

WHICH ROAD SHALL THE A. S. U. TAKE?

Appeal Of The Student Section Of The I.C.L.L. To The Convention Delegates And Members Of The American Student Union

FOR the past few months, it has become obvious to active A.S.U.ers that the American Student Union is going thru a crisis. This crisis has its roots in the very formation and foundation of the American Student Union. The A. S. U. has never been able to outgrow the sectarian inheritance of its two parent organizations, the socialist Student League for Industrial Democracy and the communist National Student League. The mere fusion of the two radical student bodies, which took place at the Columbus, Ohio, conference in December 1935, could not solve the problem of building a mass American student movement. The combined membership of the N.S.L. and the S.L.I.D. was approximately five thousand at its high point. The present membership of the A.S.U., with two years of existence behind it, is far less than that. A mass student movement is yet to be built in America.

The Student And the Labor Movement

The American student movement has never developed a clear conception of the role of the student in our present-day society and thus the student has been offered no positive perspective at all. In place of this, the student has been offered nothing but a chance to

sit in on radical factional struggles within the student movement.

The student body in this country does not constitute a class by itself, or even a distinct section of a real class. The student body as a whole, regardless of its class background, aspires to rise to the level of the middle class. Yet, whatever his aspirations may be, the student cannot reverse the process actually at work within capitalist society, that is, the tendency towards the gradual absorption of the middle-class elements by the working class. The primary task of the American Student Union should be to point out this reality—that the great majority of students upon graduation will find themselves thrown into the ranks of labor. Because of this, and because labor is the only great progressive force in modern society, the A.S.U. must break down the petty-bourgeois illusions of the majority of the student body and make it aware of its identity of interest with labor.

The A.S.U.'s support of labor must not be confined to theoretical expressions of sympathy but should be given concrete form as aid to specific actions of organized labor—guided by a student-labor coordinating committee. This solidarity should express itself also

on the political field—in a labor party. This does not mean the support of “liberal,” “progressive” politicians, who use labor as an instrument for obtaining office. The A.S.U. must not “reaffirm its non-partisanship.” It must be a frank partisan of the growing labor party movement. A student movement aiding and participating in the growth and development of a genuine labor party, rooted in the trade unions, can build itself into a healthy mass student organization.

The Student and War

No one can approach the war question today, when we are entering upon the Second World War, without an acute consciousness of the gravity of the situation and of the great responsibility involved in formulating a program for the fight against imperialist war. Among the most treasured traditions of the student movement, and of the A.S.U., in particular, has always been its militant struggle against imperialism and war. Today, in our efforts to rally the students against war, we unfortunately find among our opponents not only the imperialist war-mongers but a section of the student movement itself—the Young Communist League.

As an inevitable corollary of its defense of “democratic” imperialism, the Y.C.L. has become the sponsor of discredited imperialistic maneuvers and alliances, dignified by the name of “collective security.” “Collective security” means support of and dependence upon agreements and pacts of “democratic” capitalist powers and, consequently, also of armaments and the building up of war machines. In the United States, “collective security” would mean placing our reliance upon the dead Kellogg

Peace Pact and the moribund Nine-Power Treaty, which, to mean anything, must be implemented by a strong military force. It is precisely here that President Roosevelt finds his most ardent support in the Y.C.L.—support for a policy which increases appropriations for the R.O.T.C. and puts over the biggest peace-time war budget the United States has ever known, while slashing N.Y.A. and other relief appropriations. It is no wonder that the Y.C.L. finds itself in outright opposition to, and is intent upon sabotaging, the anti-war program of the American Student Union.

Nothing could be more explicit than the following section of the program of the A.S.U., adopted at its first convention in 1935:

“The present heightened international tension should make us more alert to the peril of American conflict with Japan or other imperialist nations over the economic stakes in the Orient and South America—stakes which are of benefit, as in the case of all wars fought by imperialist nations, not to the American people but to a handful of powerful American financial and industrial groups. The present boldness of fascist Italy and the belligerence of other fascist nations merely reveal that the internal conditions in these countries are most acute. But basic to the present insecurity of peace is the far-flung struggle to maintain colonial privileges and possessions. In these bitter clashes, the American financial barons are directly involved. The approach of another European war hastens the day when these interests will again dictate American entrance—unless they are fought relentlessly now.

“The A.S.U. uncompromisingly opposes the war preparations of our own government. It undertakes to organize the collective

resistance of students now against the steps which lead to war and, in the event of war, to the war itself. Education on causes of war is an essential factor in a peace movement. The A.S.U. will, in its educational work, seek to reveal the inefficacy of such "peace agencies," as the League of Nations and the Kellogg Pact, which have so plainly failed in a previous crisis; this failure arises directly from the domination of the League by the governments which are imperialist and which are now utilizing the League to further their own economical aims. The war which we shall be called to wage must be aggressive in character and purpose, and the 'interests' we shall be asked to defend will be those of the few, not of the many. These circumstances demand independent organization and action against war by the anti-war forces of the world, preeminent among which is the organized labor movement."

The Y.C.L. Against the Oxford Pledge

The main attack of the Y.C.L., however, has been centered on that section of the A.S.U. program which calls for the support of the Oxford Pledge:

"The A.S.U. accepts without reservation the Oxford Pledge 'to refuse to support any war conducted by the United States Government.' We will endeavor to win universal support of this pledge; we regard it not merely as a statement of conviction but as a powerful deterrent of government action; we believe that it will become the focal point for those hundreds of thousands of students who wish to join in exerting pressure for the maintenance of peace."

The sabotage of the Oxford Pledge by the Y.C.L. came into clear evidence at the City College

of New York peace meeting of November 12th, 1937, where the Y.C.L. leadership of the A.S.U. fought against the Oxford Pledge, and refused to take it when administered. This betrayal of the A.S.U. program must be most vigorously fought and exposed. The adoption of "collective security" into the A.S.U. program and the elimination of the Oxford Pledge from it would mean the open mobilization of the student movement behind American imperialism.

The renewed outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and the imminent danger of a "settlement" by the world imperialist powers at the expense of the Chinese masses, makes it imperative that the A.S.U. immediately rally American students in support of independent labor action against Japanese imperialism and for wholehearted material and moral aid to the Chinese people.

Realizing the world-wide significance of the present struggle in Spain, the A.S.U. must also give its fullest support to all genuine anti-fascist forces in Spain, particularly those of the workers and peasants, who, for sixteen months, have heroically resisted the onslaught of fascism.

The Student and International Solidarity

The A.S.U. must not limit itself to efforts to rally the students of this country against war; it must give support to, and exchange experiences with, the international student movement, particularly the movement in countries under the domination of American imperialism (Cuba, Puerto Rico, etc.). Nor should the American Student Union forget its fraternal obligations to the self-sacrificing anti-fascist student movements of Italy, Germany and other fascist and semi-fascist countries. An immediate

need is the extension of the warmest fraternal solidarity to the revolutionary student movement of China and to the anti-fascist students of Spain.

Democracy in the A.S.U.

An important reason for the failure of the A.S.U. to grow is its bureaucratic control and domination by the Y.C.L. The Y.C.L. has attempted to foist its political opinions upon the A.S.U., threatening to oust all political elements who support the official A.S.U. anti-war program. If the A.S.U., at its coming convention during Christmas week, is to start out on the road to a mass student movement, it must take steps to guarantee the fullest and most democratic expression of views in its ranks.

Our Program

This is our program for the building of a mass progressive

student movement. This is where we stand on the American Student Union:

1. For cooperation with the organized labor movement on the economic front thru a student-labor coordinating committee!

2. Support of independent labor political action thru the building of labor-party clubs on the campus!

3. Support of the Oxford Pledge! Against the "collective-security" panacea!

4. For increased student N.Y.A. appropriations! Fight Roosevelt's war budget! Abolish the R.O.T.C.!

5. For a militant struggle for academic freedom and student rights!

6. For a democratic American Student Union!

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Student Section
of the

Independent Communist Labor
League

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