

Bob

COMMENTS ON THE CURRENT STAGE OF THE YOUTH MOVEMENT

-- by Bert Deck

Three considerations guided our work once we began with the conception of a regroupment of revolutionary youth.

First we revived in our thinking the best Bolshevik traditions on the independent road for youth to socialist consciousness; the idea that each generation finds its own way to socialism; that the party should take an attitude of cooperation and friendly criticism toward youth who are finding their own paths, their own forms of organizations.

We did not present the party to youth in an ultimatic fashion, i.e., "We have the program, this is the party, it's the only revolutionary party; if you want to be revolutionists join this party, accept this program; it is already worked out for you." We avoided that pitfall, which could only isolate us from the best of the youth who want the opportunity, who must have the opportunity, to think through on their own all political questions and develop socialism as part and parcel of their beings -- not something handed down to them but something which grows out of their own experience and their own creative thought.

Secondly we estimated the particular stage of American radicalism: we faced the reality that no socialist tendency had unchallenged authority over the great bulk of American radicals. Due to the sharp decline of socialist organization there was no automatic transition for young people coming to the ideas of socialism associating the ideas with a particular party or organization. This underlined the general need for an independent framework within which the youth could actively participate in socialist politics and feel free for the fullest development of their own thinking.

Our final consideration was that we recognized that the CP and the Social-Democrats abhorred any idea of an independent development for young socialists. This meant that our organizational proposal would in this context have profound political implications.

We could go to all young socialists and say, "Let us build an independent socialist youth organization in this country." In practice the building of an independent movement meant a moving away from the organizational centers of Stalinism and Social-Democracy. This conception was recently confirmed by the attack from the CP and the Social-Democrats on the Midwest Conference.

Drawing all of this together: the Bolshevik tradition on the independence of the youth movement, the particular stage of American radicalism, and the concrete attitude of Stalinism and Social-Democracy to this development, we evolved the policy of being the most vigorous advocates of IBM, the independent, broad and militant youth organization.

The IBM movement has already proven its validity. The past six months has seen the growth of numerable clubs across the country whose first function has been to provide an elementary organizing center for young radicals of various persuasions.

We correctly saw that a real fusion of tendencies could take place only after a thorough process of common action and discussion. It is now necessary to make more precise our conception of this process.

The necessary "symposium" phase of the discussion could only serve to get people to talk to each other for the first time. But it loses its original value when and if it freezes the discussion into a debate only over positions developed outside the youth movement. In this way our discussions can degenerate into a lifeless reflection of the disputes between the adult organizations and the political life of the youth movement will not develop a validity of its own. We cannot speak of an independent movement in the real sense of the word until the latter occurs.

We should establish a new framework for the discussion based on the need to expand the present movement not only among previously affiliated radicals but among new youth who will become receptive to socialist ideas in the coming period.

This will mean eventually the writing of a program for socialism to be presented to American youth. Today it means an effort to turn the attention of the movement toward the problem of expanding socialist education on the campuses, and to turn the attention of the Young Socialist toward the task of "selling" socialism. This does not mean calling a halt to the discussion among socialists, but organizing it in such a way as to interest new people.

There is a danger of a hardening of groupings along the old lines after the original thaw.

There is no valid basis for pro-CP, pro-SWP, pro-XYZ caucuses within the youth movement. The only meaningful divisions should be over questions which relate directly to the building of the youth movement among American youth and the elaboration of a socialist program for a new generation.

In the process of taking the ideas of socialism to thousands of youth across the country who will listen, we will not only expand the movement, but deepen the process of healthy discussion and common action which can only result in furthering the cause of socialist regroupment.