzerland. The outbreak of the war found him one of the leading members of the Swiss socialist movement. He later became one of the leaders of the German Communist Party.

The new Bureau which was formed at Berne published the "Youth International". This famous paper often contained articles written by some of the most prominent Bolsheviki leaders in the international labor movement. The Bureau also participated at the Zimmerwald Conference, a gathering of the internationalists in the Parties who were also undergoing a period of clarification.

Two very important decisions were made at Berne. One was the establishment of International Youth Day\*. This was a call to the workers and youth in all countries to cast aside their artificially created hatred of their class brothers and to substitute in its place the struggle against the capitalist system and imperialist wars. The call was answered by revolutionists in all countries who on Oct. 3, 1915,, demonstrated in the streets against capitalist oppression. The Y.P.S.L. in the United States marched down the streets of New York city on this day in 1915. I.Y.D. has become a part of the tradition of the youth movement.

The second important decision was the breaking off of relations with the Vienna Bureau and Dannenberg. In its place a new committee and new international organization was formed, destined to become the forerunner of the Young Communist International. The conference also decided to organize a Liebknecht fund to be used for anti-militarist work. They also issued a declaration of sympathy for the five arrested Bolsheviki and for Rosa Luxemburg and raised funds for the class war prisoners.

A period of intensive organization followed the Berne conference. This was the war period in which the international Bureau sought to put into practice the decisions of Berne, and hence marked great strides towards the formation of the Young Communist International; This period led to the clarification of the most disputed and misunderstood fundamental problems at a time when the Parties betrayed the working class of the world.

#### J. Post Berne Period

The decisions at Berne found wide response in the ranks of the revolutionary youth. In many places, leaflets were distributed and meetings held on the decisions of the Berne conference. In those organizations not present at Berne, discussions on the proposals were heatedly thrashed out in the ranks.

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See Appendix for the call issued at Berne for the first International Youth Day demonstration.

By the end of the war practically all the youth organizations were supporters of the new international bureau with the exceptions of the Berlin Committee, the Holland, the reformist Central Committee of the French League. However, both in France and Germany strong left wings developed..

The youth organizations still contained strong centrist tendencies. In reality the Berne resolution stood on a left-centrist plane. It was because they did not completely break with centrism, that the Bolsheviks were so severely critical of the resolutions. The entire movement was faced with questions of reformism, centrism or socialist pacifist positions, and revolutionary positions on the war. Already the questions of whether or not to regenerate the Second International or build the Third was debated.

In the fall of 1916 the Swedish youth came out openly in favor of the Zimmerwald-left, the internationalists in the war. At the Kienthal Conference, (1916), a continuation of the Zimmerwald gathering of the Parties, the youth demonstrated their solidarity with the ideas of Bolshevism. At the celebration of the second International Youth Day, the new tendency in the youth organizations was demonstrated when the main fire of the demonstrations were directed against the social-patriots.

The youth moved faster and faster to the left. The Swiss organization allied itself with the Bolsheviks and its leading spirits and took the lead in winning the youth organizations to Bolshevism. They were the first to declare their support of the Russian Revolution.

In the mean while, as a direct result of the war, class struggle intensified on a world scale. The revolution in Russia became a symbol and inspiration to the class struggle everywhere. In January 1918, mass strikes broke out in Austria and Germany. In Hungary the revolution commenced. In the midst of the revolutionary struggles of the workers, came a series of repressions against the workers movements by the capitalist governments all over Europe. In November, 1917 Willi Munzenberg was arrested.

#### K. THE VANGUARD ROLE OF THE YOUTH

While in the imperialist war of 1914-1918 practically all the Social Democratic Parties went over to the side of the bourgeoisie, most of the proletarian youth organizations and the youth international remained true to the principles of revolutionary class struggle. The banner of revolution, disgraced and betrayed by the parties of the Second International, was held aloft again by the proletarian youth.

By the very nature of the situation, the youth international played a vanguard role. Their were in most places no revolutionary parties; those that did exist sold

out on the working class. The youth organizations were converted into young parties which attempted to lead the entire working class. Particular youth problems became secondary to the main burning problems confronting the working class as a whole. The youth organizations conducted independent struggles against the imperialist war, against the bourgeoisie and against the social-democrats. Thus, to a large extent, they paved the ground for the formation of revolutionary working class parties. This vanguard role, i.e. the leadership of the working class, existed as far along as 1919. Even in the early stages of the communist movement the youth groups were acting like young parties. It was not until the first and second congresses of the Young Communist International that the question was treated to a long and serious discussion. At that time a solution was arrived at: the recognition of the Party as the leader of the entire working class, the Youth as the leader of the toiling youth.

#### L. Toward the Organization of the Young Communist International.

It is necessary to examine several of the other youth organizations in this period as the militant youth moved towards the formation of the Young Communist International.

##### 1. Hungary

Prior to and during the war, the <sup>H</sup>ungarian youth organization was attached to the Social Democratic Party. A change began to take place in the beginning of 1918. Supporters of Zimmerwald began a wide agitation for adherents; sharp conflict against war rose. There was the era of great strikes and revolutionary battles. The revolution broke out in Oct. 31, 1918. On the 13th of Nov., 1918 the youth held its third congress at which, although still affiliated to the Social Democratic Party, it solidarized itself with the Spartacus League and the Russian Bolsheviks and called for a struggle against its own party. They were driven inexorably toward a split with the Party and finally declared themselves an independent youth organization. This was purely transitional since most already stood on the platform of communism. The Social Democracy also had its own youth organization composed of those who did not split. Still, this new youth group issued a paper "Young Proletarian" and engaged in such tremendous activity that by the end of March, 1919 it had 19,500 members.

##### 2. The United States

In 1907 young peoples groups were organized on a local scale by the Socialist Party which started out as purely educational groups studying the elements of socialist theory. The 1912 convention of the Socialist Party

recognized the fact that the spontaneous and uncoordinated growth of the Socialist youth movement was in itself sufficient proof of the need of such a movement on an organized basis. At first the problem of the youth was relegated to a special section of the women's department, but later a special youth department with a full time director was organized.

This movement, the Young People's Socialist League, was formed in 1915; William Kruse was elected National secretary and a paper "Young Socialist Magazine" was published. Despite the valuable propaganda work, the League membership and activities were still closer to the earlier discussion groups than to a politicalized youth movement. But the core of leading comrades were developing politically and were slowly raising the level of the movement.

In the mean while, the S.P. under its special youth department organized Socialist Sunday Schools for the purpose of training children from the ages of six to fourteen, at which time they were ready to enter the Y.P.S.L. A book published by David Greenberg "Socialist Sunday School Curriculum" is particularly interesting in showing the methods employed in the training of younger children. In the primary class, children of six and seven studied economics. The purpose was "to get the children to see that the source of all things is the earth which belongs to everybody and that it is labor that takes everything from the earth and turns it (1) into machinery and (2) the things that labor makes with machinery." Courses on music and poetry contained "simple revolutionary verse that emphasizes human rights."

When the U.S. entered the war in 1917, the YPSL took a pacifist rather than a Marxian position and its organizational attempts to combat war fell through for lack of a stable machinery and a trained membership. The League was divided on the question of the war. Kruse, despite his being a part of the S.P. machine, nevertheless took steps which later led to his imprisonment. Various S.P. members were sentenced to twenty years imprisonment on grounds of treason, but the case was finally quashed in 1920.

Kruse attempted to form an underground apparatus at the last minute by advising all secretaries to conceal duplicate lists of their membership and to "list all the dependable Socialist members of your League, and form them into an unofficial executive committee and pledge them to work for our movement and be true no matter what happens."

The trials of the leading Party and YPSL members later revealed that the membership did not have the training necessary to effectively carry out underground work and such errors as keeping illegal literature in the homes of prominent members and carrying printer's receipts for such

for such literature about their persons led to a large number of arrests and conviction.

The differences in opinion on the war within the S.P. aided the politicalization of the League. This development received an even greater impetus with the advent of the Russian Revolution and the heated controversy it engendered in the ranks of the Party. The overwhelming majority of the YPSL in America declared its agreement with the program of the Communist International and insolidarity with the left wing of the Party demanded affiliation to the international of Lenin and Trotsky.

The National Executive Committee of the Party, seeing a split in the offing, tried to keep the YPSL intact by shielding it from the factional fight. They naively thought that this object could be achieved by granting the YPSL greater autonomy and removing it further from the Party machinery. However, the 1919 convention of the YPSL stood in solidarity with the left wing. Shortly afterwards these youth moved with increasing tempo towards the Y.C.I.

### 3. Germany

The centralized and organized character of the youth left opposition took place in Jena, 1916. A few years later another national conference was held in Berlin in which Liebknecht participated and helped form the "Free Socialist Youth of Germany". The conference went on record for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and decided to issue the "Junges Guede" as the official organ of the organization.

The revolution broke out shortly afterwards. During the revolution the revolutionary sections of the youth were found in the Spartacus League or aiding. The Spartacus League, organized by Liebknecht and Luxemburg after a split with the centrists of the Independent Social Democracy, was primarily composed of young people. Although small, and hence defenseless, they tried to assume leadership in the revolution. The reformists in the Social Democracy, fearing the active revolutionary struggle of the proletariat ran to the bourgeoisie. Noske called out the Junkers. During this period, Liebknecht and Luxemburg were slaughtered in the midst of struggle.

Around Dec. 1918, Munzenberg was expelled from Switzerland. He went to Berlin where a meeting of the Bureau was held. It was decided to move the International Secretariat to Germany, but Munzenberg was arrested again and the Swiss comrades took over the Secretariat once more. At the same time (March, 1919) the Communist International was organized and the youth were present also.

With the arrest of Munzenberg, Trostel (Swiss) was named Secretary. In the early part of 1919 the German Hungarian and Russian youth section established relations



with each other. Zeigler of the Munich Communist youth organization was in Moscow as were members of the Lithuanian and Budapest opposition groups. They planned a new international conference. at Budapest.

As was soon established, the majority of the youth organization stood under the banner of the Third International. The Soviet government of Hungary had in the meantime fallen and it was decided to hold the congress in Vienna. Munzenberg was again released from prison at the same time. On the 25th of August, 1919, the first session took place in the editorial office of the "Wiener Arbeiterzeitung". The presence of Dannenberg and his organized group still expressed the confusion arising out of the war years. As it turned out the congress was just an "information" meeting.

A Provisional Committee headed by Munzenberg called a world conference. In the course of the preparatory work, and under the influence of the Bolsheviki, errors in relation to the centrists were clarified and rectified.

On November 20, 1919, at 3:00 P.M. in the back room of a beer house, guarded by sentinels and pickets of the Berlin youth, the first congress of the Young Communist International was held. There were present delegates from 14 countries representing 200,000 members when Munzenberg, in the name of the Provisional Committee, opened the Congress.

Thus was the Young Communist League organized.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Most of the material used is now unavailable. All of the material is out of print, however some libraries still carry them.

A Short History of the Y.C.L. (1928)  
 Fundamental Problems of the Communist Movement (1922)  
 Lenin : Youth International  
 Case of the Chicago Socialists  
 Militarism and Anti-Militarism(second section) K. Liebknecht  
 "Die Dritte Front" - Willi Munzenberg  
 Draft Program of the Young Communist International  
 Periodicals: Young Worker  
                   Young Spartacus  
                   Challenge of Youth  
 Also: Notes collected by Gates

In order to better understand this period and the problems within the movement the following books are recommended:

Imperialist War- Lenin (Collected Works)  
 Foundation of the C.I.-Lenin  
 War & the Second International-Lenin  
 State and Revolution-Lenin

## QUESTIONS

1. What three main issues gave rise to the youth movement?
2. Why did the Social Democracy oppose the youth movement?
3. What lessons can be learned from the fight between the Social Democracy and the youth?
4. Who is Karl Liebknecht? Can you tell something about his life? His beliefs?
5. Of what importance was the Berne Conference?
6. What was the role of Robert Dannenberg? Willi Munzenberg?
7. Why is it erroneous under normal circumstances for a proletarian youth organization to play a vanguard role towards the entire working class?
8. Why was it correct for the youth organizations to become the working class vanguard in the absence of revolutionary parties.

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## APPENDIX I

## K. Liebknecht:

"Karl Liebknecht was born as his father lay in prison for his allegiance to international socialism. His birth, 1871 coincided with the period of triumph of German imperialism. A study of economics and law in his youth translated itself into a use of his knowledge to the ends of propaganda, agitation and the defense of his comrades.

"His analysis of imperialism pointed out to him the role of militarism and the urgent need for a social struggle against it. His greatest appeal, his book of 1907, "Militarism & Anti-Militarism" was destined to spread his teachings far and wide. The book was confiscated and Karl stood up in the high courts of Leipzig on charges of high treason. From the floor of the court he boldly proclaimed the principles for which he stood. Eighteen months of imprisonment was the penalty and sacrifice. Nevertheless, he was amply rewarded by the great service he rendered toward the actual formation of the youth organization. His work as no one else's helped to create the first Socialist Youth Organization international.

From the time when he was elected to the Reichstag in 1912 he became an inspiration to workers in his fearless denunciation of the imperialists. On Dec. 2, 1914, He thundered "NO" against the issuance of war credits.

Liebknecht was called to the army and there continued his agitation against the false idea of "national defense." In this critical period he carried on with his work by organizing youth groups and participating in the first illegal conference in Jena, 1915, of the German Socialist youth opposition. He had prepared them while still in the Social Democracy against the corrupt leadership of the Party.

With the aid of Luxemburg, Zetkin, and Merhing, Liebknecht and the others published an illegal journal "The International". Eventually the principles of revolutionary internationalism which he propagated bore its fruit when he split from the centrists. With Luxemburg he organized the Spartacist Bund which emerged in the fire of war and revolution.

On May Day 1916 Liebknecht came illegally in civilian clothes to address a group of workers. For this he was sentenced to four and a half years of imprisonment. He was finally freed by the revolutionary workers when the German revolution began. Liebknecht and Luxemburg became the leaders of the revolution. In the process of the civil war, the Spartacists, Liebknecht and Luxemburg were slaughtered through the aid of the social democrats, Noske, Schiedmann, and Ebert.

## Call for the first INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY

( This is a reprint of the manifesto issued at the Berne Conference, 1915 by the International Union of Socialist Youth )

## TO THE YOUTH OF ALL COUNTRIES!

Friends! Comrades! In all countries a part of the Socialists are moving powerfully forward to prepare a quick end to this most terrible of all wars by resuming class struggle action. Tirelessly and with remarkable perseverance some of the comrades in Germany are at work under the most difficult conditions, striving to realize this aim. The heroic struggles of our Italian comrades against the war are still fresh in our memory. They are struggles that belong to the most significant deeds of the proletarian movement. And even today the Italian proletariat is once more arming to impede with its might and its solidarity, the slaughter of its sons and if possible to prevent it altogether. With the very self-same enthusiasm and joyous sacrifice all the comrades loyal to our idea, also in France, Russia, Poland, Austria, Great Britain, Siberia, and all other countries, are at work agitating for an understanding among the people and for the fraternization of humanity.

Comrades! Young Socialists! Intoxicated by their orgy of blood, supported- to the everlasting shame of the proletariat- by the social patriotic labor leaders, the reactionary governments of all countries are attempting with all the means of raw and brutal power at their disposal, to suppress the heroic struggle of our comrades and to stifle their cries for peace in the dungeons. In Germany as well as in Italy, in Russia as well as in France, mass arrests of our comrades and friends have taken place. The governments of all countries are today zealously competing with one another in the murder of their "natives" and in the brutal trampling of every peace move. The victims which our comrades have brought on the altar of liberty are legion. The present state of affairs demand most urgently and most quickly, aid and support of our fighting comrades lest in spite of all their bravery and readiness for sacrifice, the governments should triumph and sink the last remnants of humanity and freedom in a sea of blood.

This aid, you, the young socialists of all countries, must bring to our hardpressed friends. You, who by your conference at Berne, in the spring of 1915, by your uninterrupted mutual relationships and by much more than that, have proved that in your hearts and soul the liberating thoughts of international socialist labor fraternization, revolutionary struggle for peace and freedom.

We call upon you everywhere, in all countries, to effectively and militantly support the attempts to resume revolutionary and class struggle activity.

Participate as speakers at conferences and meetings, spread pamphlets and newspapers in which you call for class struggle international action, agitate tirelessly from mouth to mouth among your friends and relatives, among your colleagues at work.

The governments of all countries and the press which is entirely subordinated to them are attempting to conceal the peace efforts and the revolutionary activities of our comrades: by lies and by fake reports they are attempting to precipitate the people into an ever-greater whirlpool of hate and blind wrath. Comrades, tear down everywhere this texture of lies. Your friends in Italy, France, Russia, and England and other countries tell the story of what a part of the German and Austrian comrades are sacrificing for peace. You comrades in Germany and Austria tell in your countries what heroic struggles which the workers in Italy, France, Russia, England and other countries are conducting for peace. Comrades! The resumption of a decisive, clearly defined class struggle by the majority of the socialistically thinking workers ever allows for the possibility of victory. The hour of action has come. A second winter campaign can only immeasurably increase the sufferings and the destitution of the working masses of all countries. The soil is prepared for revolutionary indignation. Let us sow.

The bourgeois peace conference will never be able to prevent war even if they wanted to and even if they were ever so impressively arranged. Only the full might of the proletariat and of this revolutionary action can hold in check the greed for profit and blood of the exploiters.

Comrades, Socialist Youth Organizations of all countries. We call upon you to manifest by powerful demonstrations in all countries your unshakable will to work tirelessly against militarism and for socialism. On one day, on October 3, 1915, at one hour let us all meet. The comrades in Copenhagen, in Christiania, Stockholm, Paris, and Berlin must know that at one time when they demonstrate for peace and socialism the same will be done by their friends in Amsterdam, Wien, Berne, Bucharest, Rome, and other cities.

We are directing this urgent appeal to groups, that they might support effectively and militantly the action of the youth all socialist trade union and party by mass demonstration. Above all we expect an abundant participation on the part of the wives and the mothers of all young people who have been condemned to slaughter.

Arise young socialists of all countries, let your words follow your thoughts, let your acts follow your words.

Long live the International of the young worker generation, which shall one day bring to all countries peace and freedom. Long live the struggle against murder among nations, against the greed for blood. Long live the struggle for the highest ideal of humanity, for Socialism.

Bureau of the International Union  
of  
Socialist Youth Organizations.