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On The Contradictions In The Young Communist League

Speech at the C.C., R.C.P.(B.) Conference on Work Among the Youth¹ April 3, 1924

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I must first of all say something about the attitude of the Central Committee of the Russian Young Communist League to the Party discussion. It was a mistake for the Central Committee of the League to continue its stubborn silence after the local organisations had stated their views. But it would be wrong to attribute this silence of the League's Central Committee to a policy of neutrality. They were just over-cautious.

Now a few words about the debate. I think that among you there are no disagreements based on principles. I have studied your theses and articles and have failed to find any such disagreements. But there is confusion and a heap of imaginary "irreconcilable" contradictions.

The first contradiction: contrasting the League as a "reserve" to the League as an "instrument" of the Party. What is the League—a reserve or an instrument? Both. This is obvious, and it was stated by the comrades themselves in their speeches. The Young Communist League is a reserve, a reserve of peasants and workers from which the Party augments its ranks. But it is, at the same time, an instrument, an instrument in the hands of the Party, bringing the masses of the youth under its influence. More specifically, it could be said that the League is an instrument of the Party, an auxiliary weapon of the Party, in the sense that the active League membership is an instrument of the Party for influencing the youth not organised in the League. These conceptions do not contradict one another, and cannot be put in contrast to one another.

A second so-called irreconcilable contradiction: some comrades think that the "class policy of the League is determined not by its composition, but by the staunchness of the people who stand at its head." Staunchness is contrasted to composition. This contradiction, too, is imaginary, because the class policy of the R.Y.C.L. is determined by both factors—composition and staunchness of the top leadership. If staunch people are subjected to the influence of a League membership that is alien to them in spirit, all the League members enjoying equal rights, then a membership of this kind cannot but leave its imprint on the League's activity and policy. Why does the Party regulate the composition of its membership? Because it knows that the composition of the membership influences its activities.

Lastly, one more contradiction, similarly imaginary, concerning the role of the League and its work among the peasants. Some take the view that the task of the League is to "consolidate" its influence among the peasants, but not to extend that influence; others, apparently, want to "extend the influence," but do not agree with the need for consolidation. There is an attempt to make this an issue in the discussion. It is clear that to draw a contrast between these two tasks is artificial, for everyone understands quite well that League must, at one and the same time, consolidate and extend its influence in the countryside. True, in one place in the League Central

Committee's theses there is an awkward expression on work among the peasants. But neither Tarkhanov nor the other representatives of the League Central Committee majority have insisted on it, and they are prepared to correct it. That being the case, is it worth while disputing over minor points?

But there is one real, not imaginary, contradiction in the life and work of the Young Communist League about which I would like to say a few words. I have in mind the existence of two tendencies in the League: the worker tendency and the peasant tendency. I have in mind the contradiction between these tendencies, which is making itself felt, and which we cannot afford to ignore. Discussion of this contradiction has been the weakest point in the speeches. All the speakers declared that the League must grow by recruiting workers, but they all stumbled as soon as they turned to the peasantry, to the question of recruiting peasants. Even those who spoke simply and straightforwardly stumbled on this point.

Obviously, two problems confront the R.Y.C.L.: the worker problem and the peasant problem. It is obvious that, since the Y.C.L. is a workers' and peasants' league, these two tendencies, these contradictions within the League, will remain in future too. Some will stress the need to recruit workers, saying nothing about the peasantry; others will stress the need to recruit peasants, underestimating the importance of the proletarian element as the leading element in the League. It is this internal contradiction, inherent in the very nature of the League, that makes the speakers stumble. In their speeches, some draw a parallel between the Party and the Y.C.L., but the fact of the matter is that no such parallel can exist, because our Party is a workers' party, not a workers' and peasants' party, while the Y.C.L. is a workers' and peasants' league. This is why the Y.C.L. cannot be only a workers' league, but must at one and the same time, be a workers' and peasants' league. One thing is clear: with the present structure of the League, internal contradictions and the struggle of tendencies are inevitable in the future too.

Those who say that the middle-peasant youth should be recruited into the Party are correct, but we should be careful not to slip into the conception of a workers' and peasants' party, as even some responsible functionaries are prone to do at times. Many have loudly demanded: "You are recruiting workers into the Party, why not recruit peasants on the same scale? Let us bring in a hundred thousand peasants, or two hundred thousand." The Central Committee is opposed to this, for our Party must be a workers' party. The ratio in the Party should be approximately 70 or 80 per cent workers to 20-25 per cent non-workers. The position is somewhat different with regard to the Y.C.L. The Young Communist League is a voluntary, free organisation of the revolutionary elements of the worker and peasant youth. Without peasants, without the mass of the peasant youth, it will cease to be a workers' and peasants' league. But its work should be so organised that the leading role remains with the proletarian element.

Notes

1. On April 3, 1924, a conference was held under the auspices of the Central Committee of the R.C.P.(B.) to discuss work among the youth. There were present the members of the Central Committee of the Party, members and candidate members of the Central Committee of the Russian Young Communist League and representatives from ten of the largest gubernia organisations of the R.Y.C.L. The conference summed up the discussion on the immediate tasks of the Young Communist League that had taken place at the beginning of 1924. Later, the Central Committee of the R.C.P.(B.) discussed the results of the conference and instructed the local Party and Y.C.L. organisations to secure unity and harmony in the work of the R.Y.C.L., and to call upon the leading members of the Y.C.L. to work unanimously to carry out the tasks set by the Party.