

'On the orientation - back to youth work' ... Hunt

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Conference is February 18-19-20. Comrades should have the following documents:

'The Crisis in the British Section' Evington

IB 22 The Ballykelly bombing Glasgow WSL
'Crisis of the FI and our tasks' . OC
November 1981 NC minutes

IB 22+ Resolution on the LP Carolan
Parts of a draft doc. on women ... Parkinson/Fraser

IB 24 Aspects of the int'l situation ... OC
The economic situation Kinnell

IB 25 British perspectives Cunliffe

IB 25 part two Amendments to Br. persp.. Kinnell
Resolution on the LP Carolan
Industrial perspectives Levy
The long road to Wiganisation Oliver
Resolution on Ireland Dec.1981 NC
Resolution on the EEC Apr.1982 NC

IB 26 Democratic centralism in TILC Jan.1983 NC
Information on the TILC

IB 27 Gay liberation and the WSL Gay commission
'The political problems are as yet unresolved' S.Layton

IB 28 Youth work Joplin/Fraser
Student work Joplin

Women's oppression and socialist revolution: Cunliffe

Platform of the WSL Internationalist Tendency

Towards an International Tendency: problems and tasks.

Further discussion articles and resolutions should be sent as soon as possible to the centre, if possible typed A4 on Roneo stencils.

CONFERENCE DOCUMENT FOR VOTING.

ON THE ORIENTATION - BACK TO YOUTH WORK

Hunt

Introduction

This conference must note with alarm the result of 18 months of 'youth work' in our fused organisation and we must take immediate steps from this conference to resolve that situation.

My document attempts to pinpoint the real problems in terms of the general orientation. The worst possible outcome of the youth discussion at the conference would be a halfway-house position of CF groups here and there, a position that we have maintained up to now. To adopt that position would ensure a federalist youth movement. It is therefore my view that the two opposing views on the youth orientation must be fought out at conference, and that one of them must come out as the dominant position, which all members will be obliged to fight for in the class.

The last conference of the old League passed a resolution, with the majority of the youth leaders voting against it, that committed the League to a "disciplined", "communist" intervention into the YS.

The document contained many proposals which, if implemented, would have gone a long way to ensuring this kind of intervention, but these proposals were never fought for, either by the leadership or the membership.

The proposals included the 'suspension' of the Socialist Youth League through a two-day conference which would also launch a new 'Keep Left'-type paper. That conference never took place. It was also proposed to set up a youth steering committee from the leading members, suffice to say, that never materialised either.

In my view, once that resolution had been passed, it was taken, deliberately or not, to endorse the orientation of the Barricade group, who were already buried in the YS. The issue was certainly important in the rush towards fusion.

I voted against that document. I feel that the line of the youth leadership to maintain the independent organisation with a serious YS orientation, possibly a tendency, was correct. However, because of my experience in the YS over the last couple of years, I am more flexible about the profile of that group than I was at the time of that conference.

Since its foundation, the NLWYM has represented little more than an amorphous group, consisting of a group of League youth activists and some anti-M elements in the YS, most of whom have been middle class in social composition.

Quite frankly we have failed, not because the objective condition haven't been there, to build any credible youth movement. These are what I feel are the main reasons.

The party youth organisers and the party youth leadership have failed to take up any consistent fight in the movement, a) to get the youth work taken seriously as a priority issue, and b) to give any real lead to the youth and the work, in many ways due to the lack of any real agreement on our perspectives prior to fusion. The talks around the setting up of the NLWYM prior to the June conference, amounted to no more than a bodge-up, to get the thing off the ground at any price. For this we are all guilty.

Another reason has been the reluctance of some comrades to take the organisational/political steps necessary to make the youth movement work and to hold and develop the youth that we win, such as a membership structure of the NLWYM and compulsory meetings and building of branches at local level, fearing that these meetings and this structure would make us 'counterposed to the YS'.

This view has been shot down by the very victims of the critics. The Nottingham comrades have managed to take over YS branches, recruit to the League and do effective youth work, because they have an effective CG group, while the critics survive with their YS quorates.

Most of all we have failed in our youth work because we have a negative orientation. As I understand our orientation at present, it is primarily towards setting ourselves up as a tendency as 'part' of the YS, for instance, the name has come up NLWYM of the LPYS.

It is my view, and I know the view of others, that at fusion we basically took the issue of youth work and buried it in the YS. We have substituted real youth work for what amounts to a battle of words between ourselves and the leaders and hacks of the M who have a stranglehold on the YS.

The alternative that I put is a primary orientation towards working class youth. It is no good telling people to do it, we need ourselves to be going out to youth at work, black youth, young women, unemployed youth, wherever youth are - and winning them to our Trotskyist politics, to our movement, whilst at the same time having a serious, "disciplined", "communist" orientation to the YS. This means fighting to build a tendency capable of challenging the M stranglehold on that movement.

WHAT IS YOUTH WORK?

I believe we have very much misled ourselves about what youth work is, also misleading our supporters, because of our orientation.

Youth work is far too often seen as gaining a majority in the YS branch and passing lots of marvellous resolution that if, implemented, would be the salvation of working class youth.

Every now and then there is a recruitment drive. We may go and give out leaflets in the town, sell some papers and shout about different aspects of our policies, maybe even the odd "wiganisation" binge.

If that was what youth work was about, all well and good, it's easier than I thought. In actual fact it's a recipe for inward groups of young people who talk a lot and every now and then one gets bored and drops out. In fact to ever begin to do youth work, you have to take a cold look at the facts of the real world. Yes, we have good ideas. If they were implemented they would solve our problems, but unfortunately, for every one of us there are thousands upon thousands of other working class youth who have not even heard our ideas. That of course, does not mean that they are not looking for answers. The continuing struggles of young people, the continuing frustration of young people prove this, and show the desperation of the situation. We have got to be part of these youth - we must go where they are, not where we want them to be, in order to win their confidence and win them to our politics. The principle of "Wiganisation" is excellent. But if it is to succeed it must be related consistently to all our youth work or not applied at all.

An example of where our youth work failed came immediately at fusion. That example is the summer uprisings of '84. Instead of turning to the youth who had been and were on the streets to begin to build some base, we looked at the issue in terms of what we could get out of the labour movement - thus the open letters to Benn, the abortive "defence campaigns", which never defended one youth, which were

in effect defence campaigns for our own failures. I would counterpose that orientation to looking at the time immediately after the uprisings, at who we came into contact with and how best we could gain something in terms of base in the areas.

A model I would cite for that work would be the Leicester branches, who turned fully to that struggle and certainly improved our position in a key community which has been no easy ground for the 'white left'.

In essence, if we are going to commit ourselves to revolutionary youth work, we must make that turn with the whole organisation with all the strain that that will involve, and re-orientate our youth comrades and youth periphery to where working class youth are. Those who fail to make that turn will have to go, as the reluctant critics of "Wiganisation" had to go in the '60's, those who prefer sitting in smoke-filled rooms talking about working class youth rather than with them are more harm than good to us.

LPYS

As revolutionaries our work inside the LP has to be directed towards breaking workers, women youth and other sections from reformism. The key to this is winning the leadership of the YS for revolutionaries. To this end we are committed to that struggle in the YS.

However we cannot regard the YS as the absolute central point of our work. That must be, as I have stated, winning working class youth to our politics. None of the turn that I propose is incompatible with a YS orientation, but our tactics in and as regards the YS must flow from that principle of working class orientation.

I would be quite happy to see a YS branch fight along the lines of our orientation and our initiatives in any given town, all the better. That fight to win our orientation and politics must be closely linked to winning youth from that YS to our movement. NLWYM branches should discuss initiatives in the YS as well as aspects of our politics and recruitment. NLWYM branches should also be linked as much as possible to League recruitment, our main aim at all times.

Where the YS is much more M dominated, our initiatives for meetings, activity etc, will come under the auspices of the CF group. We can't create a group of political schizophrenics running round simply as YS members when their branch does not support the activity. We must show the youth who is willing to fight whilst making it clear in our leaflets, in what we say, that we think the YS should be doing this kind of thing and we have an orientation towards the YS to turn it out to this kind of activity.

Under no circumstances should we use the excuse of a M dominated YS as an excuse for not taking initiatives amongst working class youth.

We must redouble our efforts to make an impact in YS national events. We must make sure that we never have a repeat of the stunts of the '81 conference, storming the stage, swearing from the platform and stupid dismissive remarks. Whatever M policies, we must remember that they have built that youth movement - we haven't - and all our criticisms must take that into account.

We must make sure that our interventions are well thought out, that our politics are put over in a sensible, disciplined, coherent manner, and particularly that the whole movement fights for maximum mobilisation.

I feel that it would be wrong to have the view that we can have more than one revolutionary tendency in the YS. We must fight to group the maximum forces around a revolutionary programme. This means, if the opportunity arises, taking steps to fuse the tendency with other groups in the YS such as YS independent.