

Detroit  
Apr. 7, 1958

Dear Tim,

The following is a report on Young Socialist work in Detroit.

Following the Midwest Conference, we decided to take advantage of the paper's special offer for the March issue (1000 copies for \$15) and conduct a mass circulation campaign for the paper. We felt that the success of the Conference, our new contacts with YS readers at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) and Eastern Michigan College (Ypsilanti), and seeing new people becoming interested in the Young Socialist Club because of our last six month's activities, was all evidence that such a project would be successful.

We ordered 2000 copies besides our regular bundle of 100. They were stuffed with a leaflet in the form of a letter that briefly explained the purpose of the paper and its intention to build a broad, independent, and militant socialist youth movement. Included was the name of our club and literature agent, a local address, and a sub blank.

But how were we going to pay for all this and our back bill as well? A local fund drive was our only answer. We asked everyone who had ever shown the slightest interest in the paper for a contribution, including our new friends at Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor. We made it, and I am still collecting money. We found that a lot of people who were interested in the paper and its purpose were also willing to help foot the bill for our project. Some even volunteered to help circulate the paper.

Our next step was the distributions. We gave away 100 papers at Cass Tech high school and learned later that every World History Class that day discussed the YS. On two distributions at Wayne State University we gave away 500 copies. 175 were distributed one day at Ypsilanti, and at a Young Democratic Club showing of Salt of the Earth we distributed another 100.

The biggest and best response came when two of us went to Ann Arbor with 200 papers. As a result of minor police persecution we received publicity and a student response that was tremendous. The campus paper was filled for two weeks with letters, articles, and pictures of our activities. We returned for our second distribution with every old copy of the YS that we had. 500 were given out to a waiting crowd in only ten minutes, and I only wish we had had 500 more. Our last distribution there was at a public meeting for John Gates. About 100 were distributed and a student friend of ours took 200 which he strategically distributed around the campus.

At the same time we have been conducting a YS subscription drive. Our goal is 50 subs in the Detroit area. Subs are still coming to us and to New York through the mail. At every meeting we attend, our own and those of other groups, we ask everyone we can to buy a sub. And then we ask them to help us pay for the distribution campaign. It is often hard for us to ask people for such things, but when we do it, it works!

We also carried out a two-week mobilization campaign to visit every new contact who didn't have a sub. The first Sunday three crews (six people) went out, each crew with a list of five or six people to visit. It should be added here that two of these people were not yet members of the club. The second week one crew visited five people, and during the week three others went visiting after work. This work, which enabled us to talk at length with many of our contacts, yielded a number of new subs and helped us to get two new members.

A month's hard work has brought us more good contacts at Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor, a total of 20 paid subscriptions and 10 definite promises. Our YS bill has been paid in full and we have gained a new and larger periphery around the Young Socialist Club.

And finally, we have had two successful sales of the April issue of the YS. At Wayne, one person sold 14 copies in 20 minutes, and at Ann Arbor two people sold 50 copies in 35 minutes. You know, it pays to advertise!

Fraternally,

Barbara Doritty  
Literature Agent,  
Wayne Young Socialist Club

Detroit  
April 7, 1958

Dear Tim,

I am writing this to bring you up to date on our work here in Detroit and to let you know of our thinking on some political and organizational problems that we are facing.

The club we have been working in, the Young Socialist Club of Wayne County, was reorganized in August 1957, and since then has been the only open public socialist youth group in the Detroit area. We began it as part of the national attempt to create a revolutionary socialist youth movement through the process of regrouping all leftward moving youth tendencies around the Young Socialist newspaper. We had previously made attempts to create a more broadly based group through a Labor Youth League - YSC debate and a call for a youth-regroupment discussion, but these efforts were not successful. Almost the same situation existed here in the youth field as in the adult regroupment field.

We had to begin therefor with only our own forces, eight SWP'ers. The club held biweekly public forums and monthly business meetings (in the local SWP hall), sold the YS mainly at Wayne State University, participated in the Youth for Patrick Committee (see issue #1 of the YS Discussion Bulletin), participated in an informal off-campus semi-political discussion group, and we did a lot of talking with the many young people we began to meet. Its composition and activities gave the club a revolutionary-socialist character (which we wanted) and an SWP-Trotskyist reputation (which we didn't try to hide even though we constantly tried to expand the political base of the club.

Very few CP-influenced youth attended our forums, even though we had (ex)-LYL speakers at two of them (reports of participants at the Moscow Youth Festival and the subsequent Trip to New China). Their group did not suffer the open dissensions and splits that occurred in other cities, their local leaders all remained more-or-less hostile to us, and they were able to keep most of their friends and supporters from listening to our ideas.

Even though we had little success with our regroupment approach the club recruited two people in this period and made a lot of friends. We were able to bring about a dozen non-members to the Midwest Conference. Immediately after the Conference we began an extended discussion and re-evaluation of our work. At the same time we began some projects to take advantage of the changing political climate in Detroit. The past six months of severe unemployment has set a lot of people to thinking and enquiring about socialist ideas. There are not yet any new mass movements or struggles here (the labor bureaucrats in fact are still running to the right) but a lot of new people are coming around and listening to socialist ideas.

We have met a lot of new people in the last two months, largely through participation in other groups. Particularly the above-mentioned discussion group and the SWP's Friday Night Socialist Forum. Most of these people are fairly new to politics, though some had earlier been in or around the LYL. We found an immediate and almost universal response to our reports of the conference and to the Independent-Broad-Militant slogan which we were pushing hard. As always, new people want to know why the socialists can't get together. Our effort to get them together is widely respected; it gives us a high moral position in relation to all the other socialist groups (we practice what we preach) and opens ears to our revolutionary-socialist ideas.

Though our efforts to build an IBM group on a fusion basis had failed last year we decided to try it again, using the Midwest Conference as a platform. The organizational question we faced was: would the YSC grow into a large club containing more than one political tendency, or would a new and looser organization on the pattern of the New York group be necessary? We decided that the latter development was the most probable; that it would be more difficult to build a broad group around the YSC than to work for an entirely different organization.

On the other hand, the YSC was the only socialist youth group that was doing anything. It had a number of new contacts who were at the same time attracted to the politics of the S/P, and there were opportunities for immediate work with the YS and with our own forum. We decided to expand the YSC work even though we aimed to build a different IBM group. We have tried to make the two approaches complimentary rather than contradictory and so far have been quite successful.

One of our friends was sufficiently energized by the Midwest Conference to call a group of his friends together to discuss the possibility of creating a new group along the lines of New York's Young Socialist Alliance. We helped to notify people and 18 attended the first meeting on March 22: 3 of us, 6-8 previously or still CP-influenced, the rest independents (4 from Eastern Michigan College at Ypsilanti). A lot of discussion produced only an agreement to create a new broad youth club.

The second meeting on March 29 drew 31 people: 3 of us, a dozen CP-influenced (mostly teen-agers) including Mark Solomon, the local CP youth director, 8 from Ypsilanti, 5 from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and others. This meeting debated having an avowedly socialist-broad group versus a liberal-broad group. Most of the support for the latter view came from some CP-influenced people, but the overwhelming sentiment was pro-socialist and this view finally carried unanimously.

A subcommittee of this group is now drawing up a constitution along the lines of those printed in issue #1 of the YS Discussion Bulletin, and will consciously model itself on the pattern of the IBM clubs that attended the Conference. Its immediate problems are organizational: membership, officers, a name, meeting time and place, etc. Even so, it has already begun some activities: a May Day meeting and picnic is planned and Sobell work and National-Student-Committee-for-A-Sane-Nuclear-Policy work is being discussed.

This is our first real contact with the CP-influenced youth milieu. Part of the reason for it is our past activities which have built up in their minds an awareness of us and some respect for our ideas and activities. Part is undoubtedly due to the success of the Conference. The CP leaders may yet decide to pull out and attempt to disrupt the group. But their past hegemony over many of their people is now broken and we anticipate a continual, if irregular, development of this work.

One of the things that greatly helped was Steve Max's visit to Detroit following the Conference. He spent almost a week talking to his old friends of the LYL, telling them of its success, spreading the idea of IBM, and urging them to participate in such a movement with us. He received a cool response from their leaders but was very effective in gaining support for the Conference's program from amongst their ranks. He opened a lot of hitherto closed ears for us. Where possible, such trips might be well worth the expense in other cities.

Another factor that stimulated the new group is the presence of students from Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti. You know, nothing reassures like numbers and support. And conversely, the enthusiasm here has stimulated the others to lay plans for socialist clubs at their own colleges. These people are all new contacts of the YSC whom we met while distributing the YS. Most of them are fairly new to politics, though some come from the old LYL milieu.

Three kinds of organization is possible for them: on-campus socialist clubs, off-campus socialist clubs, and on-campus socialist-caucus-or-committee work in a broader liberal organization. All three have different advantages, the first being most difficult to achieve. But from our point of view the main problem is to educate these people in the basic ideas of socialism, and to give their new clubs fraternal help from our own. We expect a definite beginning will be made during the remainder of the school year, with the big doings to come next Fall. By then we hope a solid socialist cadre will be established at both colleges.

The YSC's activities have also greatly improved in the past two months. We have moved out of the SWP hall and have been holding very successful forums and business meetings, combined with socials, in members homes. Whether staying in the SWP hall would have been as fruitful is really a moot point, since the SWP is also profiting from the new political atmosphere. Our forum on The Beat Generation drew 30 young people, almost half of whom had never been to any of our functions. The last one, What Is Socialism, drew 20 (on Easter weekend). We have recruited four new members to the YSC, two of them in their teens, all very active, and all oriented in a revolutionary-socialist direction.

Our biggest recent project has been a mass circulation of the Young Socialist. This included distribution of 2000 papers, a subscription drive, and a fund drive to pay for it all. The project proved to be a phenomenal success. A letter on it is being written by our literature agent, and a news story will appear in the YS.

We made an attempt last Fall, through the discussion group, to organize an on-campus club at Wayne U. They decided against it, and we haven't pushed the matter since then. Right now we have only one person taking a non-matriculated course at Wayne. Next Fall we hope to have at least one person attending full time. A campus club at Wayne would be a big help in our work, and we intend to try again next Fall. Though the administration won't permit another socialist action club like the old YSC, it will allow a discussion group. Both the YSC and the new group are oriented toward Wayne and as they attract more students the prospects of a campus club will improve.

Finally, as the new group develops here, there will be the problem of two separate socialist clubs with similar aims and activities. What the YSC will do will depend on how the new group develops organizationally, its political coloration, and its relation to the YS. Our general orientation is to function as a revolutionary-socialist tendency within a single broader socialist group. Right now this means developing the local YS work and ensuring a public discussion of all socialist ideas. Until we know that this can be done through the new group we will continue the activities of the YSC.

Comradely,

Allen Taplin