

Running Head: PEACE, FREEDOM AND PROGRESS: THE AMERICAN
YOUTH CONGRESS MOVEMENT, 1934 - 1940

PEACE, FREEDOM, AND PROGRESS:
THE AMERICAN YOUTH CONGRESS MOVEMENT, 1934 – 1940

By

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A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School of Education

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for degree of

Doctor of Education

Graduate Program in Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education

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New Brunswick, New Jersey

October, 2014

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PEACE, FREEDOM AND PROGRESS

Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

Graduate School of Education

New Brunswick, New Jersey

Announcement of Ed.D. Dissertation Defense

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Peace, Freedom, and Progress: The American Youth Congress

Movement, 1934-1940

Committee: Dr. Catherine A. Lugg, Dr. James M. Giarelli, Dr. Louis Ray

Date: September 19, 2014

Time: 1:00 p.m.

Location: Graduate School of Education, Room 011

Abstract

In 1933, a young woman from New York named Viola Ilma, was concerned about the condition of youth in America. Amidst the social and economic conditions of the Great Depression, she had a vision for bringing to light the plight of youth and a means for addressing their problems. A national movement, leveraging the resources and peoplepower of youth groups from around the country, was born. The American Youth Congress (AYC) was founded in 1934 and became a major youth movement in the 1930s and the first youth organization

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that would effectively take a seat at the table in addressing national public policy.

The 1930s marked a tumultuous time in American history. The Great Depression triggered by the collapse of the stock market in 1929 created socioeconomic conditions that plagued Americans for close to a decade. President Hoover attempted to create policy that alleviated economic problems, however, his tenure as President came to an end as Franklin Delano Roosevelt assumed the Presidency in 1933.

Roosevelt's signature New Deal program was a comprehensive program of economic and social relief that not only defined his early Presidency, but one that became controversial as the Great Depression loomed on throughout the 1930s. The New Deal programs, some aimed at young Americans, garnered the attention of the AYC and prompted a long relationship between the organization and the White House. This relationship was at times productive and problematic for both parties.

By employing history, this research tells the story of the AYC and their struggles to fight for peace, freedom, and progress on behalf of the nation's youth. Through narrative inquiry¹ the story of the AYC is told, recounting their formation, clashes in political ideology, platform

¹ Webster and Mortova (2007) describe the use of narrative inquiry in research as a tool to explore ways that people experience their world, through stories. It rests on the assumption that people make sense of various experiences by the imposition of a story structures on them. It shapes how people perceive life. Therefore, narrative inquiry is set in human stories.

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for addressing youth problems, and struggles with the White House and the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC).

The history of the AYC uncovers some unexpected realities about its founder, Ilma, and the organization's manipulation from the Communist Party. This history captures an accurate picture of an influential youth activist organization that paved the way for inspired and politically active youth in the following decades.

Acknowledgments

When I started the dissertation process, a colleague told me, “It’s like giving birth.” I never anticipated being in labor for so many years, but the time was well spent. Along the way, there were many ‘doulas’ that helped me deliver this wonderful baby; and I wish to acknowledge their contributions.

I would first like to recognize the many archivists and librarians who helped me along my journey. I especially want to thank those individuals at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, Rutgers University Libraries, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University, and Syracuse University Library. Your expertise, kindness, and patience meant so much to me as I labored away in your archives and stacks for hours on end. I also appreciate the helpful tips and suggestions that made me more productive in my research. I especially want to thank a gentleman at the FDR Library who assisted me during my very first archive visit. As I slowly amassed a large expense photocopying documents, he so kindly came over to me and said, “You know, your iPad has a camera on it.” It was a simple suggestion, but one that saved me an immense amount of time and money!

Next, I wish to thank my colleague and friend, Dr. Angie McGuire at Rutgers University. Angie not only provided moral support and

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encouragement during my research, but also introduced me to the discipline of public policy and administration. Learning more about this field allowed me to view my research through a different lens, and ultimately enriched my research and its outcomes.

Finally, I owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to Dr. Catherine Lugg, my dissertation committee chairperson. Her support, patience, and “gentle reminders” kept me on track throughout my research as I struggled balancing school, work, motherhood, and life. As I wrestled with my dissertation’s focus and even contemplated quitting school all together, she reigned me in, gave me sage advice, and help set me on the right path. Most importantly, I thank her for exposing me to historical research and the beauty of “working with dead people.” I wouldn’t have finished my doctoral program if it weren’t for Cath.

I also wish to thank my committee as well as the many friends, family members, and colleagues who encouraged me along the way. My baby is born, and she is ready for the world to see!

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Abbreviations

ASU: American Student Union

AYA: American Youth Act

AYC: American Youth Congress

CCC: Civilian Conservation Corps

CWA: Civil Worker's Administration

CPUSA: Communist Party of the United States of America

HUAC: House Committee on Un-American Activities

NYA: National Youth Administration

NSL: National Student League

WPA: Work Projects Administration

YCL: Young Communist League

YPSL: Young People's Socialist League

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“Youth looks forward to the future
Youth seeks liberty and freedom
Youth stands firm for peace and progress
A better life for all.”²

² “Peace, Freedom, and Progress” song, Resident Board Meeting Minutes , nd.
American Youth Congress (New York City: American Youth Congress)

CHAPTER ONE:

Introduction

American youth have been expressing their viewpoints on political and societal issues for more than a hundred and fifty years in local communities and on college campuses around the United States. As early as the Civil War, American youth participated in campaigns against compulsory enrollment in the military,³ however, that was only the beginning of youth activism as youth quickly began forming organizations on a range of interests over the next several decades. As noted by Chambers (1938), in the early 1900's there were six types of organized youth groups that focused on areas such as character building, religion, student-based groups, economic or social betterment, youth auxiliaries, and rural/occupational advancement.⁴ These interests remained salient in forthcoming organizations and movements, however, would be overshadowed by other issues as the social and political climate in America changed.

Youth political activism in America rose and fell in accordance with the larger political mood of the nation during the first half of the

³ T.F. Neblett, "Youth Movements in the United States," *The Annals of the American Academy*, Vol. 194, (November, 1937), 141-151; R. Cohen, *Student Activism in the United States, 1905-1960* in Altbach, P. G. *Student political activism: An international reference handbook*. (NY: Greenwood Press. 1989.) 427-446; Patti McGill Peterson, "Student Organizations and the Anti-War Movement: 1900 - 1960," *American Studies* 13, no. 1 (Spring, 1972): 131-147.

⁴ M.M. Chambers, "Organized Youth in America," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 11, no. 6 (February, 1938): 351-59, accessed October 10, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2262247>.

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20th century and during this time, student groups primarily had a political or social focus, many focusing on peace efforts given the advent of the First World War. Between 1900 and 1920, many large and influential youth organizations formed and remained active for decades. However, the national hysteria of the Red Scare⁵ in the early 1920s singled out anti-war activists, and inhibited the socialist movement. Campus activists' organizations were closely watched during this time, since many law enforcement and political leaders believed they were breeding grounds for communist activities.⁶ However, this threat did not cause youth activist efforts to wane as student coalitions formed at a rapid rate as the first mass student protest movement in American history emerged in the 1930s. These movements were led mostly by communists and socialists who were sensitive to the emerging international tensions.⁷ Youth membership in communist and socialist groups increased in the early 1930s, and

⁵ After the end of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, a 'Red Scare' began in the United States. There was a significant fear of communists, socialists, and other divergent political viewpoints. Because of this fear, many innocent Americans were jailed for expressing their political viewpoints and many feared that a Bolshevik-style revolution was imminent.

⁶ M. M. Chambers, "Organized youth in America"

⁷ Robert Cohen. *Student Activism in the United States, 1905-1960*. In P. G. Altbach, *Student Political Activism: An International Reference Handbook*. New York (New York City: Greenwood Press, 1989). 427-446; M. P. Peterson. *Student Organizations and the Antiwar Movement in America, 1900-1960*. In Charles Chatfield (Ed.) *Peace Movements in America*. New York (New York City: Schocken Books, 1973), 116-132.

caused worry among many Americans who were fearful of political ideologies from abroad. Because of this unprecedented expansion in political activity, the 1930s became an area of focus for scholars studying student activism.⁸ With the forth-coming change in national leadership and a national crisis, students found much for which to be concerned in the 1930s. The Great Depression, Dust Bowl, and the threat of a second world war gave cause to inspired and outspoken youth. The face of student activism changed dramatically with the close of World War II, with the engagement in other wars, and the broader Cold War during the 1950s – early 1970s.

In the more than one hundred fifty years of youth activism in America, issues of concern have been relatively constant, despite the change in the social or economic climate. In recent years, youth activists have initiated and engaged in protests and rallies on a range of issues including affirmative action in the college admission process, financial practices of corporations, the reduction in force of college employees, and rising tuition costs to name a few.⁹ The desire for

⁸ Peterson, *Student organizations and the antiwar movement*

⁹ Tyler Kingkade. "Students Split On Affirmative Action For College Admissions Ahead Of Fisher V. University Of Texas At Austin Supreme Court Case: Report." *The Huffington Post*, 5 October 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/05/affirmative-action-fisher-university-of-texas-at-austin_n_1942720.html (Accessed October 6, 2012); Steve LeBlanc. "Boston area college students join Wall St. protest." *Bloomberg Business Week*, 10 October 2011, <http://www.businessweek.com/ap/financialnews/D9Q9KV680.htm> (Accessed September 28, 2012); Andrew Fowler. "Hocking Students Protest Layoffs" *Dateline Nelsonville, OH*, 2 October 2012 <http://woub.org/2012/10/02/hocking-students-protest-layoffs> (Accessed October 6, 2012)

young adults to address these issues today do not differ than students in the early part of the 20th century who were concerned with such issues as educational equity, equal opportunity, employment, the economy, and America's involvement in war.¹⁰ Young Americans have been expressing similar concerns in an effort to promote change in society and improve the life of youth and college students across the country¹¹. Not only are the issues similar, but many of the groups that provide a platform for concerns to be addressed and taken to the public have also remained the same.

The Study of American Youth Activism

Exploring the history of youth activism is important since it broadens the picture of American progress in the political and social sense and signals the important role that activism can play in young adults' lives. There are many reasons why young adults choose to get involved in activist efforts including the belief that an injustice has

Lance Knobel. "Cal tuition protest ends in scuffles, arrests." *Berkeleyside*, 23 September 2011, <http://www.berkeleyside.com/2011/09/23/cal-tuition-protest-ends-in-scuffles-arrests/> (Accessed September 28, 2012).

¹⁰ M. M. Chambers, "Organized youth in America," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 11 no. 6, (February 1938) 351-359. <http://www.jstor.org/stable2262247>

Peterson M. P. Student Organizations and the Antiwar movement in America, 1900-1960. In Chatfield Charles (Ed.) *Peace Movements in America*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1973) 116-132.; B. Hass, "As they saw the thirties: Activist Youth's vision of and for America" (PhD diss., University of Albany, State University of New York, 2011)

¹¹ P. McGill-Peterson, "Student Organizations and the Anti-War Movement in America, 1900-1960," *American Studies Journal*, Vol. 13, no. 1 (Spring 1972) 131-147; Neblett, "Youth Movements."

been done, distrust in formal ideologies and social and political organizations, or the feeling that one is culturally alienated or isolated from society.¹² As noted by Kirschner (2007), recent studies have documented the potential of youth activism for influencing political change toward socially just ends. This builds upon similar research by focusing on youth activism as a context for learning and development. Although some youth may not have the opportunity to vote or hold a formal seat on decision-making bodies, but may contribute to social action campaigns that give voice to ones hopes and concerns.¹³

The History of the American Youth Congress

Although the American Youth Congress (AYC) is often referenced in historical accounts of youth activism in the 1930s, a detailed history of the organization has not been written. Additionally, many of the accounts of the AYC focus on the influence of the Communist Party, which is an aspect of its history, but not its entirety. The AYC is recognized as an influential activist organization during the 1930s, however, the leaders mentioned as 'founders' focus heavily on young men who assumed leadership roles after the AYC was officially

¹² Kenneth Keniston, *Young Radicals: Notes On Committed Youth* (New York City: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), 297-325.

¹³ Ben Kirschner, "Youth Activism as a Context for Learning and Development", *American Behavioral Scientist* 51 (November, 2007): 367-79, accessed June 10, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0002764207306065>.

established. The actual founder, Viola Ilma, receives little recognition for her efforts in establishing the AYC, and what historical accounts are provided, focus heavily on her assumed political or ideological viewpoints, rather than her vision and leadership.

Therefore, this dissertation builds upon prior research on youth activism by exploring the history of activism¹⁴ in the United States in the 1930s. Attention is centered on one of the first national movements initiated by young people, ages 18- 25, the American Youth Congress (AYC). The AYC was the first organized effort that leveraged the power and resources of youth organizations from around the country in an effort to shape public policy. They addressed a range of political and social issues relevant to college students and American youth during a difficult time in U.S. history. The AYC, albeit a national organization, is also considered a social movement. In this regard, a 'movement' is the coordinated actions and activities of a group of youth activists.¹⁵

¹⁴ For the purpose of this dissertation, 'activism' refers to the practice of organized and purposeful action aimed at achieving social and/or political goals. The 'youth activist' is a young adult intentionally involved and engaged in a social and/or political cause. In this regard, 'engagement' includes active participation in a range of activities including community problem solving, regular volunteering for an organization, active membership in a group or organization, participation in fundraising activities, persuading others, regular voting, contacting government officials and the media, signing a petition, boycotting, and canvassing (Engagement definition from Scott Keeter et al., *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*. (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press George Mason University, 2002), 3)

¹⁵ Cohen, Student activism

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to delve deep into the history of the AYC, providing a full account of the organization's role in the social and political sphere of the 1930s. Through a historical analysis, the following research questions have been answered: How did the American Youth Congress form as a sociopolitical movement? Who were the primary founders and leaders of the AYC? What societal influences triggered the formation of the AYC?

By employing history, there is a greater understanding of the events, individuals, organizations, and societal trends that were influential in the development of the AYC. This approach examines the organization over a period of time – the 1930s.¹⁶ In studying the AYC, employing "New History" allowed the focus to be less on the narrative of history and more on the analysis of structures and social, economic, and geo-historical changes over time.¹⁷

¹⁶ E. Babbie. *The Basics of Social Research* (4th ed.). (Belmont, CA: Thomas Higher Education, 2008); Gall, J., Borg, W., & Gall, M. (1998). Historical Research. In *Applying educational research: An introduction*, Allyn and Bacon.

¹⁷ P. Burke. *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004) 2-3

Relevance

Conceptual Framework

In writing the history of the AYC, voice is given to those individuals who provided leadership for the AYC as a way of better communicating the experiences of youth activists. As noted by Sharpe (2004),¹⁸ exploring 'history from below' allows the views and perspectives from ordinary people to be central to the historical text. This approach enriches the story of the AYC since it highlights youth, whose perspectives were often ignored in historical text, experiences with social change in America. For example, many accounts of youth activism focus on mass actions such as protests and marches, rather than the individuals' experiences with such activities. Exploring the correspondence, publications, and speech of leaders of the AYC, a better understanding of the youth activists' perspectives and motivations has been achieved. Therefore, this dissertation reflects the views and experiences of young women and men who historically are often dismissed as being integral to the shaping of the American political and social landscape. These viewpoints enrich the understanding of individual's experiences and their reactions to those

¹⁸ J. Sharpe, "History from Below," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 25-27.

experiences, providing a comprehensive perspective of the American Youth Congress.

In constructing the research, a narrative inquiry approach was used as a way to capture the experiences of those involved in, and associated with, the AYC. As noted by Webster and Mertova (2007), narrative inquiry attempts to capture the whole story, rather than just communicate an understanding of the subjects under study.

Oftentimes, this approach is used by analyzing informal communications such as stories told and written or the perpetuation of myths. However, organizational documents, newsletter articles, speeches, and other texts are also considered as they are tools that construct meaning in our daily lives, and therefore, contribute to the 'storytelling process.'¹⁹ The research takes a journey through the AYC's formative years, exploring its stages of growth, success, and ultimate demise. Narrative inquiry fills the gaps in the American Youth Congress' history, providing a more complete story of this critical youth organization.

Understanding the Impact of the American Youth Congress and Its Leaders

¹⁹ Leonard Webster and Patrice Mortova, *Using Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method: An Introduction to Using Critical Event Narrative Analysis in Research On Learning and Teaching* (New York City: Routledge, 2007), 1-13.

In 1934, a young woman, Viola Ilma, founded the AYC, a representative coalition of youth student organizations. Given the rapid growth of the AYC, the national attention it garnered, and the compelling platform in which members operated, it is valuable to understand the students who worked to make the AYC successful. Existing literature notes some of the early AYC and affiliated organization leaders including Ilma, Arthur Clifford, Joseph Lash, Leslie Gould, and James Wechsler.²⁰ However, other critical figures including William Hinckley, Joseph Cadden, and Jack McMichael are rarely mentioned in the histories of the AYC. Additionally, what is found in the literature about the AYC's founder, Viola Ilma, focuses primarily on her assumed political leanings rather than her trajectory into a leadership position of a national youth movement. This dissertation provides a fuller and more accurate picture of the AYC and its young leaders.

Methodology

The research questions were answered by employing history in an effort to understand events, individuals, organizations, and societal trends that were influential in the development of the AYC. This historical approach examines a social unit – the AYC movement –

²⁰ Ibid; Hass, *As they saw the thirties*

over a specific period of time.²¹ This form of research is important in education as historical knowledge of our country and its culture helps individuals understand and appreciate our heritage as Americans and provides a framework for future planning and policy developments.²² Given that this study is providing a historical analysis of a sociopolitical movement, it was important to garner data from a range of historical resources, beyond what is provided directly through AYC records, to ensure that bias in data collection does not occur. A range of archival sources were used to provide a broad collection of texts, government data and records, images, news stories, and personal communications relevant to the AYC's history. Of note were primary sources accessed through National Archives and Records Administration, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library; Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University; and The Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

This dissertation explored a grass roots movement, uncovering the political and social efforts initiated by American youth, and through this analysis, the growth and development of the AYC against the backdrop of the tumultuous 1930s is portrayed. A description of the

²¹ E. Babbie. *The Basics of Social Research* (4th ed.). (Belmont, CA: Thomas Higher Education, 2008)

²² Gall, J., Borg, W., & Gall, M. (1998). Historical Research. In *Applying educational research: An introduction*, Allyn and Bacon.

1920s and 1930s is provided as a context for the history, followed by the youth activist phenomenon of the time. From there, the story turns to the young woman who founded the AYC and the organization's complicated first year. Upon understanding the formation and organization of the AYC, an overview of the annual congress events that focus on peace, freedom, and progress, as well as the AYC's greatest initiative, the *American Youth Act*, is reviewed. Finally, the story ends with the experiences the AYC and its leaders had with the White House and the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

CHAPTER TWO:

Life of the Young American in the 1903s

"In the squares of the city – In the shadow of the steeple
Near the relief office – I see my people
And some are grumblin' and some are wonderin'
If this land's still made for you and me."²³

- Woody Guthrie, *This Land is Your Land*

The American Youth Congress emerged during a tumultuous time in American history as young activists found themselves sandwiched between two world wars and amidst the most economically devastating time to date in U.S. history. It was also a time of significant population growth and diversification of the American people. The nation in the 1920s was one that was a result of massive population growth in the prior two decades. The country's population had nearly doubled since 1890, mostly due to the influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. This influx was noted in the 1930 Census where 10 percent of the 123 million Americans recorded were foreign born.²⁴

²³ Robert Santeli, *This Land Is Your Land: Woodie Guthrie and the Journey of an American Folksong* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2012), 253.

²⁴ David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)

As the 1930's took hold, the United States moved deeper into the Great Depression, a global catastrophe that challenged many leaders. As noted by President Hoover in his memoirs, "Because of this lack of governmental experience, therefore, we had to pioneer a new field. In fact, there was little economic knowledge to guide us. The previous great postwar depression of the 1870's had left almost no real economic information except as to consequences in prices, production, and employment."²⁵ Elected leaders and society as a whole was wholly unprepared for what would follow during the decade. This uncertainty opened the door for young Americans eager to address the problems of society.

The turmoil in the economic and social life of America created an opportunity for young people to emerge as activists striving for a better way of life. Understanding the impact of the Great Depression on youth is less about how the economy was affecting their daily lives; rather it is understanding how hopes and dreams of young Americans were slipping away. For example, the previous decade provided more opportunities for youth to pursue secondary and post secondary education. American high schools began focusing on educating all youth, rather than serving only those who might go on to college or pursue a professional career. During the 1920s, the American public

²⁵ Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover. Volume 3: The Great Depression 1929-1941* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), 28-29.

high school literally became pervasive – it was everywhere. In addition, women saw more political opportunities in society as they won the right to vote in 1920. These changes in the national landscape inspired youth who were dreaming for a better way of life, yet those dreams would be shattered in the coming decade.²⁶

The Social and Economic Context in America

The United States and other Western nations had experienced economic “depressions” before the U.S. stock market crash on October 27, 1929. However, none had an impact as much as “Black Thursday”²⁷, nor did any prior depression last as long as the “Great Depression.”²⁸ The American economy quickly began to fail and members of Congress could not agree how best to respond to the crisis. In December of 1929, President Hoover convened a meeting of

²⁶ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*; Britt Haas, “As They Saw the Thirties: Activist Youth’s Vision of and for America” (PhD diss., University at Albany, State University of New York, 2011), 1-5

²⁷ In early October, 1929, the United States stock market began to fall, causing a wild rush to buy stocks gave way to an equal rush to sell. The first day of real panic, October 24, is known as Black Thursday and on that day, the stock market (NYSE) fell 9%. There was a selling panic and during the day the market dropped from 306 to 272, a 34-point drop, or 9%. It closed at 299. (Bierman, Harold Jr. 1999. “The reasons stocks crashed in 1929.” *Journal Of Investing* 8, no. 1: 11-18. *Business Abstracts with Full Text* (H.W. Wilson), EBSCOhost (accessed April 1, 2014).

²⁸ The Great Depression was a worldwide economic tragedy that occurred between 1929 and 1939 and was the longest and most severe depression ever experienced by the industrialized Western world, sparking fundamental changes in economic and political institutions, macroeconomic policy, and economic theory. The event originated in the United States, yet caused drastic declines in output, severe unemployment, and acute deflation in almost every country of the world.

approximately 400 leaders from the business world to discuss the economic collapse and the result of that meeting was that the Federal Reserve System would ease credit by open-market purchases and by lowering its discount rate to member banks. In turn, industrial leaders agreed to maintain wage rates rather than slash wages, which was the practice of businesses in other recessions.²⁹ Hoover also believed that more local efforts could ease the economic crisis by encouraging local governments and private charities to provide relief to the unemployed and homeless. Despite many challenges, his administration and Congress did eventually pass legislation to help businesses, most notable loans to aid the agriculture industry.³⁰ As unemployment grew, Hoover's administration looked at ways to address the problem and at that time, unemployment insurance - an increasingly popular social policy in Europe - was not well received in America. Employers as well as state and federal government did not support the idea. The American Federation of Labor (AFL), a powerful union at the time, even sided with employers in vehemently opposing the idea, calling it a socialist idea and therefore, not permitted in America.³¹ Yet, Hoover's attempt to address all of the widespread problems facing the

²⁹ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*

³⁰ *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover, Volume: Volume 3: The Great Depression 1929-1941*. 1952, The Macmillan Company: New York

³¹ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*

economy would not prove fruitful, nor would the succeeding administration agree to them.

As Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) took office in 1933, his first order of business was to address the banking crisis and he did so by convening an emergency meeting of leaders from major financial centers. On March 9 of that same year, he invoked the *Trading with the Enemy Act* to cease all transactions in gold, declaring a four-day banking holiday. He

proceeded to hammer out details of economic recovery with banking leaders as to develop a plan to present to Congress in an emergency session. Later that month, *The Emergency Banking Act*

passed Congress, legitimizing

FDR's prior actions and giving him authority and control over all transactions in foreign exchange and transfers of credit between or by banking institutions. The *Act* also called for the opening of banks under strict governmental supervision and gave expanded powers to the Federal Reserve Board. As banks responded after an extended banking holiday, FDR saw his rewards as deposits and gold began to flow back



Photograph 1: Unemployment line during Depression, Brooklyn, NY, c. unknown
(Courtesy of the Library of Congress
Prints and Photographs Division)

into the banking system.³² In addition to addressing the banking crisis, Roosevelt pursued legislation that would assist the unemployed through a range of jobs programs. Labor issues were a concern of the new President as unemployment had risen from eight to 15 million - roughly 1/3 of the non-farmer workforce - as nearly 50 percent of America's workforce was either unemployed or underemployed. Additionally, the gross national product of the nation had fallen by nearly half from \$103.8 billion to \$55.7.³³ Roosevelt and his administration rolled out his signature program, "The New Deal,"³⁴ to address the economic concerns facing the country. The New Deal agencies such as the Public Works Administration, employed millions of Americans and The Works Progress Administration, Public Works Art Project, and National Youth Administration were instituted to build and improve the nation's infrastructure and create works of art and culture.³⁵

³² Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear* and Hoover, *Memoirs*

³³ "The Great Depression, 1929-1939," The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, January 1, 2013, accessed January 1, 2013, <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/>.

³⁴ Over the eight years of FDR's presidency, the government instituted a series of experimental projects and programs, known collectively as the New Deal, which aimed to restore some measure of dignity and prosperity to many Americans. (History.com Staff (2009). "New Deal". History.com, A+E Networks. <http://www.history.com/topics/new-deal>, accessed March 1, 2014)

³⁵ "The New Deal in Action," Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, December 20, 2013, accessed December 20, 2013, <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/resources/newdealprojects.html>.

As if the banking crisis was not enough, another key factor affecting the economy during the 1930s was the Dust Bowl.³⁶ The Depression significantly hit the rural areas as income on American farms had plummeted from 6 billion dollars in 1929 to 2 billion dollars in 1932.³⁷ As the Dust Bowl progressed, it would cause a population shift as more than a quarter million people fled the Dust Bowl in the 1930s. The "Oakies," the three hundred thousand people pushed out of Oklahoma due to struggling farming practices and the unrelenting weather, settled elsewhere. Along with thousands of people from Texas, Kansas, and Colorado, the Oakies primarily settled in California. These impoverished individuals became a symbol of that traumatic time and ultimately the subject of John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*.³⁸ However, Steinbeck's tale only told part of the story as

³⁶ During the 1930s, the United States experienced one of the most devastating droughts of the past century. The Dust Bowl was the name given to the region devastated by drought affected almost two-thirds of the country and parts of Mexico and Canada and was infamous for the numerous dust storms that occurred in the southern Great Plains. When drought struck from 1934 to 1937, the soil lacked the stronger root system of grass as an anchor, so the winds easily picked up the loose topsoil and swirled it into dense dust clouds. The drought and its associated dust storms created one of the most severe environmental catastrophes in U.S. history (Schubert, Siegfried D., Max J. Suarez, Philip J. Pegion, Randal D. Koster, and Julio T. Bacmeister. "On the cause of the 1930s Dust Bowl." *Science* 303, no. 5665 (2004): 1855-1859.)

³⁷ Timothy Egan, *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006)

³⁸ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*

many families chose to stay behind and weather through the
harrowing conditions.³⁹



Photograph 2: Dust Storm in
Texas, c. 1935 (Courtesy of
Monthly Weather Review,
NOAA's National Weather
Service Collection)

People in the Plains States did not
think that the Depression would affect
them since so much focus by the
American public was on the stock market
and banking crisis, rather than
agricultural production. However, by
1933 wheat prices dropped so much,
residents in the Plains realized the far

reach of the Depression. The economic collapse and daunting weather
brought forth yet another tragedy for Americans in this region. Suicide
was common during this time, not only the farmers and ranchers
whose livelihood was devastated by the Dust Bowl, but also their wives
who could not bear the struggle to fight the dust in their homes and
keep their children healthy. The American Red Cross called it a medical
emergency and dust masks were not enough to keep people's lungs
clear. Adults and children alike were developing 'dust' pneumonia and
dying. Even businesspersons and doctors, whose businesses were

³⁹ Egan, *The Worst Hard Time*

failing, also saw suicide as an escape from the unrelenting devastation and misery.⁴⁰

As a way of addressing the economic problems facing the entire country, in 1933 the National Recovery Administration (NRA) was established as a federal agency and became FDR's signature New Deal creation. The NRA worked to stabilize the agriculture and other businesses by addressing price discounting and setting production quotas.⁴¹ By 1931, and before the election of Roosevelt, some states began to offer aid to local communities, as federal efforts were not meeting the people's needs. President Roosevelt told the farmers he did not have a solution for fixing the problem of the drought, but would try. Trying was not enough for these individuals as they continued to push for concrete solutions. "You gave us beer...now give us water," was a common sign at farms, as farmers were begging FDR for help--the man who ended prohibition. Nevertheless, by 1934, it was clear farmers and ranchers were experiencing an environmental catastrophe, so the government ordered a reduction of cattle production. Ranchers were not only forced to slaughter cattle that were starving, but even their healthy livestock. These individuals, who were experiencing such hard times, were not even permitted to keep a

⁴⁰ The Great Depression (1929-1939), Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project

⁴¹ Kennedy, Freedom from Fear

calf or a steer to feed their families. This was another tragic blow to an already devastated community.⁴²

The economic conditions spawned from the Dust Bowl widened the scope of the Depression and gave cause to youth in the Midwest and Plains regions. As noted by Joseph Lash, a youth activist in the 1930s,

"Well, then came the Depression...and the mood on the campus changed, as it changed in the country...and you know the stories of the marches, the unemployed for which the government refused to take any responsibility, the farm holidays, and the closing of the banks when Roosevelt came into office. And as the mood of the country changed, the mood on the campus changed."⁴³

Organized youth organizations grew and with them programs such as conventions and rallies. For example, California religious and peace-oriented organizations held the twenty-third annual meeting of the Alliance for International Friendship conference, titled, "The International Good Will Conference," while youth in the Midwest were concerned about those in rural areas who are disadvantaged. The American Country Life Association's annual Rural Forum in 1938 had

⁴² Egan, *The Worst Hard Time*

⁴³ The Student Movement of the 1930s, Joseph P. Lash, Interview," The New Deal Network, November 15, 2013, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://newdeal.feri.org/students/lash.htm>.

as its theme "Disadvantaged People in Rural Life," and focused on rural arts and crafts as well as improvements in agriculture.⁴⁴

Political Landscape

As the 1930's began, Herbert Hoover was in the midst of his Presidency and dealing with the economic tragedy facing the country. Yet, as he campaigned for the presidency in 1928, the nation was in a vast time of change and increasing optimism and Hoover used the current climate to promote his belief in a growing and more prosperous America,

"Our problems of the past seven years have been problems of reconstruction; our problems of the future are problems of construction. They are problems of progress. New and gigantic forces have come into our national life."⁴⁵

He imagined the dream of the progressive era by managing social change through informed but *limited* government action. Recognizing a new era for America as a leader among nations, he knew that focusing on a strong economy would be paramount to prosperity and peace.⁴⁶ Once elected, President Hoover focused on three areas for his presidency, 1) Reconstruction and economic development, 2)

⁴⁴ *Youth*, Conventions Ahead, November, 1938, 2.

⁴⁵ *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover, Volume 2: The Cabinet and the Presidency 1920-1933*. 1952, The Macmillan Company: New York, 200

⁴⁶ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*

Improved foreign relations, and, 3) Reforms in social and business life.

However, many of his goals would go unmet as the Great Depression begun eight months after his inauguration and continued throughout his term. He believed that the main role of government was to define and direct the aspirations of citizens so they can work together to create a better life; government should be a constructive force in society. Although the economic collapse was an international problem and not just an American one, it would nonetheless lead to Hoover's defeated attempt at a second term.⁴⁷

As the "economic hurricane" ravaged through Europe in the early 1930's, political viewpoints and ideologies intensified as individuals were searching for solutions to the vast problems facing them. President Hoover during a 1931 address took an opportunity to express his viewpoints on various ideologies, warning of their potential dangers.⁴⁸ Hoover also believed that FDR's presidency further opened the doors to these political viewpoints being accepted in America. Hoover, who was bitter about his presidential loss to Roosevelt, was not the only one who questioned the Roosevelt administration's political ideologies. The National Education Association had expressed concerns at their annual meetings about the influence of socialist and

⁴⁷ The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover; Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*

⁴⁸ The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover, p. 36

communist beliefs infiltrating the American school system. They pointed to the writings of Stuart Chase, an admitted Socialist who later became part of the Fabian Socialist⁴⁹ movement and advocated for complete state control of the education system. Chase was the author of Roosevelt's economic plan, The New Deal, which was his platform for his presidential election and guidebook for his Presidential term.⁵⁰

Diverse ideologies were also being embraced by youth around the world and were shaping their social and political organizations. The *Oxford Pledge*,⁵¹ formulated by students at Oxford University in 1933, committed students not to fight, under any circumstances even in the case of war. The *Pledge* would eventually make its way to the United

⁴⁹ The Fabian Society was founded in 1884 in Great Britain. With its middle-class membership, they sought to overcome the problem of poverty and to achieve a moral reconstruction of society through a process of parliamentary political reform. The society was committed to establishing a socialist economy while committing to British Imperialism. (Jack Melitz, "The Trade Unions and Fabian Socialism", *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 12, no. 4 (July, 1959): 554-67, accessed March 17, 2014, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/ehost/detail?vid=3&sid=a8cc2207-63ae-4aff-9f82ce6a33dbf681%40sessionmgr1113&hid=101&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=buh&AN=6450369>.)

⁵⁰ Verne Paul Kaub, *Communist-Socialists Propaganda in American Schools: National Education Association* (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1953).

⁵¹ The Oxford Pledge was pacifist statement created by Oxford University students on February 9, 1933, less than 10 days following Adolf Hitler's accession to power. The Oxford Union voted 275 to 173 in favor of this pledge to oppose participation in war. The wording of the pledge committed union members not to fight, under any circumstances, for their king or country in a future war. (Burg, David F. "Oxford Pledge." *Encyclopedia of Student and Youth Movements*. New York: Facts On File, Inc., 1998. *Modern World History Online*. Facts On File, Inc. <http://www.fofweb.com/activelink2.asp?ItemID=WE53&iPin=student00530&SingleRecord=True> (accessed February 20, 2014).

States where it would be read by many youth organizations before meetings and gatherings.⁵² Varied political viewpoints would be embraced by many youth organizations that emerged during the early part of the 20th century; however, it would be socialist and communist groups that would eventually infiltrate the AYC. Student membership in communist and socialist groups increased by the late 1920s when organizations like the Young Communist League (YCL) were established in 1929 and in 1931, when the communist-led National Student League (NSL) was born. The YCL and NSL would become major forces in student activist efforts in the decades to come.⁵³ The YCL gained momentum in the early 1930s by organizing on college campuses that had a radical tradition. City, Hunter, and Brooklyn Colleges in New York, Temple in Philadelphia, the University of Chicago, Wayne State University in Detroit, UCLA, and the University of Wisconsin established strong communist clubs on campus. These schools attracted students who came from humble backgrounds and would empathize with the 'pro-worker' stance of the Communist Party.⁵⁴

⁵² *The Student Movement of the 1930s*, Joseph P. Lash, Interview

⁵³ Altbach, *Student political activism*, 433-435; Haas, *As They Saw the Thirties*, 25-28

⁵⁴ Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History* (New York City: DaCapo Press, 1974), 197-99.

The Communist Party USA (CPUSA) was founded in 1919, two years after the Russian Revolution. It started as a dual organization composed of foreign-language and native-born American groups, but the two groups were ordered to merge by the Soviet Union, which helped fund the CPUSA. Over the coming decades, various pro-communist organizations would emerge throughout the nation many targeted at young Americans. In the early 1920s a Communist Children's Movement was initiated in an attempt to develop a political culture for youth in which they would identify with the working class and communist movement. Programs targeted towards children were often lead by the YCL and organizations such as the Junior Section of the Young Workers League - an arm of the Workers Party - and the Juniors of the International Workers Order, helped indoctrinate children into communist thought through organized programs.⁵⁵ Another active group was the American League Against War and Fascism, which was widely viewed by most federal agencies as a communist-front organization, and would eventually come under scrutiny by the HUAC.⁵⁶ It eventually changed its name to American League for Peace and Democracy in an effort to improve its reputation.

⁵⁵ Paul Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States*. (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1999), 41-67.

⁵⁶ Kaub, *Communist-Socialists Propaganda in American Schools*

The CPUSA was active in promoting civil rights and racial equality for African-Americans and many African-American writers and artists were invited to Moscow as guests of the State. Attracting this segment of the population was important to the CPUSA. The American Negro Labor Congress, a communist auxiliary group was founded in 1925, but support dwindled throughout the latter part of the decade

but experienced a reemergence in 1930 as racial violence grew in the South. In the early 1930s, the CPUSA became extremely active in civil-rights, and took advantage of a tragic situation as opportunity to be visible on national stage. In

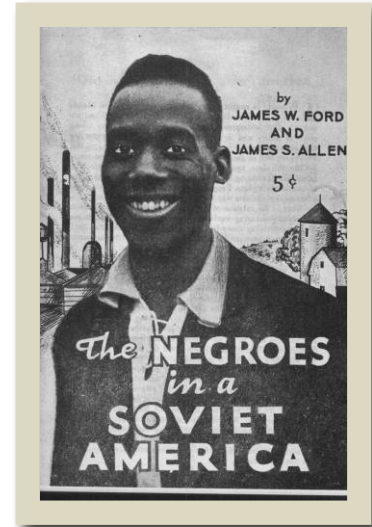


Photograph 3: CPUSA Meeting in New York City, c. 1938 (Courtesy of OldMagazineArticles.com)

1928, At the Sixth World

Conference of the Communist International, the attendees determined via a resolution that African-Americans living in the Deep South constituted an oppressed nation. As an oppressed nation, African-Americans had the right to self-determination through political power, control over the economy, and the right to secede from the U.S.

Participation in the Communist Party quickly gained momentum in 1929 as early meetings held by CPUSA leaders in the World Conference of the Communist International attracted several hundred supporters, most who were African-American. Unemployment was an issue addressed by the Party and hit home with local residents. However, the illiteracy of many African-Americans was an issue for the CPUSA in spreading their propaganda and by 1934, dedicated time was provided at each meeting to teach individuals to read and write.⁵⁷



Photograph 4: Cover of a communist recruitment pamphlet, c. 1935 (Courtesy of the University of Southern Mississippi)

In 1930, the World Conference of the Communist International clarified that the prior resolution passed in 1928 only held for Southern African-Americans as those in the North were seeking assimilation and integration, and therefore, had no demand for self-determination. This opened the door for the CPUSA, since it had not pursued aggressive organizing efforts in the South prior to 1929. However, racist beliefs were prevalent in the South and some communists felt that African-Americans were not radical enough for

⁵⁷ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990)

the party. Additionally, many southerners were suspicious of an organization that allowed both African-American men and Caucasian women to be members. Women members were sometimes accused of being sexually promiscuous, especially with African-American men. Those against the Communist Party promoted the belief that its goal was to allow African-American men to have control over Caucasian women as their own property.⁵⁸

In 1930, the *Southern Worker*, a weekly newspaper began publishing and was distributed in Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and the Carolinas. The paper was provided for farmers and workers and promoted the division between "bosses and workers." In 1932, as efforts to attract more members continued, the CPUSA realized that the future of its efforts in the South needed to concentrate on the employed *and* unemployed African-American worker.⁵⁹ Young Americans were finding solace in the Communist Party as they saw the ideology as providing solutions to the dire economic situation on the country. Youth, disenfranchised with the American capitalist society, would travel along the many CPUSA affiliated organizations.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Haas, *As They Saw the Thirties*

PEACE, FREEDOM AND PROGRESS: THE AMERICAN YOUTH CONGRESS MOVEMENT, 1934 - 1940

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In 1931, an event would occur that would propel the CPUSA in an unexpected direction. That year, nine African-American youths traveling on a freight train in Alabama were arrested, falsely charged with raping two Caucasian women who were also on the train. The individuals, also known as the "Scottsboro Boys," were quickly tried, and all but one was sentenced to death.⁶¹ The CPUSA came out as condemning the trial and it was this advocacy of civil rights that attracted many youth to the Communist Party and ultimately allowed influence within the AYC. The communist led International Labor Defense (ILD), the legal arm of the CPUSA, gained national attention for defense of the Scottsboro Boys. The campaign to free the nine young men boosted the party's popularity in African-American communities, especially around Birmingham. Despite this wave of support, the CPUSA gained the reputation as being a 'race' organization, although

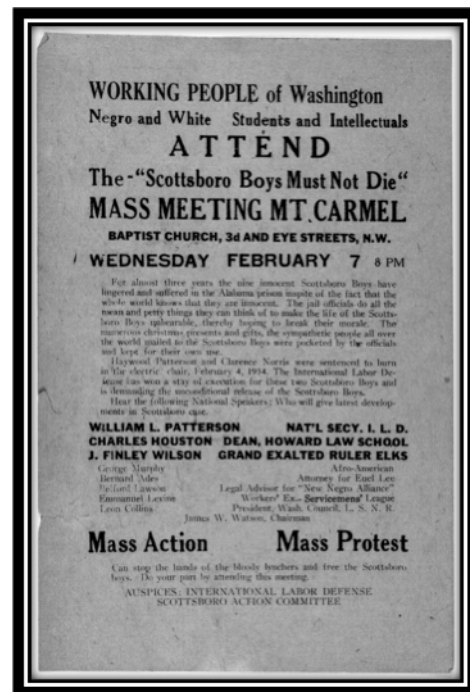


Illustration 1: A flyer advertising one of the many mass meetings held demanding freedom for the "Scottsboro Boys," c. 1934 (Courtesy of the Library of Congress, American Memory)

⁶¹ Richard Wormer, "Jim Crow Stories - Communist Party, USA," PBS.org, January 4, 2014, accessed January 4, 2014, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_org_communist.html.

they were just abiding by their policy of advocating for 'class war prisoners.' This unintentionally placed the ILD in the middle of Southern racial politics. Despite the widespread support in the South, the CPUSA had a difficult time recruiting in some African-American communities since the party was viewed as only being concerned with class issues, rather than racial apartheid which was a major of concern of African-Americans. As a result, much of the African-American community would eventually join the anti-communism movement in the mid 1930s.⁶²

The Communist Party not only addressed social issues, but political ones as well as they were vocal about certain ideologies especially fascism. The International Communist Organization (ICO) through its world congresses encouraged members to promote communism and to fight against fascism.

"In emphasizing the growth of the threat of fascism in all capitalist countries, the Seventh Congress of the Communist International warns against any underestimation of the fascist danger...The working class can prevent the victory of fascism, if it succeeds in bringing about unity in its struggle and by promptly developing its own militant action, does not allow fascism to gather strength: if it succeeds, by correct revolutionary leadership, in rallying around itself the broad strata of toilers in town and country."⁶³

⁶² Cruz, C.A. (2011) Communism in the United States Late 1910's and Into the 1930's, academic paper, USF – Sarasota – Manatee

⁶³ Full Text of the Resolutions Adopted at the Seventh Congress, Seventh World Congress Communist International, Modern Books Ltd. London, W.C. 1935, pg. 5

The anti-fascist theme became a major focus of communist organizations, including youth organizations in America. It was a directive of the ICO to become leaders in "nonparty" organizations as an effort to gain communist control and to create a united front movement. This included seeking elected or selected positions within labor organizations, community groups, and assuming informal leadership positions among the unemployed. The ICO also called to address the "secludedness" of the YCL and encouraged young communists to "do everything to help unite non-fascist organizations...on the basis if the broadest united front." They further argued that, "The task of creating an anti-fascist association of communist and socialist youth leagues on the platform of the class struggle must be brought to the fore."⁶⁴ The AYC would provide that opportunity for the communist platform to advance.

Although there would be growing support for communism in America, a vastly larger contingency of Americans, including the Federal government, supported, and even spearheaded, anticomunist activities. In the 1920s and 30s, Jewish Americans were among a vocal group against communism, in response to the

⁶⁴ Ibid, 9

anti-Semitism in Russia and elsewhere. The Roman Catholic Church, longtime critics of communism, encouraged their members to help spread the anticommunism message during this time as well.⁶⁵ It was widely believed that Catholics, especially high-ranking clergy in Italy, including bishops and cardinals, were staunch supporters of Benito Mussolini and fascist ideals. However, during this time, Pope Pius IX made public statements against totalitarianism and a political party that is "...pagan worship of the state..."⁶⁶ However, his statements would not necessarily be taken to heart by all of his followers. In America during the mid-1920s, Cardinal O'Connell, Archbishop of Boston, and Cardinal Mundelein, Archbishop of Chicago, publicly praised the early work of Mussolini in Italy. In 1929, Joseph Schrembs, Bishop of Cleveland participated in a Birthday of Fascism celebration and praised Mussolini for his leadership.⁶⁷ Additionally, like the CPUSA, the fascists would find their supporters in youth organizations. The divergent political viewpoints of old and young Americans alike would continue throughout the 1930s until the brink of World War II.

⁶⁵ Cruz, *Communism in the United States*

⁶⁶ Harry W. Flannery, "The Catholic Church and Fascism", *Free World* 6 (September 1, 1943): 232-36.

⁶⁷ Gaetano Salvemini, "Seeking for Truth", *Free World* 6 (September 1, 1943): 236-42.

Education and Opportunity for Young Americans

The roaring twenties allowed opportunities for prosperity for many Americans, including the opportunity for youth to pursue higher education. Following World War I, American high schools became more accessible focusing on educating all youth rather than just those who would benefit from a traditional form of secondary education in the European tradition.⁶⁸ This decade also saw women taking on a new role in society signaled by winning their right to vote in 1920. At that same time, The Women's Bureau was established in the U.S. Department of Labor to create policies to "...promote the welfare of wage-earning women, improve their working conditions, increase their efficiency, and advance their opportunities for profitable employment."⁶⁹ Women began demanding the same rights and opportunities afforded to men in society including job opportunities outside of the home and higher education and by 1929, working women were in a range of jobs including teaching, clerical work, domestic services, and garment trades. However, their presence in professional jobs was still lacking. By 1930, women composed 22 percent of the workforce, yet despite the advances in women's

⁶⁸ Alexander S. Rippa (1997) "Education in a Free Society: An American History, Eight Ed. Longman: New York

⁶⁹ U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau, "Our History."
http://www.dol.gov/wb/info_about_wb/interwb.htm, accessed 2/18/2014

equality, most female workers were single since married women were expected to be homemakers.⁷⁰ Entering the 1930s, American youth had no reason to believe that education and opportunity would not lie ahead for them.

Enrollment growth in colleges and universities accelerated in the first 30 years of the 20th century, driven by population growth, growing demand for professional experts and greater participation in post-secondary education. With the rapid pace of industrialization in America, leaders in business and industry exerting their influence on the educational system expecting they cooperate in a more businesslike way. During this time, public education was influenced by Taylor's Scientific Management Theory⁷¹, which not only propelled the field of educational administration, but also focused on the efficiency of education and the serving of the business community.⁷² Similarly, higher education saw a shift towards more professional education as

⁷⁰ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*

⁷¹ Scientific Management, also called the 'Taylor System' for its founder Frederick Winslow Taylor, was conceptualized in Washington, D.C. and brought to the public during hearings before the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1910. The system focused on increasing wages and reducing production costs at the same time via efficiency measures. It stated that the best management is based upon defined rules, laws, and principles and stated that the primary objective of the employer is to ensure the maximum prosperity for the employer and employee. Such prosperity could be achieved through job based training and development and clear incentives.

⁷² Raymond E. Callahan. *Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces That Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1972. 6th edition.

the creation of vocationally oriented programs, schools, and colleges in the 1920s and 1930s. Before this time, professional training primarily took place through apprenticeships with little formal education tied to the students' learning. With the growth in professional education, formal academic programs were being established in the post-secondary educational environment.⁷³ This movement not only created more educational opportunities for youth, but also contributed towards a more skilled workforce.

During this time, the ratio of college students aged 18 to 24 rose from 2 to 7 percent, however, the proportion of women students pursuing higher education dropped during the 1920s by three percent. By the end of the 1930s, college enrollment in America had reached 1.5 million. The total was still 36 percent higher than 1929–30, but the proportion of women students had fallen to 40 percent, despite advances made in the prior decade. By this time, enrollment in public colleges had risen to the point where more than half of college students were enrolled in public institutions. Financial support for colleges and universities fluctuated during this time with federal funding slipping during the Great Depression. This event, coupled with the vast expansion of institutions, placed a burden on not only federal

⁷³ Labaree, David F. "Mutual Subversion: A Short History of the Liberal and the Professional in American Higher Education." *History of Education Quarterly* 46 (2006): 1-15.

revenue sources, but state resources as well. These new schools usually did not have the financial resources of some of the older, well-established institutions so revenues from endowments were greatly reduced by the economic crisis.⁷⁴

Access to higher education was impeded by the costs of institutions to maintain facilities and the availability of education programs for adults. The federal government attempted to address these issues in the proposed *Federal Aid to Education Act of 1938*. The *Act* called for increased funds for operational and maintenance purposes including libraries, vocational education, services for disabled students, and scholarships. Additionally, the *Act* called for publicly controlled teacher education programs, new schools and community activity center buildings, local adult education programs stimulate library growth, and educational research projects.⁷⁵

The opportunity for higher education was not the only issue on the minds of young Americans in the 1930s, but the opportunity for meaningful work as well. Many young Americans faced unemployment at a time when they should have been planning for their future careers and family. Economic life was challenging, and many young Americans

⁷⁴ *Report: 120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, Editor Thomas D. Snyder Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, January 1993 (PDF).

⁷⁵ Youth Magazine (1938) "Federal bill offers broad aid to states as school crowding reaches new peaks", November, published by American Youth Congress, pg. 2

were put in a position of financially supporting their families rather than planning for their own. The situation left many youth feeling hopeless.⁷⁶ Additionally, many cities teetered on the verge of bankruptcy therefore, many public workers including firefighters, teachers, and police officers, were not paid. In many cases, positions were eliminated all together. Although state and federal relief efforts were in place, they did not always resolve the economic struggles of cities and towns.⁷⁷ Federal workers also felt the financial pinch during this time. Young Americans sought out various avenues for work as they reached adulthood, and the military was one of these options. Those who chose to serve in the military found a long-standing career increasingly difficult. By the early years of the depression, Army and Navy personnel experienced a furlough, a 15 percent decrease in pay, and many training programs curtailed. Army leaders were unable to replace necessary equipment due to budget cuts. However, demand for military personnel grew as federal funds were allocated to the Navy in 1933 via the National Industry Recovery Act, to build 32 navy

⁷⁶ Haas, *As They Saw the Thirties*

⁷⁷ The Great Depression (1929-1939), Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, Jeffrey Edward Mirel, "Politics and Public Education in the Great Depression: Detroit, 1929-1940" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1984), 68-70.

vessels.⁷⁸ This effort did create jobs, but did not resolve the larger issue of unemployment facing the country.

On July 1, 1933, President Roosevelt signed the *Wagner-Peyser Act*, which established the United States Department of Employment Service and in its first year, 2,400 employment offices were established throughout the country. Most were set up as temporary offices, while one hundred were permanent, where the unemployed would be placed in private sector jobs and in Public Works and Civil Works projects.⁷⁹ By 1934, the Civil Works Administration (CWA) had provided employment for 4.2 million workers. Individuals were hired for projects ranging from road and bridge repairs to the refurbishing of schools and hospitals.⁸⁰ FDR's administration continued to pursue efforts to protect workers and the workplace throughout his term. In 1935, the *National Labor Relations Act* was passed. Also known as the "Wagner Act" after its sponsor Senator Robert F. Wagner, a Democrat from New York, the *Act* protected workers' civil liberties and guaranteed them the right to organize without employer interference.

⁷⁸ Frances Perkins, "The Record of 1933 – Relief, Recovery, Repeal," *New York Times*, December 31, 1933, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/100774566?accountid=13626>.

⁷⁹ Ibid; "Federal Employment Offices Opened; 2,400 Now Placing Idle in Jobs," *New York Times*, November 29, 1933, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/100841982?accountid=13626>.

⁸⁰ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*

Although these rights did not become law until 1937, they paved the way for more workers seeking union representation and participation.⁸¹ Although these programs helped the adult unemployed, American youth continued to push FDR's administration to explore other avenues for job training and financial support for the unemployed.

Formation of National Activist Organizations

Student activism on the college campus was politically motivated in the 1920s and primarily revolved around issues of world peace and international relations. After all, World War I heightened the awareness of such issues to many Americans, not just youth. This activism was mostly a movement of inquiry and study rather than a movement of action.⁸² The years leading



Illustration 2: Poster for the National Student Strike Against War, c. 1935. (Courtesy of the University of California Archives, Bancroft Library)

⁸¹ Cooke, William N. 1985. "Evolution of the National Labor Relations Act." In *Union Organizing and Public Policy: Failure to Secure First Contracts*. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, pp. 1-21. http://research.upjohn.org/up_bookchapters/124

⁸² The Student Movement of the 1930s, Joseph P. Lash, Interview

into the 1920's, less politically active students were involved in social activism, but their focus was on promoting peace. Groups like the American School Peace League were founded to promote peace among younger students at the primary and secondary school levels.⁸³ The hysteria of the Red Scare and the federally led "Palmer Raids"⁸⁴ of 1919-1920 drew attention to youth activists and their anti-war messages. Many campus activists' organizations were being closely watched during this time, since many law enforcement officials – most especially J. Edgar Hoover – believed they were breeding grounds for communist activities. Those who were outspoken against the federal government risked being targeted and having their comments labeled as radical or rebellious.⁸⁵ However, this threat did not cause student activism to wane as transformation from what the public perceived as

⁸³ Peterson, *Student organizations and the antiwar movement*, 132 – 136

⁸⁴ The "Palmer Raids" refer to an action led by J. Edgar Hoover, then special assistant to Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. Deeply anti-radical in his ideology, Hoover came to the forefront of federal law enforcement during the so-called "Red Scare" of 1919 to 1920. He set up a card index system listing every radical leader, organization, and publication in the United States and by 1921 had amassed some 450,000 files. More than 10,000 suspected communists were also arrested during this period, but these raids found that the vast majority of these people were briefly questioned and then released. (FBI Founded, This Day In History, History.com accessed March 1, 2014)

⁸⁵ Peterson, *Student organizations and the antiwar movement*

'student apathy' of the 1920s to the advocacy of the 1930s, which began during the last year of the Hoover administration.⁸⁶

The 1920s saw the emergence of student activism as the Great Depression fueled student protests and strikes in an effort to help shape the public discourse. The reactionary form of activism, where youth responded to social and political issues rather than bringing them to light, helped pave the way for a stronger and more organized national movement. Moreover, although the depression would eventually create conditions that would attract youth to a national movement, young Americans expressed little concern over the Depression in its first two years. But as the national financial crisis worsened, employment opportunities dropped, and agriculture system faced harrowing weather conditions, the young activists in the 1930s strived for ways in which they could develop solutions to the crisis they faced every day including the collapse of the economy, strained international relations, and the prospect of another world war. Addressing these problems came via collective efforts among a diverse range of groups and saw a coalition of communists, socialists, liberals,

⁸⁶ P. G. Altbach, *Student political activism: An international reference handbook* (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1989).

and pacifists working alongside another to challenge the “bourgeois collegiate culture” and to align itself with the working class.⁸⁷

Although student activism came of age in the Progressive era, it reached a climax during the New Deal years (1933 – 1938). The only time when activism dropped in the first half of the twentieth century was during the first two world wars when many college students were drafted.⁸⁸ *The New Student* newspaper, a highly regarded activist paper of the time, had lost much of its reform fervor by 1928 – the height of the roaring 20s. As The Great Depression took hold in America, it reignited the campus movement in the early 1930s as the economic and social crisis directly affected college students since one-fourth of the unemployed were between the ages of 15 and 24.⁸⁹ The issue of economic security was one of focus among many college students during this time, as American youth organizations were not striving towards militant solidarity, which was the focus of European youth organizations in the 1930s.⁹⁰ Student coalitions were forming at a rapid rate as the first mass student protest movement in American

⁸⁷ Robert Cohen (1993). *When the Old Left was Young: Student Radicals and Americans First Mass Student Movement, 1929 – 1941*, Oxford University Press, New York. P. xiiv – xv; 4-6.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 427

⁸⁹ Peterson, *Student organizations and the antiwar movement*

⁹⁰ Chambers, *Organized youth in America*

history emerged in the 1930s. The movement was lead mostly by communists and socialists who were sensitive to the emerging international tensions, and therefore, during this time, the climate on college campuses was distinctly anti war.⁹¹ In an effort to focus college students on national problems, various youth organizations and their leaders came to the forefront of the movement. For example, Edward R. Murrow, president of the National Student Federation – America’s association of college student governments – addressed student apathy and worked to raise awareness of political and social problems facing Americans.⁹² Both the Intercollegiate Socialist Society (ISS) and the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), two major student organizations founded in the early part of the 20th century, were large and influential organizations that would help ignite youth interests in problems facing young Americans.⁹³

In many college communities, the Great Depression destroyed the part-time jobs that students had relied on to help pay for school. By 1932, the economic crisis gave life to the student Left and fueled criticism of American capitalism. American youth became more aware of broader social issues and began uniting to address their concerns

⁹¹ Cohen, *Student activism* and Peterson, *Student organizations and the antiwar movement*

⁹² Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young*, p7

⁹³ Peterson, *Student organizations and the antiwar movement*, 132 – 136

and ideals through organized efforts. Common issues addressed by most youth organizations were the economic order, peace advocacy, social service, equality, and welfare issues.⁹⁴ Incidents such as the Scottsboro Boys criminal case and conviction helped mobilize activist groups across the country and allowed youth to have a unified voice. Students expressed their viewpoints not only through protests and rallies, but through the campus newspaper as well. Clashes for power emerged from student activists asserting their freedom of speech and school administrations censoring student papers and banning political meetings on campus. These actions triggered many campus conflicts across the country in the 1930s.⁹⁵

By 1938, there were approximately 20 activist organizations in the United States with 100,000 members or more, and six with a million or more. Many of the largest national youth organizations that existed at the time were religious-based organizations such as the Baptist Young People's Union, Epworth League (Methodist), Young Women's Christian Association, and YMCA/YWCA.⁹⁶ There were also a surge in political action groups as well such as the Mercian Student

⁹⁴ Chambers, *Organized youth in America*

⁹⁵ Cohen, *Student activism*

⁹⁶ Chambers, *Organized Youth in America*

Union (ASU), the YCL, the NSL, the YPSL, and the AYC.⁹⁷ Although varying in political and social viewpoints, these student groups did find shared goals, as common issues addressed by most youth organizations were the economic order, peace advocacy, social services, and welfare issues.⁹⁸ However, as America entered into World War II, student peace movements were dealt a crippling blow as the war created a clear pro-war sentiment on college campuses. Many peace-focused students believed that higher learning was once again being sacrificed for the sake of war as the draft and voluntary enlistment caused many male students to enlist.⁹⁹ However, it would be one organization, the AYC that would ignite a national youth movement by harnessing the energies of all of these youth activists' organizations – a movement that would work to change public policy in America. The AYC would unite youth organizations from across the country to address issues stemming from the Great Depression and international conflict. A young woman from New York City would envision a mass movement that would empower youth and give voice to a generation of American youth.

⁹⁷ Brax, *The Fist Student Movement*

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Peterson, *Student organizations and the antiwar movement*

CHAPTER THREE:

The Formation of a National Movement

"I believed that grown ups had made a mess of things and that it was up to the youth to straiten things out."¹⁰⁰

- Viola Ilma

The turmoil of the 1930s created a ripe opportunity for young Americans who were seeking a venue to express their ideas or pursue their passions. Given the expansion of political ideologies that were emerging, young Americans trying to find their place in the social and political systems of the country had many opportunities to explore their interests. On the heels of the women's suffrage in the U.S., emerged a young woman intrigued by vast political viewpoints who was eager to make positive change in the world. Viola Ilma demonstrated the duality of frustration and hope in the American Dream and launched a movement to reclaim that aspiration.

The Vision of a Young Woman

Viola Waldemeier seemed to have been destined to lead an

¹⁰⁰ Viola Ilma, *The Political Virgin* (New York City: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1958), 36

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CONGRESS MOVEMENT, 1934 - 1940

inquisitive and political life. Born April 1910 in Mainz, Germany¹⁰¹ she⁴⁹ was named after a girl her father did not marry. Viola held Swiss citizenship, since her father Alfred was Swiss, yet lived in Damascus. Her father studied engineering at Heidelberg University where he met his wife Hattie who was a German-Jew. In 1912, the family moved to America, and Viola became a naturalized citizen in 1935 where she



Photograph 5: Viola Ilma, c. 1933 (From author's private collection)

formally changed her surname to 'Ilma.' Upon arriving to New York, her father was discovered by Oscar Hammerstein who then hired him for his opera company as a singer. Viola's mother was a budding dancer, so Viola grew up in a home surrounded by music and dance as both parents gave lessons. Even popular performers of the day would get singing

lessons from the Ilmas.¹⁰²

Viola attended Julia Richman High School, an all girls' school in New York City where she first learned to exercise her creative voice, when she became editor of *The Bluebird*, the school newspaper. It was

¹⁰¹ National Archives; Washington, D.C.; *Petitions for Naturalization from the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, 1897-1944*; Series: M1972; Roll: 1140.

¹⁰² Viola Ilma, *The Political Virgin* (New York City: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1958)

through an interview with David Belasco, Dean of the American Theatre, for the school paper that she met a literary agent who asked her to pen an article for *Liberty* magazine. The title of the February 1928 article was "The Aim of the Modern High School Girl," and was published under her birth name of Waldmeier. Billed as "The Publication for Everyone," *Liberty Magazine* introduced Viola to the world of publishing and social and political action.

In 1927, after abandoning the idea of college, Viola decided to pursue a career in advertising which she viewed as a "business, art, and science all combined."¹⁰³ Through much persistence, that same year she landed an entry-level job at Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn, an advertising agency in New York City. She was soon encouraged by a colleague to apply for an opening as a copy editor at a local publishing house. She applied for the position and when she arrived at her first day of work, the publisher, William Clayton, was surprised that she was a woman and was shocked she had applied for a "man's job" and was immediately given the job because of her moxie.¹⁰⁴ This persistence and desire to work against the odds would propel Viola Ilma into the center stage of youth activism in America. As noted in her autobiography, *The Political Virgin* (1958), Viola was

¹⁰³ Ilma, *The Political Virgin*, 8

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 9; *Report of the First Annual American Youth Congress* (New York City: The Central Bureau, 1934).

inspired by Charles Lindbergh, especially his heroism and disdain for the odds, and was mindful of his leadership in her own pursuits.

Lindbergh's unique individualism motivated her to embrace life's challenges. Invigorated by the knowledge she was acquiring in her job, she decided to expand her horizons and take her learning over seas.

In 1929, at the age of 19, Viola took a trip to Europe with her sister Lillie. The two young women traveled to Italy, Switzerland, Germany, France, and Egypt. On board the ship to Italy, Viola met Professor Julian Huxley, grandson of Thomas Huxley a renowned biologist, who was also colleague of the late Charles Darwin. Julian, although much older than Viola, took a special interest in the young woman and encouraged her writing and in seeing the world. Once in Europe, Julian introduced Viola to influential and politically active individuals. The trip abroad and her relationship with Julian came back to haunt her several years later as she was accused of socializing with Nazi sympathizers during her visit to Germany. Upon her return to the States, Viola continued to correspond with Julian over the next few years, and spent time with him when he came to New York.¹⁰⁵

Upon the advice and encouragement of Huxley, Viola continued pursuing her journalism career in Cleveland, Ohio and again in New York City. In 1932 she branched out on her own and conceptualized

¹⁰⁵ Ilma, *The Political Virgin*, 8-34

Modern Youth Magazine because "...the older generation had failed us" and wanted a magazine that reflected the interests and challenges facing youth.¹⁰⁶ Despite her frustration with adults, she remained optimistic about the future and had confidence in youth to make a difference in the country. The magazine served the purpose of giving American youth a voice in the state of their lives, speaking to the "scattered heirs of the depression."¹⁰⁷ However, many of her college-educated peers did not share her optimism given the economic strife of the Great Depression. Viola believed that "...the 'grown ups' had made a mess of things and that it was up to the youth to straitened things out." Viola borrowed money from friends to travel to Chicago to pitch the magazine concept to Kable Brothers, a successful printing company in the Midwest. Although officers of the company were skeptical at first, they agreed to print and distribute 50,000 copies of the magazine. Writers for the magazine included friends of Viola as well as Joseph Lash, who at the time was heading the Association of Unemployed College Alumni and ultimately became a contributing author of the magazine. The magazine ignited public interest in the under 30 population and encouraged young Americans to fully engage

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 34

¹⁰⁷ *Report of the First Annual American Youth Congress*, 6

in political and social life.¹⁰⁸ Initial interest in *Modern Youth* was positive and lead Viola to receive invitations to speak at events about issues and the condition of American youth. In 1933, she wrote First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt telling her of the magazine and the group's interest in addressing problems facing youth in the country. Viola saw an alignment between her interests and the new First Lady's and looked to leverage that interest into support for her struggling publication. Mrs. Roosevelt responded to the initial letter and invited Viola to the White House for a discussion. Although it was some time before the two women would meet in person, they continued to correspond about the magazine and its purpose. Ilma continually sought a formal endorsement and funding from Eleanor, however, it never came to fruition.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, this initial introduction led to a long-standing and mutually beneficial relationship between the two women that spanned the decade. By late 1933, after three issues of *Modern Youth* were published, Viola declared bankruptcy for the magazine and ceased publication. *Modern Youth Magazine* ultimately served as a vehicle for collective action of American youth and a

¹⁰⁸ Ilma, *The Political Virgin*, 36

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Viola Ilma to Eleanor Roosevelt, March 23, 1933; Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Viola Ilma, March 27, 1933; Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Viola Ilma, April 15, 1933; Letter from Viola Ilma to Eleanor Roosevelt, April 24, 1933; Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Viola Ilma, August 5, 1933

springboard for the creation of the American Youth Congress.¹¹⁰

The Starting Point: The Central Bureau

In early 1934, after having established a relationship with the First Lady, Viola Ilma set out to meet with New Dealers in Washington D.C. in an effort to discuss youth issues and the role of youth organizations in America. At this time, she was also ready to publish her 56-page book, *And Now, Youth!* a book that covered topics including peace, war, sex, marriage, youth movements, and diplomacy. The success of this book led young readers to inquire about a youth program or organization in the United States, which, in turn, inspired Viola to take her interests to a new forum. That same year Viola conceptualized the Central Bureau for Young Americans to serve as a clearinghouse to “assist and foster sound intellectual, spiritual, and physical development of the youth of America.”¹¹¹ Its aim was to be a nonpartisan, nonpolitical fact-finding organization dedicated to the interests of youth in America. As noted in the *Final Report of the First American Youth Congress*, a history of the Central Bureau was provided, referencing the original announcement of the organization, it stated in part:

¹¹⁰ *Report of the First Annual American Youth Congress*, 6

¹¹¹ Ilma, *The Political Virgin*

"The Central Bureau for Young Americans has been created to assist and foster sound intellectual, spiritual and physical development of the youth of America. It is the function of this Bureau to disseminate unbiased and reliable information as to the aims, ideals, programs, and physical composition of the various youth organizations and movements in this country, as well as the facts concerning unaffiliated youth, their needs and aspirations."¹¹²

Ilma's colleagues at *Modern Youth* magazine soon became her cofounders of the Central Bureau. While eating lunch with her collaborators at Christ Cella's Steakhouse in New York City, Viola pitched the idea of a World Youth Congress, but after discussing the concept in detail, settled on an American Youth Congress, which would be more manageable. However, her dream of a gathering of youth from around the world would eventually transpire, just not under her leadership. "It was my dream...that we could bring hope and direction to millions of young Americans who were trying to find their way along a road darkened by depression and economic stagnation," Viola recalled in her autobiography.¹¹³ A friend of hers who worked at the New York Public Library quickly went to work gathering the names and addresses of youth organizations around the country while Viola went to work raising money for the Central Bureau. She called upon her contacts she made early on in her publishing career as well as society

¹¹² *Report of the First Annual American Youth Congress*, 8

¹¹³ Ilma, *The Political Virgin*, 74

elite from her travels. The AYC, a representative coalition of student organizations, was officially founded in 1934 and was a movement that promoted social change.¹¹⁴

Establishing the American Youth Congress Organization

One of the Central Bureau's first efforts was to plan and implement the First Annual American Youth Congress event, bringing together youth and organizational leaders from around the country to establish a clear statement of need for the nation's youth. Although young adults managed the Central Bureau and the congress, they did rely upon professionals and organizations to provide financial backing. The first Annual American Youth Congress garnered \$1,572 in donations from individuals including an attorney, an author, state and local leaders, and nonprofit and for profit organizations. To prepare for the congress, the Central Bureau mailed 4,000 surveys to youth leaders and organizations ascertaining their needs and viewpoints on addressing such needs. The results of the survey served as a guide in developing the platform for the congress.¹¹⁵

New York University (NYU) was identified as a location for the

¹¹⁴ Arthur Clifford, *The Truth About the American Youth Congress* (New York City: Committee of 76, 1935)

¹¹⁵ *Report of the First Annual American Youth Congress*, 8-11

first national gathering of youth. Chancellor Harry Woodburn Chase gave approval for the event to be held at NYU in one of its academic buildings. He supported the concept of the youth gathering and assigned Professor Harvey Zorbaugh to liaise with Viola on the planning of event. Viola planned to invite youth leaders from all types of organizations and to her a youth leader "was anyone with enough interest and energy to come to the congress."¹¹⁶ Despite the Central Bureau's efforts to be open to all types of organizations, the group's advisor did not see it that way. A few days before the congress, Professor Zorbaugh stepped away from his involvement, telling Viola that he felt she was not giving liberal and radical groups enough attention.¹¹⁷ Later, Viola would find out Zorbaugh's real intentions and this would be the first of many times in the AYC history where ideological viewpoints would cause divisiveness among delegates. Ambitious and focused, Viola and her colleagues continued with the planning of the summer event.

In developing the program for the congress, the following issues drove the platform for the event:

Education: The AYC called for freedom of discussion in the classroom and that ideas and issues be exchanged without bias. It requested the establishment of a Federal

¹¹⁶ Ilma, *The Political Virgin*, 79

¹¹⁷ Ilma, *The Political Virgin*, 75 - 76

Vocational Advisory Bureau to distribute information on vocational opportunities. The group also addressed the need for enhanced curriculum including sex education as a vehicle for improved health and well being of youth. Although not directly related to education, the Congress did call for a national divorce law where both parties consented in the dissolution of the marriage, providing the marriage did not result in children.

War and Peace: The AYC stated clearly that it was strongly opposed to any armed conflict and was in favor of world disarmament. However, it did recognize that the United States could not completely abolish its military defense, rather it called for a cease of arms and minimum defense on a daily basis.

Social Insurance: The issues surrounding social insurance were broad and complex. It called for extending the length of a child's education and limiting his entrance into the workforce was an objective of the AYC. They favored the adoption of National Uniform Child Labor Laws. The AYC also vowed to bring to light organizations and companies that violated laws concerning child labor and education. The congress called for more recreational outlets and facilities in communities. Recognizing the economic conditions of the time, they also expressed the need for national unemployment insurance for all workers and expansion of the then current Federal Works Projects¹¹⁸ providing enhanced compensation and jobs, especially for transients. The Congress also advocated for apprenticeship and job training programs. The establishment of youth hostels for young travelers was also advocated for. Finally, the AYC favored enactment of a pension fund supported by federal taxation.

¹¹⁸ The Federal Works Projects was an effort administered by the Work Projects Administration. The Works Project fell under the Transient Division and provided grants to states for relief of indigent persons otherwise disqualified by residency requirements. (Records of the Work Projects Administration, National Archives, accessed <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/069.html#69.3.3>)

*Apprenticeships and Homesteads.*¹¹⁹ Closely related to the other platform issues, the AYC called for federal support of vocational education programs and the establishment of a commission to study educational apprenticeship programs. It also requested that the Federal Apprenticeship plan have clear rules established for the employment of apprentices, that they not be exploited or used as a substitute for employable, qualified workers. In connection with Homesteads, the AYC asked the federal government to develop planned communities where young, newly married individuals facing financial difficulties could create a life of hem and work. However, the congress wanted to ensure that participation on such a program would be voluntary, and not serve as a vehicle to further divide social classes.¹²⁰

Once the issues were identified, the Central Bureau began planning for what would become the first of many summer youth congresses.

However, the core issues of education, war and peace, social insurances, and apprentices and homesteads would not be sustained as a central focus of the AYC after the summer congress, as a shift in leadership and philosophy would occur.

¹¹⁹ The Subsistence Homesteads Division was established August 23, 1933, under provisions of EO 6209, July 21, 1933, and fell under the Department of the Interior. The program implemented the subsistence homesteads program of the National Recovery Act. (Records of the Farmers Home Administration, National Archives, <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/096.html#96.2.4>) The federal program created model communities, moving the urban poor to small plots of land where they would live in safe, clean houses and learn to produce enough food to become self-sustaining. (Resettlement Administration, Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History & Culture, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/R/RE032.html>)

¹²⁰ *Report of the First Annual American Youth Congress*, 16-21

American Youth Congress, 1934

The First Annual American Youth Congress was held from August 15-17, 1934 in New York City.¹²¹ At the time, some youth leaders believed that Viola Ilma supported Hitler and had received funding from fascist organizations; causing early accounts of the AYC associating the organization with fascism. These perceptions were based upon her earlier travels to Europe, specifically Nazi Germany, where she socialized with individuals believed to have been supporters of the Fascist Party. Communist and socialist delegates who were attending the congress questioned Viola's motivations for creating the AYC, arguing that she intended to transform the AYC into a fascist organization.¹²² In an interview before the first congress, Viola found herself having to defend the organization's origin saying "We are not radical for these times. As a matter of fact, the radicals indulgently call us conservatives."¹²³ Nonetheless, her assumed political alignment continued throughout the summer congress but would not dampen her enthusiasm.

At the age of 23, Viola Ilma was energized by the first Annual

¹²¹ *Report of the First Annual American Youth Congress*

¹²² Joel. A. Lewis, *Youth Against Fascism: Young Communists in Britain and the United States, 1919-1939* (Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Mueller e.K., 2007), 93.

¹²³ "Young America Plans to Fight Its Own Battles," *Spartenburg Herald-Journal*, June 12, 1935.

American Youth Congress and the potential power of youth in public life. "We must assume leadership without having been trained for it, but we shall train ourselves,"¹²⁴ stated Ilma in an interview. Although several hundred youth organization leaders and unaffiliated youth were invited to the first congress, 500 responded receiving credential cards for the event. The credentials were issued to "...extreme radicals to extreme conservatives, and from social clubs to labor unions."¹²⁵ Despite the widespread invitation, less than 200 delegates attended the first gathering held in New York.

Although the AYC was intended to be 'nonpolitical,' ideological clashes began to emerge during the event. In her autobiography, Viola described the opening of the congress:

"On the surface, the meeting was orderly. But things are not always as they seem to be. Printed matter was being passed among the delegates...people were switching seats, whispering and breaking up, while other delegates were passing in and out of the room..."¹²⁶

Viola later learned that Harvey Zorbaugh, Advisor to the AYC, had convened a group of 12 organizations, including the YCL and the YPSL, to promote specific issues at the congress. Gil Green of the YCL led the group and on behalf of the organizations, claiming that not all youth

¹²⁴ Ibid

¹²⁵ *Report of the First Annual American Youth Congress*, 10

¹²⁶ Ilma, *The Political Virgin*, 79

groups were invited to the congress and that the method of selection was not fair. Members of the caucus led by Gil began speaking out saying that officers of the congress should be elected from the floor. These requests were made while Viola tried to lead the meeting, but the protests continued through the evening's break out meetings. The outbursts and maneuvering for support led to a split in the congress with Viola's congress continuing to meet at the Hotel Brevoort and Green's congress staying at NYU and electing Waldo McNutt, Rocky Mountain YMCA, temporary chairman and leader of the Continuation Committee.¹²⁷

Although claiming to be politically neutral, the Central Bureau did express their opinion of some congress participants in the publishing of the *Report of First American Youth Congress*. In describing the results of the gathering, the report indicated that the congress called attention to the intellectual differences between the radical left wing and the 'normal' right wing of American youth, implying that some conservative groups were not acceptable. Yet, the Central Bureau reaffirmed that it would serve as a clearinghouse for all ideas of American youth "...whatever political,



Photograph 6: Waldo
McNutt, c. 1933
(Courtesy of
Ancestry.com)

¹²⁷ Ibid, 78-81

social or racial affiliation.”¹²⁸

A group of leaders were identified by Viola’s congress for keeping the efforts of the first gathering alive, and to serve as a coordinating body for regional and national programs. The group represented individuals from the two groups that had split during the first congress. A Board of Governors was identified and represented youth from various organizations from around the country. Viola Ilma was named chairman and Ernestine Young as vice chairman.¹²⁹ However, this group would not be successful in its efforts and soon disbanded.

An Unexpected Change in Leadership

Viola Ilma’s leadership was short-lived as control of the AYC remained controversial after the first congress and democratic elections for the congress came the following year under McNutt’s and Green’s leadership.¹³⁰ After Viola was ousted as leader of the AYC, a series of attacks began against her. As she recounted in *The Political Virgin* (1958) “The Reds, by deceit, deign, and a disciplined corps of followers schooled in parliamentary procedures, had stolen the youth movement from me, establishing my reputation as a political

¹²⁸ Ibid, 22

¹²⁹ *Report of the First Annual American Youth Congress*

¹³⁰ Clifford, *The Truth About the American Youth Congress*; Ilma, *The Political Virgin*, 79-83

virgin.”¹³¹ Additionally, *New Masses*, a communist magazine, headlined its November 13, 1934 issue with “Who paid Viola Ilma?” penned by John Spivak. The article stated that Viola was a fascist¹³² inspired by the Nazis and equated her relationships with influential people and the New Dealers no different from the Nazi youth in Germany with Hitler. The article referenced Viola’s travels the prior summer and the time spent with society leaders who were known sympathizers of the Nazis.¹³³ The First Lady saw this article, as well as others, and wrote Viola asking for an explanation and if the accusations were true. Viola communicated to Eleanor that the inferences were false and that since the first congress, communist groups had been attacking her. She stated that Spivak’s accusations stemmed from her not disclosing to him where she received funding for the summer congress. Finally, Viola shared with the Eleanor that she was “...an enthusiastic and

¹³¹ Ilma, *The Political Virgin*, 90

¹³² After 1933, the Young Communist League (YCL) used anti-fascist language to mobilize youth. The YCL stated that its primary goal was to prevent fascism from provoking another world war. This shift towards anti-fascism occurred after the official adoption of the ‘Popular Front’ in 1935, a strategy that focused on creating alliances with anti-fascist groups in order to strengthen communist position and isolate fascist dictatorships. Comintern leaders used a continuity of terms in the reports of the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern to ease potential tensions, legitimizing their revisionism in Leninist terminology. During this era, the YCL rejected much of the combative rhetoric and strategies of traditional Leninism. Young communists embraced the populist peace politics of the Popular Front with enthusiasm, as they saw themselves to be impacted the most by the outbreak of a new world war. Communist youth insisted their entire generation needed to unite to defeat the deadly “enemy of the youth”, fascism. (Lewis, *Youth Against Fascism*, 37-43.)

¹³³ Ibid, 92

confirmed democrat.”¹³⁴

Despite these controversies, the new democratic election process opened up participation into the AYC organization, allowing for rapid growth. In addition to having delegates elected democratically, The Committee of 76 formed, replacing the Central Bureau by taking on the role of coordinating youth activities. Playing upon the patriotism of American youth, the new leaders selected a name for the new coordinating body that they thought would resonate with young Americans. “The [AYC] has a job to do. It must carry forward the traditions of 1776 and 1861,”¹³⁵ Gil Green later commented. Plans were made by The Committee of 76 to hold another annual congress of delegates to make progress on issues with the end goal being social change.¹³⁶

With a change in leadership came a new vision for the AYC. The Committee of 76 organized the movement and provided structure and guidance for the AYC’s activities and in 1935 articulated the aims of the AYC:

1. Determine major problems facing youth
2. Carry the program into action via committees and congress

¹³⁴ Letter from Viola Ilma to Eleanor Roosevelt, December 7, 1934

¹³⁵ Gil Green, “Youth Carries On - The Traditions of '76,” *Young Worker*, July 2, 1935.

¹³⁶ Clifford, *The Truth About the American Youth Congress*

3. To forge bonds among religious, racial, and social class groups¹³⁷

In defining its goals, the AYC declared "...to meet national problems on a national scale. It serves to integrate the otherwise isolated endeavors of young Americans to better themselves and society." The AYC viewed themselves as the "watchdog of young Americans."¹³⁸

In the early years, the AYC had ambitious goals, which were in



Photograph 7: Young children working in a Hawaiian canning factory, c. 1928. (Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives)

line with the viewpoints of many American youth at the time. Their efforts focused on the prevention of war; abolition of military schools; anti racism; bettering the living and working conditions of youth; rights for collective bargaining; unemployment insurance benefits; abolishing child labor; more

funding for education; and standing firmly as anti 'New Deal.'¹³⁹ As the

¹³⁷ Ibid, 9-10

¹³⁸ *Youngsville, U.S.A.: American Youth Tells Its Story* (New York City: National Council American Youth Congress, n.d.), 55.

¹³⁹ The New Deal was a series of domestic economic programs enacted by President Franklin Roosevelt between 1933 and 1936. The programs were in response to the Great Depression, and focused addressing widespread unemployment, recovery of the economy, and the rebuilding and reformation of the banking industry. The term "new deal" was used during one of FDR's Fireside Chats on May 7, 1933. (*Outlining the New Deal Program*, 5/7/1933, New Deal Network <http://newdeal.feri.org/chat/chat02.htm>); Clifford, *The Truth About the American Youth Congress*

organization grew and moved forward, it became apparent to some affiliate members of the AYC that these goals were also in line with those of the CPUSA and the YCL. After the 1934 congress, the YCL stated that the event was the most important event for youth since the delegates had successfully united together to smash a budding fascist youth movement. The YCL defended the maneuvers of Gil Green and his collaborators stating that such consensus tactics were effective in facilitating the coordination of forces against unemployment, fascism, and war.¹⁴⁰

After it's first year of operation, the leaders of the AYC moved to focus on drafting a statement that outlined the rights of American youth. The

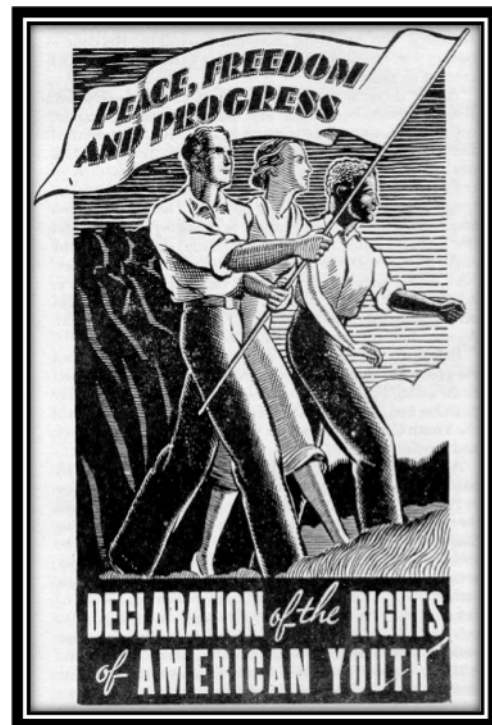


Illustration 3: *Declaration of Rights of American Youth*, c. 1935 (From the author's private collection)

Declaration of Rights of American Youth (Appendix) was adopted by the Second Annual American Youth Congress held in Detroit, Michigan, from July 4-7, 1935. One thousand two hundred and five delegates

¹⁴⁰ Lewis, *Youth Against Fascism*, 93

from 53 organizations, representing 1,350,000 American youth,
adopted the declaration. As stated by William Hinckley, AYC leader, in
a 1936 hearing to the Senate Committee on Education and Labor,

"It is the product of the American Youth Congress, but it belongs
to the youth of America wherever they assemble, whether It be
on, the farm, the factory, trade union, church, Y's, school,
professional, fraternal, language, or social groups."¹⁴¹

The preamble of the *Declaration* set the stage of the AYC platform in
the coming years, stating forcefully,

"We declare that our generation is rightfully entitled to a useful,
creative, and happy life, the guarantees of which are: full
educational opportunities, steady employment at adequate
wages, security in time of need, civil rights, religious freedom,
and peace."¹⁴²

The *Declaration* was organized into three sections focusing on the right
to life, liberty, and happiness – mirroring the U.S. *Declaration of
Independence*, but framing those rights around the needs of young
citizens. *Declaration of Rights of American Youth* was slightly amended
in 1936.

In 1939, the AYC adopted and published another seminal
document, *The Creed of the American Youth Congress*, which outlined
the values and commitments of the AYC's commitment to democracy

¹⁴¹ Senate Committee on Committee on Education and Labor, Hearings - A Bill to
Provide Vocational Training and Employment For Youth, 74th Cong., 2d sess., 1936,
S. Rep. 3685, 4.

¹⁴² Ibid.

and the American ideal, "which is the democratic way of life. I will help assure its bounty to all races, creeds, and colors."¹⁴³ Although *The Creed* reflected higher order values,¹⁴⁴ how those values were interpreted and applied towards the organization's platform and lobbying activities varied during the 1930s. For example, the authors of *The Creed* found it under attack in 1938, as efforts initiated by Joseph Lash, a leader in the ASU called for an amendment to the document at the upcoming 1939 summer congress.¹⁴⁵ The delegates of the congress rejected the amendment, which would have condemned communism, fascism, and nazism. Eleanor Roosevelt applauded the youth's stance, and officially endorsed *The Creed* in its original form.¹⁴⁶

Seeking Support from Washington and the Roosevelts

From the beginning, AYC leaders made pilgrimages to Washington D.C. to appear at Congressional hearings and to lobby

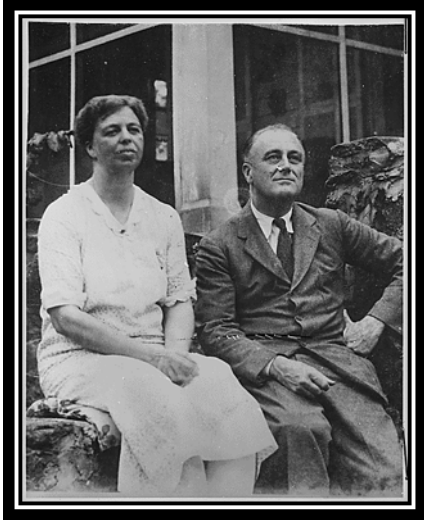
¹⁴³ *Creed of the American Youth Congress* (New York City: National Council American Youth Congress, 1939).

¹⁴⁴ Higher order values, often communicated as 'ideals', represent the ultimate economic, technological, political, social, and aesthetic priorities. They are among the ultimate strivings of human existence. (James Kouzes & Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, Fifth Ed., p. 126)

¹⁴⁵ *Resident Board Minutes June 22, 1939: American Youth Congress* (New York City: American Youth Congress, June, 1938).

¹⁴⁶ "Youth Congress "Creed"; No Anti-Communist Plank," *Lewiston Daily Sun*, July 4, 1939.

elected officials on a range of social and economic initiatives. Although some of the early attempts to shape legislation failed, for the first time in American history the U.S. Congress gave attention to legislation



Photograph 5: Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt, c. 1930
(Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library Public Domain Photographs)

written by, for, and about youth. The AYC contributed to the acceptance of the principles implicit in the NYA and growth in annual appropriations in its initial years.¹⁴⁷

In response to the economic and social strife facing the country from the Great

Depression, including the expressed needs

of youth, the NYA served as a vehicle for

addressing such needs. Initially, President

Roosevelt was not committed to addressing

youth needs, however, through effective lobbying lead by his wife

Eleanor in cooperation with youth leaders, caused Roosevelt to change

his mind. In June 1935, FDR signed the order establishing the NYA,

within the Works Project Administration, a program designed

specifically to address the problem of unemployment among

Depression-era youth. Geared towards individuals age 16 to 25, the

NYA provided skills-based job training for unemployed, out-of-school

¹⁴⁷ Alan Hartman, "Youth Finds Its Own Answers", *Survey Graphic* 28, no. 8 (August, 1939): 492.

youth. It also included the Student Aid Program, a precursor to today's Federal Work Study Program,¹⁴⁸ providing jobs training for high school, college, and graduate students through scholarships and grants.¹⁴⁹

The AYC leadership had contact with many New Dealers, especially First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt who was concerned with youth issues. Although the AYC did not agree with the Roosevelt Administration's 'New Deal'¹⁵⁰ initiative, they did find common ground on the issue of student federal aid.¹⁵¹ Despite these differences, several of the issues addressed by the AYC were in line with President Roosevelt's platform and in a letter to then AYC Chairman William Hinckley, FDR stated,

¹⁴⁸ The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 created a new program for Work-Study. Its objective is to stimulate and promote the part-time employment of students in institutions of higher education who are from low-income families in need of financial earnings in order to pursue courses of study at such institutions. (A Brief History of the Federal Work-Study Program, Campus Compact, <http://www.compact.org/>)

¹⁴⁹ National Youth Administration, The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, George Washington University.
<http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/glossary/nya.cfm>; National Youth Administration, Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma State University,
<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/n/na014.html>

¹⁵⁰ The New Deal was a series of domestic economic programs enacted by President Franklin Roosevelt between 1933 and 1936. The programs were in response to the Great Depression, and focused addressing widespread unemployment, recovery of the economy, and the rebuilding and reformation of the banking industry. The term "new deal" was used during one of FDR's Fireside Chats on May 7, 1933. (*Outlining the New Deal Program, 5/7/1933*, New Deal Network <http://newdeal.feri.org/chat/chat02.htm>).

¹⁵¹ William W. Hinckley, *Youth Seeks Peace, Freedom and Progress: Report of National Chairman of the American Youth Congress, to the Third American Youth Congress* (New York City: National Council American Youth Congress, January 1, 1936).

"...it is indeed gratifying on this Congress still another evidence of the growing interest which young people are showing in the affairs of government. It is encouraging and reassuring to know that the future of our democracy rests in the hands of a generation which is alive to the responsibilities which democratic government involves and well versed in its mechanics."¹⁵²

Eleanor Roosevelt took special interest in the activities and politics of the AYC and helped convince the young leaders that cooperating with her husband's administration addressing common goals would benefit the organization greatly. Additionally, Mrs. Roosevelt wanted to discourage the AYC from criticizing the New Deal and undermining her husband's political objectives. Despite her loyalties to her husband, oftentimes her sympathies lied with the brash young students who composed the AYC's leadership. She often met with young leaders prior to them attending Congressional committee meetings, often prepping them the night before.¹⁵³

Eleanor Roosevelt took up the charge of defending the AYC as it came under public attack as a communist organization in the mid-1930s. In a 1939 article, she acknowledged that the AYC and the World Youth Congress had youth affiliated with communism as

¹⁵² Letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt to William Hinckley, Chairman AYC 6/21/37. Published in "The American Youth Congress: What it Is, How It Works", nd, published by AYC, p. 1

¹⁵³ American Youth Congress, The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, George Washington University, <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/glossary/american-youth-congress.cfm>

delegates, but dismissed that they were communist-controlled organizations. She described such negative attacks on the youth organizations as "intolerance" and argued that all youth – regardless of political affiliation – should be heard.¹⁵⁴ She believed fervently that intolerance and injustices must be fought if we were to live in a true democracy,

"I do not believe that oppression anywhere or injustice which is tolerated by the people of any country toward any group in that country is a healthy influence. I feel that unless we learn to live together as individuals and as groups, and to find ways of settling our difficulties without showing fear of each other and resorting to force, we cannot hope to see our democracy successful."¹⁵⁵

By the late 1930s, the relationship between the Roosevelts and the AYC had waned. Leslie Gould authored a book in 1940 on the AYC, *American Youth Today* and asked the First Lady to provide commentary. In the forward, Eleanor Roosevelt spoke of the importance of the AYC and youth organizations stating,

"I have no great illusions about the perfection of any organization or any group. I do believe, however, that a group which is honestly trying to help young people in their own communities to get together and face such problems as unemployment, recreation and health, should receive cooperation and understanding."

¹⁵⁴ "Keepers of Democracy", Eleanor Roosevelt. Originally published in *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1939): 1-5. New Deal Network, <http://newdeal.feri.org/er/er17.htm>

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

Although the First Lady agreed to write the forward, in the memo sent to the publisher Mr. Carf, which included her comments, she indicated her displeasure of the way Leslie portrayed her husband and one of his speeches to the American Youth Congress. In addition, she took aim at Murray Plavner, a youth activist who portrayed the AYC as a communist front.¹⁵⁶ Plavner responded by stating, "If Mrs. Roosevelt wished to front for the communists who control the youth congress that is her business."¹⁵⁷

The AYC - Roosevelt administration relationship all but collapsed during the National Youth Citizenship Institute held in February 1940. Five thousand AYC delegates had come to Washington D.C. for the program, which was intended to focus on youth involvement in public life and government and to lobby for federal jobs and financial aid programs. President Roosevelt was aware that a faction of young communists were in the crowd and drew gentle attention to them during the opening of his address while quieting the fears of those who were in opposition of the faction's beliefs,

"And I think that some of us have in the back of our heads the fact that if we had a different form of government this kind of meeting on the White House lawn

¹⁵⁶ Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Mr. Carf, May 12, 1940

¹⁵⁷ "First Lady Absent but Gets Spotlight at Youth Congress," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 5, 1940, accessed June 11, 2013, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1499&dat=19400705&id=BbRQAAAAIBAJ&sjid=qSIEAAAAIBAJ&pg=2535,932659>.

could not take place. In saying this I am not denying to you or anyone else in any way the right of free assembly...or free speech..."

However, in his closing remarks took direct aim at them stating,

"It has been said that some of you are Communists...As Americans you have a right, a legal constitutional right, to call yourself Communists...but as Americans you not only have a right but a sacred duty to confine your advocacy of changes in law to the methods prescribed in the Constitution of the United States – and you have no American right...to subvert the Government and the Constitution of this Nation."¹⁵⁸

The crowd cheered at his closing remarks. However, the AYC's communist faction used the Citizenship Institute to argue against Roosevelt's foreign policies, especially his opposition to the Soviet invasion of Finland.¹⁵⁹ The delegates had a negative view of President Roosevelt because of his political stance and therefore responded by delivering an emotionally charged speech to the youth delegates. Roosevelt told the delegates and a national radio audience that the Youth Congress's charge that he was seeking war with Russia was "unadulterated twaddle" and "silly."¹⁶⁰ In response to FDR's angry speech, the young communists in the crowd were provoked to raucous

¹⁵⁸ Transcript, Address of the President to the Delegates of the National Citizenship Institute of the American Youth Congress, February 10, 1940, 12:30 p.m.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid; Robert Cohen, "American Youth Congress," Macmillan Reference USA's Encyclopedia of the Great Depression, Digital, p. 43-44, 2009 Gale, Cengage Learning.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid; speech transcript

booing, and a similar response followed when Eleanor Roosevelt addressed the delegates.¹⁶¹ Yet, even after this detrimental exchange, Eleanor Roosevelt still stood in public support of the AYC. In an article written in the April, 1940 issue of *Liberty* magazine, titled "Why I Still Believe in the Youth Congress" she addressed the communist presence within the organization, specifically taking aim at journalist Fulton Lewis, Jr. whom she believed inaccurately reported activities of the AYC and as well as the investigation of the Dies Committee. In addressing the concerns over the Youth Citizenship Institute, Mrs. Roosevelt argued that it was "...a serious crowd of young people."¹⁶² She passionately stated the importance of such organizations as the AYC and expressed hope that outburst such as the one that erupted at the Youth Citizenship Institute do not cast a cloud over all youth organizations and their efforts to promote social and political change.

"All the attacks made upon the congress have only consolidated the feeling of "youth against the world." That is a danger, I think; because what we want to do is to have all ages work together to solve the problems of today. We have gone about obtaining this cooperation most stupidly. Whether we can retrieve what we have lost, and make these youngsters feel that the attacks that have been made upon them in the press do not represent the attitude of thinking and sympathetic older people, I do not know. If we cannot, then I think we have done a

¹⁶¹ Cohen, "American Youth Congress"

¹⁶² Black, "Why I Still Believe in the Youth Congress," in *Courage in a Dangerous World*

dangerous thing; because, whatever else this meeting did, it awakened a great many more young people to the fact that they were being attacked as young people, and that is not a good spirit to foster."¹⁶³

She continued this tone of supporting youth organizations, including the AYC, downplaying any role that communists groups may have had within such groups. At a Democratic Women's Luncheon Club of Philadelphia event, she served as a guest speaker on "Youth Today." In her remarks, she advocated for youth involvement in solving their problems and gave accolades to youth groups for getting involved in the political process.¹⁶⁴

Organizational Operations

Upon the founding of the AYC, the Central Bureau did not focus heavily on organizational operations, rather their concentrated efforts on planning the first annual summer congress. When the Committee of 76 took over the reigns of the AYC, and acknowledging the vast potential of the national movement, new leaders of the AYC began establishing clear lines of structure, authority, and programmatic purpose.

¹⁶³ Ibid

¹⁶⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt, "Youth Today," Address before the Democratic Women's Luncheon Club of Philadelphia, Philadelphia. April 17, 1940.

After the 1934 Congress, the AYC organization began developing a more organized system of operation. As noted in an official AYC publication, the congress was a federation of national and local youth organizations that stood for peace, freedom, and progress. It was not only an annual meeting of delegates, but also an association that worked daily for the conditions and interests of the nation's youth.¹⁶⁵

Given the scope of the organization, it needed to have a structure that supported its breadth of constituents and its wide interests.

Operationally, the AYC had three levels of organization. The National Council, comprised of organizational representatives, was the resident aspect of the organization and the most active facet of the AYC. The council included one representative from each member national organization as well as representatives of important regional group.¹⁶⁶

The Administrative Council was comprised of a cross section of the National Council and acted on behalf of the AYC when necessary.

Member youth organizations from across the country made up the congress and attended the annual events each year.

As the organization grew, commissions were formed to focus on specific topics that would be addressed at annual gatherings. The

¹⁶⁵ *Youngsville, U.S.A.*, 54

¹⁶⁶ *The American Youth Congress: What It Is. How It Works* (New York City: National Council American Youth Congress, 1937).

commissions were a facet of the National Council and planned detailed activities, conducted campaigns, and implemented programs and services at each summer congress. The commissions were Peace, Crime Prevention and Recreation, Labor, Democratic Liberties, Public Health, Agriculture, Education, and Consumer Cooperatives. On a local level City Youth Councils existed as forum for leveraging resources of the local youth organizations and coordinated the development of community programs.¹⁶⁷

On a national level and local level, the AYC focused on five areas of activity: Coordination, legislation, peace advocacy, democracy, and information dissemination. These framed the goals and strategies used by the National Council and member organizations in their efforts to promote social and political change.¹⁶⁸ However, great focus was placed on national issues that affected all youth as the AYC worked "...to meet national problems on a national scale. It serves to integrate the otherwise isolated endeavors of young Americans to better themselves and society." The AYC viewed themselves as the "watchdog of young Americans."¹⁶⁹

Local and national activities were organized as they related to

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 10

¹⁶⁸ *Youngsville, U.S.A.*

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 55

the overall purpose of the AYC and the specific legislation being pursued in Washington. During the 1930s, six summer youth congresses were held as well as serving host to the World Youth Congress in 1938. A National Youth Citizenship Institute was held in 1940 to serve as a training program for youth leaders and to lobby legislators on critical issues. These annual programs not only served as a forum for youth organizations to develop strategies for addressing issues, but allowed new concerns to be brought forward from the regional groups. On a regional level, affiliated organizations also held similar programs. For example, the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC) held events in the south to specifically address the needs of African-American youth. In 1940, the SNYC held a congress in New Orleans, however there was concern from delegates' regarding their ability to pay related expenses given current economic conditions. Regional and state assemblies also coordinated events such as the Model United States Congress, a smaller version of what became the Annual Youth Congress during the summers. The model congresses served a dual purpose of a training youth leaders for political participation and for drafting proposals for legislative action.¹⁷⁰ The AYC also took to the air and worked with national and local radio stations to provide commentary during regularly scheduled programs.

¹⁷⁰ *The American Youth Congress: What It Is. How It Works*, 11

In 1938 programs were scheduled in advance if the summer congress and focused on such topics as "Opportunity and Security for Urban Youth" and "Youth Problems of Today and Yesterday", as well as interviews with AYC leaders.¹⁷¹ The AYC was also able to involve government leaders to participate in these radio programs, speaking on issues important to young American youth. In 1939, Floyd Reeves, then Director of the American Youth Commission, gave an address on "Cooperation Between City and Rural Youth" as part of the Youth Congress Radio Program.¹⁷²

Although a national movement, the leadership of the AYC recognized, and encouraged, youth activism in local communities via City Youth Councils. However, national leaders did try to maintain a level of control in endorsing such activities. The National Council oftentimes were informed of organizational protests and demonstrations that were lead by youth organizations or other political action groups and determined the AYC's potential involvement. For instance, in 1939 the AYC leadership became aware of an effort by labor organizations and groups of unemployed workers to coordinate to demonstrations in cities around the country. The demonstrations

¹⁷¹ Meeting Notes, American Youth Congress, Resident Board June 22, 1938

¹⁷² "Floyd W. Reeves - Cooperation Between City and Rural Youth", *Youth Congress Radio Program*, NBC Red Network, June 24, 1939.

were to give support to the Work Program Administration's Deficiency Appropriation Bill that was pending in Congress at that time. The AYC Resident Board¹⁷³ voted to allow national and local organizations to participate in the demonstrations.¹⁷⁴

In support of its mission to provide information to American youth, the AYC disseminated information to local and regional organizations and took the form of memos, information pamphlets, reports, and newsletters. Many of these publications centered on specific issues that the AYC was addressing and publications were sold in an effort to help generate revenue for the organization. For example, in promoting American youth as the country's future, *Here's A Real Inside Tip On America's Best Investment* was published. Written as a business plan outlining 'assets', 'liabilities' and 'dividends', the booklet took aim at the government's spending on defense, arguing that more funding was required to support youth job training, education, and job placement.¹⁷⁵

In January 1939, AYC leaders recognized the need to better

¹⁷³ In the early years, the National Council referred to itself as the "Resident Board." After the adoption of the AYC Constitution in 1937, this verbiage changed with the inclusion of a Cabinet and Advisory Board into the AYC hierarchy.

¹⁷⁴ *Resident Board Minutes January 19, 1939: American Youth Congress* (New York City: American Youth Congress, January, 1939).

¹⁷⁵ *Here's a Real Inside Tip On America's Best Investment* (New York City: National Council American Youth Congress, n.d.).

provide information to member organizations about its legislative programs. Detailed information about pending bills, positions, and related campaigns needed to be clearly outlined for youth organizations and it was determined that this could be accomplished via a national newsletter.¹⁷⁶ In October 1940, the AYC via the National Office started publishing a bi-weekly *AYC News* bulletin. The bulletin was distributed to affiliated national and local youth organizations and was envisioned as a tool to empower AYC affiliated organizations by providing up-to-date news and information on pertinent issues. Specifically, *AYC News* provided resolutions passed by the AYC cabinet and assembly, status on AYC commission efforts, and news of youth activities across the country. The bulletin was structured in a way to serve as a planning tool for youth organizations. For example, an overview would be provided on the status of a particular issue, and then following the synopsis would be strategies for the organization. There were specific strategies outlined for national and local organizations yet indicated to local organizations "...every idea has to be adapted to your own locale; no idea should be applied mechanically..."¹⁷⁷ In most cases what followed was a list of key points that clarified the AYC's position and served as talking points for youth

¹⁷⁶ *Resident Board Minutes January 19, 1939*

¹⁷⁷ *AYC News* (New York City: American Youth Congress, October 1940), 2.

leaders during meetings or with interviews with the media.

After the National Youth Citizenship Institute in 1940, a publication, *Now Is the Time: The Fight for Civil Liberties*, was made available to delegates. The twenty-two-page booklet provided an overview of civil liberty violations from around the country as well as specific focus on discrimination against African-Americans.¹⁷⁸ Other publications developed after the Institute included *This Is Youth's Voice*, which were the proceedings from the Institute, and *American Youth Act Petitions* and *Here's A Real Job For You!! Pass the American Youth Act!* which outlined aspects and the need for the act and promoted passage of the *American Youth Act*.¹⁷⁹ *An American Youth Congress Songbook* was published for sale and included such songs as *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, *National Negro Anthem*, *Star Spangled Banner*, and *Casey Jones*, among others.¹⁸⁰

As the AYC organization quickly grew and more fee-generating programs were offered, the National Council created the position of Treasurer who was charged with managing revenue and expenses for activities and services provided by the AYC. Common expenses

¹⁷⁸ *Now Is the Time. the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York City: National Council American Youth Congress, 1940).

¹⁷⁹ *Here's a Real Job for You!! Pass the American Youth Act!* (New York City: National Council American Youth Congress, n.d.).

¹⁸⁰ *An American Youth Congress Songbook* (New York City: American Youth Congress, n.d.).

included news clipping services, equipment rental, priming, office supplies, postage and telegraph services, office rent, and travel. Despite the many expenses, close to 30% of the expenses went towards salaries of AYC leadership. The primary source of income was private donations, which accounted close to 90% of the AYC's revenue. Other sources included sales of literature, affiliation fees, loans, and fundraisers.¹⁸¹

Since its inception, the AYC relied heavily on donations to keep the organization afloat. Viola Ilma had paved the way for influential society leaders to act on behalf of the AYC and by the late-1930s, a Committee of Patrons was established by supporters to help raise funds for AYC programs. Junior League President Mrs. Richard Storre Childs wrote letters to fellow community leaders encouraging them to join the committee and support youth activities.¹⁸² Leaders and activists like Dr. Mary Wooley, former President of Mount Holyoke College, also sent letters to potential donors seeking funds for the training of the "citizens of tomorrow."¹⁸³ Annual programs such as summer congresses would generate income, however, expenses oftentimes exceeded what was gained from registration fees.

¹⁸¹ *Resident Board Minutes January 19, 1939*

¹⁸² Correspondence from Mrs. Richard Storre Childs to [undisclosed list], May 16, 1939.

¹⁸³ Correspondence from Dr. Mary E. Wooley to [undisclosed list], May 3, 1939

By 1938, the AYC was facing serious financial difficulties as bills went unpaid and collection notices were a common affair that would extend over the next two years. Overdue bills from news clipping services, radiograms, print shops plagued the organization and its operation.¹⁸⁴ At the same time, the House Committee on Un-American Activities was investigating the organization, along with other major youth groups. However, before that difficult time, the American Youth Congress established an effective program of annual youth events, lobbying efforts, and publications designed to inform and engage American youth. Over the course of six years, the AYC coalesced the power and voice of American youth through their effective local and national operations. Issues such as minimum wage, federal financial aid for college, work-study programs, anti-discrimination laws, child labor laws, and unemployment insurance were all be pursued by the youth affiliated with the AYC. The youth congress became the first successful youth lobbying organization that gave voice to young Americans through their workings with Congress.

¹⁸⁴ Correspondence from Weiss & Weiss Collections and Adjustment to the American Youth Congress, December 12, 1939; Correspondence from B.C.A. Communications, Inc. to the American Youth Congress, June 21, 1940 Correspondence to from Philip Jacobs to the American Youth Congress, October 8, 1938

CHAPTER FOUR:

Activities of the American Youth Congress

"The [AYC] program is as varied as America's problems. The youth problem cannot be separated from the general problem of economic distress, social disaster...So as a matter of fact, the local programs are as varied as the problems of America and as interesting in their solutions."¹⁸⁵

- William Hinckley

Upon the founding of the American Youth Congress (AYC), its young leaders determined that it would be beneficial to plan and implement a summer congress event, bringing together youth leaders from around the country to establish a clear statement of need for the country's youth.¹⁸⁶ The first Annual American Youth Congress¹⁸⁷ was held in 1934, but within a few short years, the AYC was holding more annual events beyond the summer program. The annual summer meeting would become structured into a "Model Congress of the United States" mirroring the legislative process of the federal government and other nationally organized events included citizenship

¹⁸⁵ House Committee on Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Report Investigation of Un-American Activities and Propaganda, 76th Cong., 1st sess., 1940, H. Rep. 282, 7050

¹⁸⁶ *Report First American Youth Congress*. (New York: Central Bureau for Young America, 1934),8.

¹⁸⁷ The term "American Youth Congress" was used to refer to the formal organization as well as the summer program. Officers were selected for each entity. The summer program would eventually be referred to as the "Youth Model Congress."

institutes, lobbying events in Washington, D.C., and participation in the World Youth Congresses. The culmination of these national events was a targeted platform of issues and solutions for the problems facing youth.

Through its national council and commissions, the AYC directed a range of events and campaigns, with assistance on the local level. The AYC's broadest effort was its National Legislative Program lead by the national council whereby delegates of the summer congress were expected to be familiar with specific legislation under consideration by the U.S. Congress. At monthly and annual meetings, participants discussed legislation so that the AYC could formulate a position on behalf of America's youth. The AYC developed positions on a range of bills pertaining to child labor, federal funding for education, the end of lynching, and voting rights, among others.¹⁸⁸ Encouraging youth to participate in the political process was an important aim of the AYC and efforts were put in place to foster youth voting. For example, in preparation of the fall 1940 election, the AYC mapped out a "get out the youth vote" campaign, focused on informing youth of the issues, such as jobs, education, and peace – while not advocating for specific candidates. The *"Youth Yardstick"* leaflet was developed and

¹⁸⁸ *Resident Board Minutes January 19, 1939: American Youth Congress* (New York City: American Youth Congress, 1939); *Resident Board Minutes June 22, 1939: American Youth Congress* (New York City: American Youth Congress, 1939).

distributed in large quantities to AYC affiliated organizations as a means of educating youth on specific issues. Youth organizations were encouraged to hold election preparation meetings in an effort to inform young voters about the prevalent issues and each candidate's viewpoints on the issues. Additionally, youth organizations were asked to educate young voters on how and where to vote.¹⁸⁹

On a local level, affiliated organizations hosted youth activities as well as city and statewide consortiums with support from the AYC National Council. By 1939, the National Council reported that nearly 4,500,000 youth were affiliated with the AYC via its 64¹⁹⁰ affiliated organizations.¹⁹¹ In an effort to support the development of new regional councils and leaders, in December, 1938 the AYC sponsored a its first Leadership Institute, titled, "Developing Local Youth Councils" held at American People's School in New York City. Fifty officers of city youth councils, state youth legislatures, and local youth organizations attended the training program. The conference previewed important local projects promoted during the upcoming year and provided approaches for improving the administration of such projects including

¹⁸⁹ *American Youth Congress News* (New York City: American Youth Congress, 1940).

¹⁹⁰ Annually the AYC would report the number of affiliated organizations, with the numbers often decreasing as regional groups, often counted as a single affiliate, would eventually be recognized under a national umbrella organization.

¹⁹¹ *Youth*, "Youth Arsenal" Boils Down Stacks of Facts, May, 1939, 1.

financial management strategies.¹⁹² Additionally, the AYC National Council encouraged city and county Youth Councils to develop community programs targeted towards youth and through the coordination of activities and pursuing legislation at the state level, local affiliates pursued the aims of the national organization. Often working with local agencies and community groups to affect social change, councils' and cooperative projects ranged from crime prevention programs to public health drives to recreation programs.¹⁹³

The AYC also focused on developing publications to raise awareness about their efforts on a national level and to spur involvement from American youth in rural and urban centers. The first attempt was a youth-focused magazine, established by the founders of the AYC. When the magazine was first released, it was under the title of *Voice of Youth* and was released in November of 1935. Viola Ilma was editor and Ruth Steinberg served as managing editor and other staffers included Victor Incorvia, Lyle Chubb, Ernest Neufield, and Jack Murphy. Billed as a "nonpartisan publication," the first issue covered a range of topics including the NYA and youth complaints about the

¹⁹² *Youth*, Leaders Spurn Vacation For AYC Training Course, December, 1938, 2.

¹⁹³ *The American Youth Congress: What It Is, How It Works* (New York City: American Youth Congress, 1937); *Youngsville, U.S.A. American Youth Tells its Story*. National Council American Youth Congress, New York, NY, 16-17

organization and its programs.¹⁹⁴ Only a few issues of the magazine were published under Viola's leadership, however, the publication concept was revisited a few years later as the youth movement in America progressed and the AYC's activities expanded. The AYC's leadership focused on providing information to affiliate organizations and working professionals concerned about issues and concerns of youth. *Youth*, the news publication of the AYC, was conceptualized as a medium for distributing information about programs and activities of the AYC and its affiliate organizations. The first issue was distributed in November 1938 and was coordinated by editorial board members Leslie A. Goldman and John P. McDonnell. Initially free, later *Youth* was only available to subscribers at a cost of one dollar per issue; a fairly expensive magazine.¹⁹⁵ The magazine touched on a range of issues including aid to China, federal aid for education, Fair Labor Standards Act, and jobs training. Issues also promoted youth events including the World Youth Congress and regional conferences and programs coordinated by affiliate organizations.¹⁹⁶ The AYC developed

¹⁹⁴ "Youth Magazine Issued," *New York Times*, November 27, 1935, accessed October 16, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/101306366?accountid=13626>.

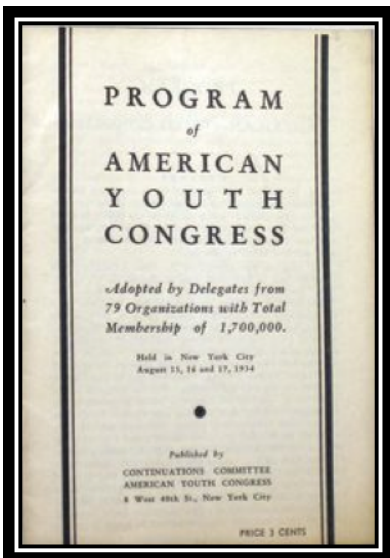
¹⁹⁵ During that same time, *Time* magazine sold for .15 per issue, significantly less than the newly formed magazine, *Youth*. Taking into consideration the rate of inflation, *Youth* would cost more than \$16.00 per issue today. (Calculation to current dollars was made using <http://www.dollartimes.com/inflation/inflation.php?amount=1&year=1938>.)

¹⁹⁶ *Youth*, November, 1938, American Youth Congress: New York

and distributed other publications to address specific topics including proceedings from the summer youth congresses, *Declaration of American Youth*, *The American Youth Act* text, and *Youngville, U.S.A., American Youth Tells Its Story*.¹⁹⁷ Many of these publications were made available at their annual programs.

American Youth Congress, 1934

The first Annual American Youth Congress was held at New York University from August 15-17, 1934 and was convened by the Central



Bureau.¹⁹⁸ As it was being conceived, the planners intended it to be more than just a summer gathering of activist youth; it was intended to start a movement:

"This is a brief summary of the results of The First American Youth Congress...This account is offered less in the light of producing decisive results than explaining the beginning of a movement."¹⁹⁹

Illustration 4: Cover
Program of American Youth
Congress, c. 1934 (From
author's private collection)

Planning for the first summer congress took

¹⁹⁷ *The American Youth Congress: What It Is, How It Works*

¹⁹⁸ *Report First American Youth Congress* (New York: Central Bureau for Young America, 1934).

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, introduction

substantial planning and networking skills of its young leaders. They needed to raise funds to hold the event, soliciting donations from public and private leaders. Perhaps the greatest challenge was reaching out to the other youth organizations around the country to inform them of the program. To prepare for the congress and to promote the youth gathering, the Central Bureau mailed 4,000 surveys to youth leaders and organizations ascertaining their needs and viewpoints on addressing such needs. The results of the survey served as a guide in developing the platform for the first congress.²⁰⁰

New York University was identified as a location for the first national gathering of youth. Harvey Zorbaugh liaised with Viola Ilma on the planning of event, however, a few days before the event, he stepped away from his involvement.²⁰¹ Viola later learned that Zorbaugh was behind the convening of communist and socialist groups to promote specific issues at the congress, encouraging the group to cause a major disruption at the event and signal a new direction for the AYC.²⁰²

In developing the program for the congress, the platform centered round several key issues including education, war and peace,

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 11

²⁰¹ Viola Ilma, *The Political Virgin* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1958), 75-76.

²⁰² Ilma, *Political Virgin*, 78

social insurance, and apprenticeships and homesteads. The first congress and the potential power of youth in public life energized Viola Ilma, "We are determined to be constructive and practical, not theoretical. The first question we have to answer is how to create jobs and put ourselves to work,"²⁰³ stated Ilma in an interview. Although several hundred youth organization leaders and unaffiliated youth were invited to the first congress, 500 responded receiving credential cards for the event. The credentials were issued to "...extreme radicals to extreme conservatives, and from social clubs to labor unions,"²⁰⁴ proving to naysayers, like Zorbaugh, that the event was open to all youth organizations, despite political affiliation. Less than 200 delegates attended the congress, however, given the economy the cost of travelling to New York might have proved cost-prohibitive for many youth.

At the time, Viola Ilma was being accused publically as being a supporter of Hitler and to having received AYC funding from Fascist organizations, and therefore, early accounts associate the AYC with the Fascist Party. These perceptions were based upon her earlier travels to Europe where she socialized with individuals believed to

²⁰³ Mary Margaret M'Bride, "Young America Plans to Fight Its Own," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, June 12, 1934, accessed May 30, 2013, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1876&dat=19340612&id=Y0gsAAAAIBAJ&sjid=r8oEAAAAIBAJ&pg=3618,3378469>.

²⁰⁴ *Report First American Youth Congress*, 10

have been supporters of the Fascist Party. In a booklet titled, *The Truth About the American Youth Congress* (1935), Arthur Clifford, who later was named to the congress' National Continuation Committee, furthered this belief by stating that Viola's trip to "Nazi Germany" included her conferring with "high officials in the Nazi Socialist government." Because she did not divulge who had funded her trip, it was assumed that she was a Nazi sympathizer.²⁰⁵ In an interview before the first congress, Viola found herself having to defend the organization's origin saying "We are not radical for these times. As a matter of fact, the radicals indulgently call us conservatives."²⁰⁶

The congress opened the morning of August 15 and included the following speakers: Dr. Harold O. Voorhis, Vice Chancellor, New York University; Fiorello H. LaGuardia, Mayor, New York City; Adolphe A. Berle, Jr., Chamberlain, New York City; Arthur Garfield Hayes, Attorney; Dr. Jay B. Nash, Professor, New York University; and Viola Ilma. Although the AYC was intended to be an event that brought together diverse viewpoints and interests, ideological conflicts emerged during the initial sessions. In her autobiography, Viola described the opening of the congress as being disruptive as

²⁰⁵ Arthur Clifford, *The Truth About the American Youth Congress* (New York: National Continuations Committee, 1935), 5-6

²⁰⁶ M'Bride, "Young America Plans to Fight Its Own"

participants were passing notes and chatting amongst themselves.

Cliques were forming as individuals were clearly maneuvering to engineer a coup.²⁰⁷ As noted in the *Report of the First American Youth Congress*:

“Scarcely had the speakers finished when the bloc on the floor sprang from several points into immediate an noisy action. People were shouting wildly, demanding the right to elect all officers, change the existing set-up, prepare the agenda, pass on credentials, and conduct the Congress.”²⁰⁸

Gil Green, under the influence of Professor Zorbaugh, led the coup.

These requests were made while Viola tried to lead the opening session, however it was quickly adjourned due to the disruption.

The afternoon program was to include a series of round table discussions on the key issues identified for the assembly. However, in advance of the summer meeting a communist group prepared a pamphlet, *The United Front Program*, and distributed it among the delegates, which then divided the participants. The protests continued through the evening’s break out meetings, which included guest speakers on the topic of political systems and viewpoints. Dr. Jay Nash of New York University was asked to assume the role of chair and mediator for the program, and this further incited the participants who were urging for a democratic election. By not having democratic

²⁰⁷ Ilma, *Political Virgin*, 79; *Report First American Youth Congress*, 12

²⁰⁸ Ibid

elections, some participants viewed Viola as denying democracy, free speech, and free discussion – furthering the belief that she was a fascist. The outbursts and maneuvering for control of the event led to a split in the congress with Viola's congress continuing to meet at the Hotel Brevoort and Green's congress staying at NYU and electing Waldo McNutt, from the Rocky Mountain YMCA, temporary chairman.²⁰⁹

Although claiming to be politically neutral, the Central Bureau did express their opinion of some congress participants in the publishing of the *Report of First American Youth Congress*. In describing the results of the gathering, the report indicated that the congress called attention to the intellectual differences between the radical left wing and the "normal" right wing of American Youth, implying that some liberal groups were not acceptable. Yet, the Central Bureau reaffirmed that it would serve as a clearinghouse for all ideas of American youth "...whatever political, social or racial affiliation."²¹⁰

A group of leaders was identified for keeping the efforts of the first congress alive, and to serve as a coordinating body for regional and national programs. The group represented individuals from the two groups that had split during the first summer program. A Board of

²⁰⁹ Clifford, *The Truth About the American Youth Congress*, 6-8, 79-81

²¹⁰ *Report First American Youth Congress*, 21-22

Governors was identified and represented youth from various organizations from around the country. Viola Ilma was named chairman and Ernestine Young as vice chairman.²¹¹ However, it was the other group, created by Gil Green, that prevailed.

Waldo McNutt was elected as chairman of the Continuation Committee, later to be renamed the Committee of 76,²¹² and led the coordination of the next summer youth congress and the AYC for the next two years as AYC chairman.²¹³ McNutt was the eldest of three sons of Ernest and Addie McNutt and was born in Texas, but later moved to Missouri then Kansas and finally settling in New York City as an adult.²¹⁴ He graduated from Independence High School in Kansas in 1930 and later attended Washburn College where he served as the President of Y.M.C.A, and was a member of The Student Council. While at Washburn, McNutt earned the "Gold 'W' Award," an award granted to students who exceeded in campus activities.²¹⁵ Waldo, an active

²¹¹ Ibid

²¹² Clifford, *The Truth About the American Youth Congress*, 18-19.

²¹³ "President Criticized at Youth Congress," *New York Times*, July 6, 1935, under "11," accessed November 11, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/101409087?accountid=13626>.

²¹⁴ Year; 1920; Census Place: *Lincoln, Linn, Kansas*; Roll: *T625_538*; Page: *14A*; Enumeration District: *123*; Image: *124*.

²¹⁵ Ancestry.com. *U.S. School Yearbooks* [database online]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. The Kaw, 1933

member of the American League Against War and Fascism,²¹⁶ became a sympathizer of the Communist Party and in April of 1935, was the national organizer for the First Pacific Coast Congress Against War and Fascism, a known front for communist groups.²¹⁷ In 1936, McNutt was appointed to an advisory committee of the Farm-Labor Party at their first national conference in Chicago.²¹⁸

As the Central Bureau's leaders left the AYC, the Committee of 76 took over as the coordinating body for the congress. Organizations who participated in the first congress were invited to continue their involvement, however, were asked to inform the committee of their intent to participate in the second, and subsequent, summer congresses. With this invitation, each participating organization was charged a membership fee of one dollar to offset organizational

²¹⁶ The American League Against War and Fascism was organized in 1933. It was a coalition of liberal and left-wing organizations whose objective was oppose war and the fascist governments in Europe. Membership of the League included a range of diverse groups including the American Communist Party and pacifist groups. The organization was active throughout the 1930s. In 1937 the League changed its name to the American League for Peace and Democracy. American League for Peace and Democracy Collected Records, 1933-1939, Swarthmore College, website: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/CDGA.A-L/alpd.htm>

²¹⁷ "Radicals Will Open Session in S.F. Tomorrow," *Modesto Bee and News Herald*, April 26, 1935, accessed October 18, 2013, <http://www.newspapers.com/newspage/26245035/>; Lewis, *Youth Against Fascism*, 93

²¹⁸ Corrinne Hardesy, Farm-Labor Party Looking Ahead to National Campaign, *Oshkosh Northwestern*, June 1, 1936, under "Ancestry.com,"

expenses.²¹⁹

American Youth Congress, 1935

At the close of the first youth congress, planning for the 1935 program began immediately. Provisional committees were set up in cities around the country to further advocate for the AYC and its summer program. The Second American Youth Congress was held July 4-7, 1935 at Cass Technical High School in Detroit Michigan. Given the new leadership of the AYC, it was no coincidence that the second congress was held in Detroit and at Cass. With the growth of labor unions in the auto industry as well as with teachers, the CPUSA held a significant presence in Detroit and party members held leadership positions in many of the local unions. Even the HUAC targeted the Detroit Public Schools for investigation as it was believed that several teachers were members of the Communist Party. This suspicion stemmed from the school facilities often being sites for meetings of pro-communist groups and the school board not objecting to the facilities being used for such gatherings. For example, in March 1932, four participants in the communist-led demonstration, the "Ford Hunger March,"²²⁰ were killed in a clash with Dearborn police. Several

²¹⁹ Clifford, *The Truth About the American Youth Congress*, 19.

²²⁰ The Ford Hunger March was a demonstration that took place on March 7, 1932 in Michigan. The march involved unemployed workers and it started in Detroit and

weeks later, communists staged a 'trial' at Cass Technical High School where Henry Ford and others were denounced as murderers.

Communist speakers appeared at other leftist meetings held in Detroit public schools, oftentimes joined by members of the YCL who were insistent on their voices being heard at the gatherings.²²¹

The AYC's summer congress event garnered more participants than the prior year with 1,205 delegates representing 853 youth organizations. The congress, lead by chairman of the Continuation Committee Waldo McNutt, established a permanent federation for the AYC.²²² New officers for the AYC were elected with Albert Hamilton, a descendent of Alexander Hamilton, being elected as chairman of the National Council and Angelo Herdon, an African-American who had served on a Georgia chain gang, was elected honorary chairman when he lost the chairman election by 80 votes.²²³ The program included a range of speakers from political persuasions, including Clarence

ended in Dearborn. Four individuals were shot to death, and over 60 workers injured by gunfire, by the Dearborn Police Department and security guards from the Ford Motor Company. The Ford Hunger March was an integral event that led to the unionization of the auto industry.

²²¹ Jeffrey Edward Mirel, "Politics and Public Education in the Great Depression: Detroit, 1929-1940" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1984), 185-287.

²²² Senate Committee on Committee on Education and Labor, American Youth Act Hearings Report, 74th Cong., 2d sess., 1936, S. Rep. 3658, 12.

²²³ "President Criticized at Youth Congress." *New York Times*
"Youth Congress Combats J.C. at Detroit Meeting," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 13, 1935, 28

Hathaway, editor of the *Daily Worker*; Pat O'Brien, former District Attorney of Michigan, representing the Democrat Party; S.A. Hebbloom Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, representing the Republican Party; August Tyler, Socialist Party leader; and Lester Johnson chairman of the Wayne County Farmer-Labor Party. Said Hathaway of the AYC, it

"...represents the broadest united front that so far has been created in the United States...We realize that the unity established between young Communist and young Socialists...must be established between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party in the fight for broadest working class unity."²²⁴

The lexicon of the congress was reflective of Hathaway's language and followed that of the CPUSA.



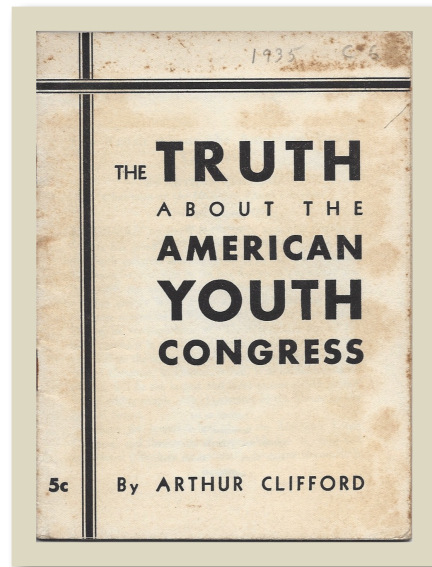
Photograph 9: Cover of
Young Worker newspaper,
July 9, 1935 (From author's
private collection)

The language and tone of the AYC represented a significant shift with the second congress, which was consistent with the major change in leadership and mission. Whereas the Central Bureau's congress was one of a clear decision-making structure that aimed to work with elected officials, the new congress focused more on masses of youth pursuing change and for power to the

²²⁴ "Congress Opens!," *Young Worker*, July 9, 1934

"worker." This focus was further reiterated and supported in the *Young Worker*, the official newspaper of the YCL, in an article on the summer conclave, stating that the AYC is a "...step towards the rallying of the forces of the youth to end war and exploitation inherent in the social order," and further noted that Norman Thomas, a Socialist Party political leader, "urged upon socialists and upon labor organizations friendly and sympathetic support of, and cooperation with the American Youth Congress."²²⁵ Additionally, in describing the AYC in *The Truth About the American Youth Congress*, Arthur Clifford stated,

"The core of the American Youth Congress movement is its program. Created by youth and adopted by the elected representatives of hundreds of thousands of young farmers, workers, and students, it is not simply a statement of principles but a plan whereby these principles may be translated into action."²²⁶



Photograph 10: Cover of The Truth booklet, c. 1935. (From author's private collection)

He further described the organization's anti-war stance, advocacy for labor groups and organized strikes, and abolition of military schools.

²²⁵ "2nd Youth Congress Opens On July 4," *Young Worker*, July 2, 1934.

²²⁶ Clifford, *The Truth About the American Youth Congress*, 11.

In his annual report given to the congress delegates, Waldo McNutt criticized President Roosevelt's National Youth Administration, stating that "we believe that Congress seeks to do something better for youth." He targeted the relief workers pay of 15 dollars a month as an example of inadequate support for youth concerns.²²⁷ Echoing the pro-worker anti-war language of communist organizations, McNutt further stated, "...we are America's Youth and in our hands is the power to change the world...we work in the mills, in the factories, on the docks, in the fields - we are the producers of the goods of the nation." Delegates responded with applause to his comments, and McNutt added, "We clothe, speed, transport and supply the nation. We can stop the production of battleships. We can halt the war machine. We have in our hands the power to change the world."²²⁸

The summer program also focused on making a strong stance against discrimination as the youth delegates pledged to fight racial discrimination wherever it existed and stood by the Scottsboro Boys until they were freed. Additionally, the delegates focused on crusading against war, condemning Fascism, fighting unemployment, and to take a proactive stance within American politics.²²⁹ Addressing the concerns

²²⁷ "President Criticized at Youth Congress," *New York Times*

²²⁸ "Congress Opens!"

²²⁹ "Youth Congress Combats J.C. at Detroit Meeting," *Baltimore Afro-American*

of Fascism came via a formal declaration. Addressing national concerns of youth was not the only concern for the AYC as A *Declaration of Rights Of American Youth* was drafted at the Detroit congress. Delegates agreed to the *Declaration* as a program to address immediate youth concerns, and as stated by William Hinckley in a 1936 hearing to the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, "It [the Declaration] is the product of the American Youth Congress, but it belongs to the youth of America wherever they assemble, whether it be on, the farm, the factory, trade union, church, Ys, school, professional, fraternal, language, or social groups." The preamble of the *Declaration* echoed the concerns of the founders of the AYC,

"On the Fourth of July 159 years ago our forefathers declared their independence from despotic rule in order to realize their inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Today our lives are threatened by war; our liberties threatened by reactionary legislation; and our right to happiness remains illusory in a world of insecurity. Therefore, on this Fourth day of July, 1935 we, the young People of America, in Congress assembled, announce our own declaration—A Declaration of the Rights of American Youth.

We declare that our generation is rightfully entitled to a useful, creative, and happy life, the guarantees of which are: full educational opportunities, steady employment at adequate wages, security in time of need, civil rights, religious freedom, and peace."²³⁰

The *Declaration* focused on American youth and their rights to

²³⁰ Senate Committee on Education and Labor, American Youth Act Hearings Report, 74th Cong., 2d sess., 1936, S. Rep. 3658, 4

life, liberty, and happiness and described how those rights needed to be protected. Some viewed it also as an expressed "unalterable" opposition to fascism²³¹ a concern raised at the prior summer's congress by the communist faction. As stated in the section on *A Right to Liberty*,

"In song and legend America has been exalted as a land of the free, a haven for the oppressed. Yet, on every hand we see this freedom limited or destroyed. Progressive forces are persecuted. Minority nationalities are exposed to arbitrary deportation. The Negro people are subjected to constant abuse, discrimination, and lynch laws. Workers who strike for a living wage are met with increasing violence. These we affirm to be the omens of that modern tyranny, fascism. More brutal, more vicious and reactionary than even that against which our forefathers rebelled in 1776..."²³²

Delegates who were from communist-influenced groups pushed the *Declaration* and they viewed the passage as a success as the YPSL delegation had been beaten in its attempts to alter the language.²³³ Despite the strong sentiment to override the YPSL efforts, Norman Thomas, a Socialist Party political leader, hailed the AYC and the second congress, stating that the AYC is a, "...step towards the rallying

²³¹ Alan Hartman, "Youth Finds Its Own Answers", *Survey Graphic Magazine of Social Interpretation* 28, no. 8 (August, 1939), 492, accessed June 15, 2013, <http://newdeal.feri.org/survey/39b11.htm>.

²³² Senate Committee on Education and Labor, American Youth Act Hearings, 4

²³³ "Says 'Reds' Framed Student Platform," *New York Times*, November 30, 1939, accessed November 11, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102907553?accountid=13626>.

of the forces of the youth to end war and exploitation inherent in the social order," and he further "...urged upon socialists and upon labor organizations friendly and sympathetic support of, and cooperation with the American Youth Congress."²³⁴

William Gernaey, a former member of the YCL, stated in a 1938 hearing before the HUAC that the League controlled the 1935 congress.²³⁵ In a 1939 hearing, the same observation came before the House Committee from Michael W. Howsowick, a Michigan native, who identified himself as a "graduate from a school for Communist agitators." Among the active leaders of the communist group in attendance of the Detroit congress was Gil Green who led the ousting of Viola Ilma at the prior year's congress.²³⁶

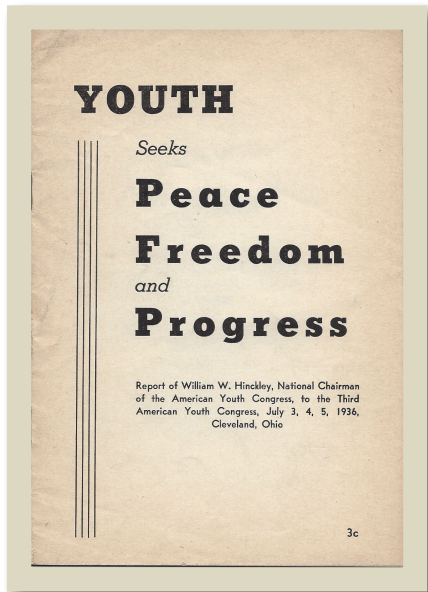
An outcome of the 1935 congress was for the AYC National Council to draft model legislation for the United States Congress that addressed youth concerns. The bill would focus on the education and employment needs of American youth. Lead by William Hinckley, the legislation would later become known as *The American Youth*

²³⁴ "2nd Youth Congress Opens On July 4," *Young Worker*, July 2, 1935.

²³⁵ "Says Stalin Aimed to Destroy A. F. L.," *New York Times*, October 19, 1938, accessed November 11, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102907553?accountid=13626>.

²³⁶ "Says 'Reds' Framed Student Platform," *New York Times*

Act,²³⁷ one of the most ambitious efforts of the AYC.



Photograph 11: Cover of 1936
Congress Report, c. 1936.
(From author's private
collection)

American Youth Congress, 1936

The Third American Youth

Congress was held in Cleveland, Ohio at the Public Music Hall from July 3-5, 1936. An estimated 1,500 delegates from representing various youth organizations attended the program.²³⁸ In announcing the third congress, the organizers chose the theme of "Peace, Freedom, and Progress." The event was a call to

action, to address the particulars of the *American Youth Act*, which was prepared at the prior year's congress; however, the proposed legislation was ignored.

"Despite such evident need for immediate action, the elected officials of our people in Washington have seen fit to ignore our pleas. They have refused to take adequate steps toward solving our problems. They have postponed action time and time again,

²³⁷ Hinckley, William W. *Youth Seeks Peace, Freedom and Progress: Report of William W. Hinckley, National Chairman of the American Youth Congress, to the Third American Youth Congress*. New York: American Youth Congress, 1936, 7.

²³⁸ "Youth Congress Ended," *New York Times*, July 6, 1936, accessed November 12, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/101830383?accountid=13626>.

leaving our problems to grow and our anguish to deepen,"²³⁹

Such was the sentiment communicated in the registration brochure for the 1936 congress. The call to action for America's youth encouraged them to come to Cleveland that summer to "debate their problems and legislate their solutions and unite to execute them."²⁴⁰ The three-day program included introductory speeches and updates from youth leaders on Friday evening and Saturday began with elections for Chairman and committee heads followed by roundtable sessions and geographic session in the afternoon. The evening concluded the day's program with a symposium on "What My Party Offers the American Youth" with representatives from the Republican, Democratic, Farmer-Labor, Communist, and Socialist Parties. Sunday concluded the congress and began with round table sessions followed by committee reports and elections for the AYC National Council.²⁴¹ Political and social leaders were invited to attend the program, but the AYC received little positive response. Although not in attendance, President Roosevelt sent a message to the AYC acknowledging the complex problems facing American youth and recognizing the need for them to be addressed. Norman Thomas, Socialist candidate for President, also

²³⁹ Hinckley, *Youth Seeks Peace, Freedom and Progress*, 1

²⁴⁰ Ibid

²⁴¹ *Peace, Freedom, and Progress: A Call to the Third American Youth Congress* (New York City: National Council American Youth Congress, 1936).

sent a message to the delegates, focusing on the need for American youth to organize.²⁴²

The program was lead by William Hinckley, chairman of the National Council, and carried an anti-fascist tone similar to the prior year's program. In his report on the congress, a section titled "Must Reject Fascism" was included which recounted his opening address that included the message of rejecting the "American pied pipers of Fascism" which drew applause from the delegates present.²⁴³ The program of the congress gave time to the communist voice, while presenting the Fascist Party as a problem. For example, the Saturday night symposium had speakers from a range of political parties including the Communist, Farmer-Labor, and Socialist Parties but not the Fascist Party. Additionally, the round table sessions on Sunday morning included discussion on problems to solve, with one being "War and Fascism."²⁴⁴ However, the concern of communist control of the AYC continued by many affiliates and became an issue during the elections of members to the 63-person National Council. Three organizations – the YPSL, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, and the

²⁴² "Warns of Danger From Idle Youth," *New York Times*, July 4, 1936, accessed November 12, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/101817802?accountid=13626>.

²⁴³ Hinckley, *Youth Seeks Peace, Freedom and Progress*, 4

²⁴⁴ *Peace, Freedom, and Progress: A Call to the Third American Youth Congress*

Young Poles Zion Alliance – declined having their members considered for national office because of the belief the organization was becoming a front for communist organizations.²⁴⁵

During the 1936 congress, Hinckley emerged as a strong leader and voice of American youth and proved a powerful force in the coming years and lead the AYC until 1940. William Hinckley was born in South Dakota and later his family moved to Missouri. He was a graduate of Rollins College and earned his masters degree from Columbia University in 1931. He first attended a summer congress in as a representative of “New America,” an organization formed in Chicago in the early 1930s and believed to be communist in nature by those who were anti-communist.²⁴⁶ In 1935, he earned his first position within the organization having been elected executive secretary of the AYC. During the mid-1930’s, Hinckley served as a course instructor in Psychology for the International Garment Workers Union in New York as the union offered an evening school.²⁴⁷ He would later testify before the HUAC about the AYC’s assumed involvement in communist activities, protesting the implication that it

²⁴⁵ “Youth Congress Ended,” *New York Times*

²⁴⁶ Marty Plavner, *Here Are the Facts: Is the American Youth Congress a Communist Front? Its History, What It Is, How It Works* (Unknown: Publisher Union, 1939), 36

²⁴⁷ Senate Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on S. 1463, American Youth Act Hearings, 75th Cong., 2d sess., 1938, S. Rep. 1463

was a communist front organization.²⁴⁸

The program for the 1936 annual congress opened with a speech by Hinckley who demanded relief to unemployed youth and end to militarization. He continued the stance of the AYC of being against Roosevelt's NYA, stating,

"One-third of the population of a whole generation is out of school and out of work. The present National Youth Administration is not adequate. Only a bill similar to the American Youth Act can give our present young people an adequate living wage...If the country doesn't face this most important problem as it should, we may see our youth listening to the first skillful demagogue to appeal to them and swept into Fascist youth movement dedicated to violence."²⁴⁹

He continued to promote the progress of the *American Youth Act* and the growing list of youth and labor organizations in support of the bill. He shared with the delegates his hope that the bill would pass in 1937.²⁵⁰ However, his ambitions were not realized, as the passage of the *American Youth Act* proved to be a significant struggle for the AYC.

The *Declaration of Rights of American Youth* drafted at the Detroit congress in 1935 expressed permanent opposition to fascism. However, at the Cleveland program the AYC delegation dropped this

²⁴⁸ House Committee on Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Hearings, 76th Cong., 1st sess., 1938, H. Rep. 282, 7042-7045

²⁴⁹ "Warns of Danger From Idle Youth," *New York Times*

²⁵⁰ Hinckley, *Youth Seeks Peace, Freedom and Progress*, 7-8.

clause, deciding it was not its business to go on record for or against foreign ideologies, and the *Declaration* was adopted with the amendment.²⁵¹ Additionally, the delegates adopted only portions of the *AYC Constitution*, leaving the balance of the document to be developed and approved by the National Council. Other business included approving resolutions in support of the *American Youth Act*, boycotting Hearst publications,²⁵² and sending delegates to the World Youth Congress to be held in Geneva.²⁵³

*Model Congress of the United States/Fourth Annual American
Youth Congress, 1937*

In 1937, the AYC approached their summer program in a different format, embarking upon a "model congress," a program model that still exists today. Like the other summer programs, it was held in July spanning Independence Day. The model congress format allowed "senators" and "representatives" to introduce "bills" and pass "legislation" in eight areas represented by committees including agriculture, democratic liberties; education; labor; peace; recreation,

²⁵¹ Hartman, Youth Finds Its Own Answer; "Youth Congress Ended," *New York Times*

²⁵² The Hearst Corporation was a target of communist organizations in the 1930s because of their anti-Soviet stance and because of their lack of alliance with the striking workers. William Hinckley accused William Hearst of not being a true American. The Labor Press Project, "Voice of Action," University of Washington and "Warns of Danger From Idle Youth." *New York Times*, July 04, 1936.

²⁵³ "Youth Congress Ended," *New York Times*

housing and cultural opportunities; crime prevention; and social hygiene. A thousand youth representing more than 40 youth organizations met in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for the First Model Congress of the United States. The young "congressmen" (and women) were selected by the AYC leadership and drawn from major youth organizations and youth serving agencies from around the country. Some of the groups that participated included the American Federation of Teachers, American Newspaper Guild, American Student Union, Baptist Young People's Union, International Typographical Union, Junior Order of Bnai Israel, National Student Councils of the YWCA and YMCA, and the Young People's Socialist League, among others. Of significant importance to the AYC leadership was the influx of youth from labor unions, which comprised nearly 25 percent of the delegation.²⁵⁴

The objective of the model congress was to solve the immediate problems of American youth. As described in the registration brochure for the 1937 congress, also billed as the Fourth American Youth Congress,

"The purpose of the Congress is to give the Nation's youth an opportunity to consider its mutual problems, seek its own solutions, and strengthen the cooperative efforts

²⁵⁴ *The American Youth Congress: What It Is. How It Works*; "Youth Wants Jobs and Security; Stresses Vocational Training," *New York Times*, July 11, 1937, 71, accessed June 4, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102154882?accountid=13626>.

among organizations of youth and organizations serving youth it will provide the means by which these organizations can accomplish things together which they could not accomplish alone..."²⁵⁵

The collaborative tone of the event transcended into seeking participation and endorsement from political and civic leaders and eleven U.S. Senators and thirty-five Congressmen, as well as President Roosevelt, endorsed the event.²⁵⁶ In explaining the event to participants, the congress was described as a model of the Congress of the United States and would include a Senate, a House of Representatives, joint committees and organizational caucuses. Those participating as senators and representatives were expected to have proposals for legislation and resolutions prepared in advance of the congress so that they could be referred to committee prior to the opening of the meeting.²⁵⁷

Wisconsin Senator Robert LaFollett and Washington Senator Lewis B. Schwellenbach opened the event with a broadcast from Washington, D.C. On the second day of the program, a broadcast of the Social Welfare Committee was aired over the Red network of NBC

²⁵⁵ *Calling Young America to the Model Congress of the United States*. New York City: American Youth Congress, 1937)

²⁵⁶ *The American Youth Congress: What It Is. How It Works*; Senate Committee on Committee on Education and Labor, American Youth Act Hearings, 75th Cong., 2d sess., 178-79.; "Youth Wants Jobs and Security; Stresses Vocational Training"

²⁵⁷ *Calling Young America to the Model Congress of the United States*

Radio led by Waldo McNutt, former AYC chairman and secretary of the committee. Other guest speakers at the model congress included Helen Hall, Chairperson of the National Federation of Settlement & Houses, Katherine Lenroot, Chief of the Children's Bureau of the Department of Labor, Aubrey Williams, Director of the National Youth Administration, Edward Strong, Youth Director of the National Negro Congress, Charles P. Howard, President of the International Typographical Union, and John Bosh, National President of the Farm Holiday Association.²⁵⁸

The program kicked off on Friday, July 2 and included an opening session and a message from William Hinckley, on "The State of Youth in the Nation" where he argued,

"Eight years of 'depression education' has taught them [youth] a lot – they want peace, they want jobs, not 'hand-out bread; they want better job training...they want to feel that they are contributing to the upbuilding of our civilization..."²⁵⁹

Saturday was scheduled as joint sessions and breakout meetings by committee with the day concluding with entrainment and a dance.

Sunday began with an interdenominational service followed by hearings and committee reports with the remainder of the day having the delegates meet in caucuses with the objective of developing

²⁵⁸ "Former Youth Congress Head Visits in City," *Sheboygan Press*, July 1, 1936. *Calling Young America to the Model Congress of the United States*

²⁵⁹ "Youth Wants Jobs and Security; Stresses Vocational Training"

concrete plans. The final day of the congress began with individual meetings of the "Senate" and "House" and concluding with a joint session in the afternoon.²⁶⁰

That summer, the congress passed legislation for more than 40 initiatives, most which were reflective of provisions in the *American Youth Act*, including but not limited to:

- Vocational training for rural youth
- End of discrimination against African-Americans in trade unions
- Federal scholarships for needy youth
- Passage of the Harrison-Black-Fletcher Bill²⁶¹
- Guarantee of collective bargaining for all groups and labor's right to organize
- Federal minimum wage and maximum hour laws
- Adherence to the Kellogg Peace Pact²⁶²
- Operation of all federal and state recreation facilities without discrimination
- Programs to prevent delinquency and crime by cooperation of police, schools, civil groups, social agencies, and youth organizations
- State laws of marriage applicants to submit proof they are free from venereal disease²⁶³

²⁶⁰ *Calling Young America to the Model Congress of the United States*

²⁶¹ The Harrison-Black-Fletcher Bill proposed to give \$100,000,000 of direct Federal Aid to States for school purposes. The bill was controversial and not unanimously supported by all educators. Many believed that the bill would further create inequalities between urban and rural children, specifically, between African-American and Caucasian children. "Trends and Tides in World of Modern Education." *New York Times*, Mar 14, 1937, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102293426?accountid=13626>.

²⁶² The Kellogg-Briand Pact, also referred to as the "Paris Pact" was initiated by United States Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg and French foreign minister Aristide Briand. The Pact, signed by 15 countries in 1928, was aimed at deterring a future world war.

²⁶³ *The American Youth Congress: What It Is. How It Works*

The Model Congress of the United States program not only provided new structure for the Annual American Youth Congresses, but a foundation for future programs that included state model congresses. These model congress programs continue today around the country in conjunction with high schools and institutions of higher education.

Model Youth Congress, 1939

In the summer of 1938, a summer congress program was not held as the AYC planned to host and participate in the Second World Youth Congress, held at Vassar College. In preparation for that program, a Youth Leadership Conference was held in Berea, Ohio in order for American youth to prepare for the world congress.²⁶⁴ While planning the 1939 congress, AYC leaders followed a similar approach used for prior events and solicited support from political and civic leaders from around the country. For example, in March 1939, Helen Hall, AYC officer, wrote Lynn Frazier, former governor and Senator from North Dakota, to participate in and support the summer congress. Frazier was hesitant to participate given the global climate at the time and said he would support the congress if it took an anti-war stance. Although the AYC was against war efforts, Joseph Cadden, AYC Executive Secretary responded to Frazier stating that prior

²⁶⁴ Plavner, *Here Are the Facts*, 44-45.

attempts to protest war at the annual meetings were futile.

Nonetheless, he urged Senator Frazier to participate in the congress, however, he declined.²⁶⁵ Other political leaders waged their opinions on the 1939 Annual American Youth Congress as 56 members of the New York state legislature as well as the New York Secretary of State, joined the list of concerned leaders who demanded that the AYC program go on record as being against communism. A statement signed by the public officers demanded that the AYC "unequivocally resolve itself for the preservation of American democracy by definitely, decisively, and publically opposing communism as well as fascism and Nazism."²⁶⁶

The event was held July 1-5²⁶⁷ in the Manhattan Center in New York City and was chaired by William Hinckley who had been the AYC chairman for 4 years. In advance of its congress, the AYC, via the California Youth Model Legislature, coordinated a 'Caravan of Youth' that wound its way across the U.S. during the last two weeks of June. The caravan included representatives that would participate in the

²⁶⁵ Letter from Lynn Frazier to Joseph Cadden, March 23, 1939; Letter from Joseph Cadden to Lynn Frazier, March 24, 1939

²⁶⁶ "Youth Group Votes On Red Issue Today," *New York Times*, July 3, 1939, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102872635?accountid=13626>.

²⁶⁷ Documents provide conflicting dates of the actual event, although all place the congress during the first week of July.

summer youth congress as well as the American Youth Congress Day, held at the World's Fair in New York. The coordinated motor van began in California and included vehicles with "...streamers, banners, window stickers, pennants, and all the trappings..." to promote the group's journey. The caravan moved across the country with other vehicles joining the movement.²⁶⁸ Despite the grand caravan to promote youth participation on the summer congress, unlike in prior years, the scope of participation by organizations had limits. National organizations were limited to five delegates to the 1939 model congress who would sit as senators and local groups were limited to one representative. Despite these limits, the types of organizations were quite expansive. For example, there were 104 local trade unions registered for the congress including 36 chapters of the American Federation of Labor and 68 chapters of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The two largest youth groups represented were the YWCA/YMCAs and the Student Christian Movement. As reflected by one participant,

"How could one help it when formal distinctions go down the drain? Side by side were YMCA leader and labor union representative, young Methodist and young Communist, daughter of the Deep South and Negro girl. Groups sprang up around issues rather than personalities." ²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ *Youth*, Motorvan Trek to Publicize States' Delegations to Congress of Youth, May 1939, 1.

²⁶⁹ Hartman, *Youth Finds Its Own Answer*, 492.

The restriction on the number of participants did not deflect from the AYC's desire to highlight the summer program as being diverse and truly representative of America's youth. Seven hundred and thirty-six delegates came from 22 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico to participate in the event. They represented some 4,700,000 organized young people in America and they wrote themselves a creed which won the outspoken appreciation of Eleanor Roosevelt in her address at a "21,000,000" rally, a rough total of all American youth.²⁷⁰ The summer congress program blended the formats of the prior congresses with that of the Model Congress.

The Creed of the American Youth Congress was adopted in its original form in the face of an attack upon the congress. *The Creed* came under assault as Alfred M. Lilienthal of the Republican First Voters League introduced an anti-communist amendment.

"I will respect and defend the Constitution, keystone of American liberties. I will seek progress only within the framework of the American system of government, and I oppose all undemocratic tendencies and all forms of dictatorship,"

stated Lilienthal.²⁷¹ Lilienthal stated that the clause in the creed

"opposing all undemocratic tendencies and all forms of dictatorship"

²⁷⁰ Ibid; "Youth Congress to Meet," *New York Times*, June 28, 1939, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102869629?accountid=13626>.

²⁷¹ "Youth Group Votes On Red Issue Today," *New York Times*, July 3, 1939, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102872635?accountid=13626>.

was vague and demanded that the delegates condemn communism by name.²⁷² However, the delegates at the congress rejected the amendment, which would have condemned communism, fascism, and Nazism. The proposal was defeated by an overwhelming majority of the delegates as speaker after speaker pointed out that the original clause was all inclusive and therefore, unnecessary to point out specific political ideologies.²⁷³

Nevertheless, the actions surrounding the adoption of *The Creed* revealed on-going divisiveness among the affiliated organizations. The ranks of the AYC split when 23 of the 135 organizations walked out of the meeting because the congress voted against a resolution condemning communism.²⁷⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt applauded the youth's stance, and officially endorsed *The Creed* in its original form.²⁷⁵ Despite the vote to maintain the original form of *The Creed*, the anti-communist faction persisted. Murray Plavner, a former participant of

²⁷² Hartman, *Youth Finds Its Own Answer*

²⁷³ "Youth Group Votes On Red Issue Today," *New York Times*

²⁷⁴ "Refusal to Vote Anti-Red Splits Youth Parley," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 4, 1939, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/chicagotribune/doc/175309114.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:AI&type=historic&date=Jul+4%2C+1939&author=&pub=Chicago+Daily+Tribune+%281923-1963%29&edition=&startpage=&desc=Refusal+to+Vote+Anti-Red+Splits+Youth+Parley>.

²⁷⁵ "Youth Congress "creed"; No Anti-Communist Plank," *Lewiston Daily Sun*, July 4, 1939, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=IT5EXw6i2GUC&dat=19390704&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>.

the AYC who experienced many failed attempts at gaining a national position, stayed at the Hotel New Yorker and attempted to get himself accredited as a delegate to the summer congress. Plavner had produced a 100-page booklet, *Here Are the Facts: Is the American Youth Congress a Communist front? Its history, What It Is, How It Works*²⁷⁶ and distributed it to delegates at the event. The pamphlet was 'a study' of the AYC, providing evidence that the organization was a communist-lead group. In the pamphlet, Plavner provided suggestions what the AYC must do to become a truly democratic organization.²⁷⁷

Sunday evening the AYC chair was passed from William Hinckley to Jack McMichael, who then was head of the National Intercollegiate Christian Council. McMichael was born in Brooks, Georgia to Jack R. and Louise L. McMichael. He was the youngest of five, having four older sisters. Jack's father was a physician and his mother a homemaker.²⁷⁸ During high school, the family moved from Georgia to North Carolina where he graduated in 1933 from Reynolds School in Winston Salem. In high school, he was active in many activities, including the International Relations Club, Hi-Y Club, Boosters Club as

²⁷⁶ Plavner, *Here are the Facts*

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 5

²⁷⁸ 1920; Census Place: Quitman, Brooks, Georgia; Roll: T625_237; Page: 20B; Enumeration District: 40; Image: 345.

well as serving as Sports Editor of the Black and Gold Yearbook.

McMichael also played varsity football and served as Student Body

President his senior year.²⁷⁹ In 1936, Jack enrolled in the Union

Theological Seminary in New York.²⁸⁰

On Sunday, McMichael attempted to lead the congress session, but had difficulty, since he was ill, and therefore, the session proved disorganized and unproductive. On Monday morning, *The Creed* was presented to the delegation in a plenary session, chaired by James B. Carey, the young national secretary of the CIO. It was during this session that a last effort pitch was made to amend the document to take a clearer stance against communism. However, by acclamation the congress rejected the anti-communist amendment and adopted its creed intact. On Monday morning, with only one abstention, and with delegates of the YCL supporting the resolution, the AYC adopted the following:

Whereas, the American Youth Congress is devoted to the principles of true democracy and the great constitutional freedoms of speech, of petition, of the press and of religion and of assembly:

Be it resolved that this Congress of Youth record its opposition to all forms of dictatorship, regardless of

²⁷⁹ Ancestry.com. U.S. School Yearbooks [database online]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Original data: Various school yearbooks from across the United States, 73

²⁸⁰ 1940; Census Place: New York, New York, New York; Roll: T627_2652; Page: 3A; Enumeration District: 31-1184.

whether they be Communist, Fascist, Nazi, or any other
type, or bear any other name;

That this Congress accord full freedom of speech and
discussion to all young people, regardless of race, creed,
religion, or political label, whether Republican, Democratic,
Socialist, Communist, Fascist, or any other; and
That this Congress be open in all its activities and its
gatherings to all persons, regardless of race, creed, religion
or political label, who are willing to abide by the principles
of democratic procedure.²⁸¹

The resolution reaffirmed the original goals of the AYC as set out by its
original founders in 1934, encouraging viewpoints from a range of
perspectives. At the close of the congress, on July 5, 800 delegates
attended the Worlds Fair, which was also being held in New York. That
evening, they gathered in a 'Court of Peace' to celebrate Youth Day at
the fair. Jack McMichael read a mass citizenship pledge to supporters
of the AYC that was based upon the *Creed* adopted earlier that week.
The AYC delegates closed out the week participating in other youth
activities scheduled ta the Fair.²⁸²

National Youth Citizenship Institute, 1940

By 1937, the AYC had coordinated lobbying trips to Washington,

²⁸¹ Hartman, Youth Finds Its Own Answer

²⁸² "Youth Takes Over Fair for the Day," *New York Times*, July 6, 1939, under "18,"
accessed November 15, 2013,
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/102762128?accountid=13626>.

D.C. to address issues and to further youth interests and in February of that year, a delegation lead by William Hinckley, went to the Nation's capital to promote the *American Youth Act* (AYA) and to advocate for the Lundeen Bill. A sit-down occurred on behalf of the Lundeen Bill, which would have provided \$500,000,000 for jobs, scholarships, and vocational training for American youth. Although Hinckley denied that a sit down protest was planned, police

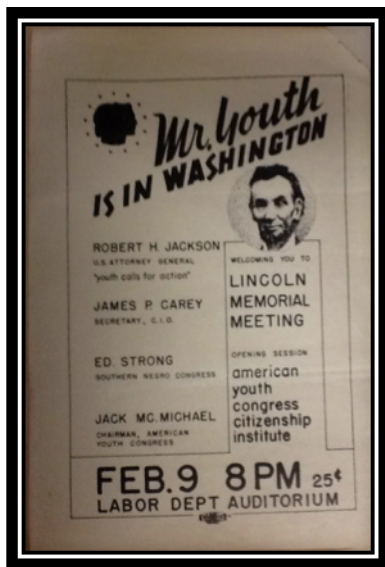


Illustration 5: Citizenship
Institute Flyer, c. 1940
(From the author's
private collection)

nonetheless broke up the event and arrested Hinckley and Abbott Simon for violating their parade permit.²⁸³ The event also piqued the interests of the FBI, who was suspicious of the group, believing it promoted communist activity.²⁸⁴

In an effort to focus on national legislative issues and to maintain a presence with political leaders, in 1940

the AYC coordinated a National Youth Citizenship Institute to be held in Washington D.C. The institute provided an opportunity for AYC leaders

²⁸³ "Youth Delegates Honor Washington," *New York Times*, February 22, 1937, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102267925?accountid=13626>.

²⁸⁴ Letter from J. Edgar Hoover to Homer S. Cummins, January 29, 1937

to interact with legislative leaders and to pursue their social platform in a more coordinated manner. It was estimated that 4,000 youth attended the 1940 institute in an effort to lobby for the AYA.²⁸⁵

The program was scheduled from February 9-12 and included a meeting at the Lincoln Memorial on Friday evening, a parade and session on jobs and training on Saturday, and a Sunday program that include an Interfaith Service, sessions on civil liberties and war, and a guest lecture from Eleanor Roosevelt. Speakers throughout the weekend included Jack McMichael, AYC Chairman, James B. Carey, president of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America, Robert H. Jackson, U.S. Attorney General, James E. Murray, Montana Senator, President Roosevelt, Dr. Floyd W. Reeves, Director American Youth Commission, and Catherine Robinson, Representative of the Sharecroppers Union.²⁸⁶ On Sunday evening, Eleanor Roosevelt spoke about "How the War Affects American Youth," taking questions from the delegates. However, not all officials were as cooperative with the AYC delegates. Aubrey Williams, Administrator of the NYA²⁸⁷ and

²⁸⁵ "Washington: Debate Over Youth," *New York Times*, February 18, 1940, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/105129949?accountid=13626>.

²⁸⁶ *This Is Youth Speaking: Record of National Youth Citizenship Institute* (New York City: National Council American Youth Congress, June, 1940).

²⁸⁷ The National Youth Administration was established in 1935 as a facet of the Works Progress Administration and provided federal support for vocational training for unemployed youth and part-time employment for needy students.

longtime supporter of the AYC, was not pleased with some of the groups actions specifically, he took issue with the fact that the New York chapter of the congress protested the NYA taking the names of participants in the jobs works program so that the list could be made available to military recruiters.²⁸⁸

The undercurrent of communist influence within the AYC remained with the 1940 institute. Viola Ilma, who attended with a group from the Young Men's Vocational Foundation in which she worked, was frustrated with the focus on suspected communist activity. She felt that such discussion by the media and others distracted from the good work that the AYC was trying to accomplish.²⁸⁹ Marty Plavner, who left the organization the prior summer, attended the Institute in opposition to the AYC's activities. In a *New York Times* article, Plavner was quoted as saying that "a strong group of delegates representing bona fide organizations would back the resolutions condemning the Soviet invasion of Finland and calling for the ousting of the alleged Communist Front organization." Joseph Cadden, Executive Secretary of the AYC dismissed Plavner's attempts to disrupt the Institute's proceedings and accused Plavner of acting on

²⁸⁸ Frank Adams, "Youth Advancing On Capital Meets General Attack," *New York Times*, February 9, 1940, accessed May 6, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/105116120?accountid=13626>.

²⁸⁹ Letter from Viola Ilma to Eleanor Roosevelt, February 16, 1940

behalf of John Hamilton, then Chairman of the Republican Party.¹²⁹²⁹⁰

However, Plavner was not alone in his concerns. In an address to the Citizenship Institute delegates, President Roosevelt let it be known in his opening remarks that he had concerns as well.

“And I think that some of us have in the back of our heads that the fact that if we had a different form of government this kind of meeting on the White House lawn could not take place. In saying this I am not denying to you or anybody else in any way the rights of free assemblage, of free petition, (and) of free speech – nor am I precluding the right of Any American, old people or young people, to advocate improvements and change in the operations of the Government of the United States on one very simple condition: that all of you conform to the constitutional process of change and improvement (in) by the Constitution of the United States itself.”²⁹¹

This message was again reiterated at the close of his address, with stronger intent.

“It has been said that some of you are Communists. That is a very unpopular term (these days) today. As Americans you have a right, a legal and constitutional right, to call yourself Communists.... and you have no American right, by act or deed of any kind, to subvert the Government and the Constitution of this nation.”²⁹²

Many of the delegates were not happy with the comments from

²⁹⁰ Adams, “Youth Advancing On Capital Meets General Attack”

²⁹¹ Franklin Roosevelt, “Address of the President to the Delegates of the National Citizenship Institute of the American Youth Congress” (lecture, South Portico of the White House, Washington, DC, February 10, 1940).

²⁹² Ibid

the President, and were quite agitated. Later, the First Lady would respond to comments about the youth's behavior, saying,

"The President tried to be ingratiating and he certainly had a kindly feeling toward his audience. It is true the young people showed bad manners, but how many older people would have gone through that ordeal and would have accepted criticism gracefully?...I wonder if older people would always be able to rise above the feeling of being baffled by their problems when those to whom they look for leadership and reassurance seem to fail them?"²⁹³

Nonetheless, the comments would contribute to the hardening of the relationship between the AYC and the White House.

At the interdenominational service held at the Washington Monument, a member of the AYC read a statement to the delegates, stating, "One hundred and sixty years ago our forefathers died that future generations might enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Today, at least one fourth of our whole generation is denied the right to work, to study to plan for lives of decency and hope."²⁹⁴ The message reiterated the rights of American youth and reaffirmed the congress' goals of protecting them.

Although well planned by its hopeful leaders, the lobbying

²⁹³ Allida M. Black, "Why I Still Believe in the Youth Congress," in *Courage in a Dangerous World: The Political Writings of Eleanor Roosevelt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 128

²⁹⁴ "Youth Delegates Honor Washington," *New York Times*, February 22, 1937, 33, accessed October 16, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102267925?accountid=13626>.

program was not as effective as hoped as relations with the White House and administration leaders continued to weaken. With the HUAC investigations looming, the AYC leadership had difficulty in maintaining focus on the program's goals. As the Institute closed and the youth leaders pursued their issues amidst internal turmoil, they looked to the annual summer congress and the passage of the *American Youth Act*.

Model Youth Congress, 1940

The 1940 congress, held in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, focused on peace and democracy and the theme, "Youth Defends America" was fitting as the nation had become concerned about national security after the fall of France. The five-day event that began on July 3, included commission meetings, lectures, workshops, and an interfaith service focused on peace efforts and passage of the *American Youth Act*.²⁹⁵ The *Delegates Manual* was mailed to organizations expected to participate in the summer congress. The manual, and the activities at the congress, was to be a springboard for activity in the coming year. "This Congress is where we all pool our ideas, where we hammer out a common program for study, and action, where we find stimulation and courage to work day by day in less dramatic but equally important situations" was the message in the opening of the *Delegates Manual*.

²⁹⁵ *Delegates Manual: 6th American Youth Congress* (New York City: American Youth Congress, 1940); Haas, *As They Saw the Thirties*

Participants were provided an outline of the key issues to be discussed at the congress and a listing of suggested activities that could be concluded prior to arrival at Lake Geneva. For example, they were encouraged to visit the public schools in their area and conduct an audit of the quality of facilities, the length of the school day and year, and whether there were transportation services. In general, many of the proposals for action came back to the passage of the *American Youth Act*, which addressed a wide range of issues relating to American youth and had yet to be adopted by the U.S. Congress.²⁹⁶

As in prior years, President Roosevelt and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt were invited to participate in the summer event. However, by this time the relationship between the White House and the AYC had become strained. The President responded that he was unable to attend and declined the invitation to give an opening address to the youth delegates of the 1940 congress.²⁹⁷



Photograph 13: Pete Seeger singing at the 1940 Model Congress (Photo by Arthur Rothstein, courtesy of Seeger family)

Eleanor Roosevelt, a long time supporter of the AYC was visibly absent

²⁹⁶ *Delegates Manual: 6th American Youth Congress*

²⁹⁷ Letter from M.H. McIntyre to William Hinckley, May 18, 1937.

from the summer congress. However, in advance of the program, the book, *American Youth Today*, written by Leslie Gould, public relations director of the AYC, was released and included in the book was a forward written by Mrs. Roosevelt who defended against attacks that the AYC was a communist-front organization.²⁹⁸

The first evening's opening session of the congress consisted of a welcome from Dr. Harold Coffman, President of George Williams College and Jack McMichael, chairman, making introductory remarks, followed by various social activities including dancing, singing and watching films. On the next day, July 4, McMichael reported on AYC activities and the upcoming plans for the year. That afternoon, delegates broke out into commission meetings to focus on targeted issues including peace, Far East labor and economy, rural youth needs, unemployment and discrimination in employment, interfaith efforts to address social justice issues, affordable housing, national health programs²⁹⁹, consistency and equity in public education, and

²⁹⁸ "First Lady Absent but Gets Spotlight at Youth Congress," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 5, 1940, accessed June 11, 2013, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1499&dat=19400705&id=BbRQAAAAIBAJ&sjid=qSIEAAAAIBAJ&pg=2535,932659>.

²⁹⁹ Senator Robert Wagner of New York introduced a bill, The National Health Act, in 1939 that called for an improvement of health services in the U.S. Within that bill was a recommendation for a National Health Program which would provide for expansion of public health services; expansion of maternal healthcare and care for handicapped children; expansion of hospital facilities; medical care for the needy; and insurances against loss of wages during illness. However, as the bill progressed through Congress, it lost some momentum. The AYC placed blame on the federal government's focus on defense and war funding. (*Delegates Manual: 6th American*

discrimination against immigrants.³⁰⁰

The evening program on July 4 consisted of four speakers who spoke to the delegates about "What my Party Offers Youth," a message heard at prior congresses. On the third day, the delegates participated in plenary sessions on health, housing, and peace and reconvened commission meetings and the meetings continued the following day where reports were also provided for the general delegation. That afternoon, participants also discussed the development of an *American Youth Congress Constitution* and addressed specific AYC organizational problems. The final day started with an interfaith service and discussion. The congress ended with a report on resolutions and general discussion on topics including the AYC's solidarity with China and enacting an embargo on war supplies and boycott of goods upon Japan.³⁰¹

The ongoing HUAC investigations loomed over the organization and at the 1940 congress; AYC's leadership addressed the Congressional investigation of possible communist activities by the AYC. In his July 4 speech to the delegates, Jack McMichael decried the "hypocritical disguise of 'Americanism' of the Dies Commission, the Ku

Youth Congress).

³⁰⁰ *Delegates Manual: 6th American Youth Congress*

³⁰¹ *Youth Defends America: Report of the 6th American Youth Congress* (New York: American Youth Congress, 1940)

Klux Klan, and other reactionary and anti-democratic forces were using...to crush the people's rights."³⁰² As AYC leaders continued to participate in the hearings, they persisted in denying any communist control of the organization. In advocating for civil liberties, the AYC called for fairness of 'political minorities,' focusing on those who choose to adopt communist beliefs. However, the AYC did not help their cause since in the *Delegates Manual* they condemned fascists, and even implying there were fascists in the government ranks, referring to the Attorney General's tactics as 'Gestapo methods'.³⁰³

One of the most significant actions to come out of the 1940 summer congress was the adoption of the *American Youth Congress Constitution* (Appendix). The *Constitution* delineated the facets of the national organization as well as responsibilities of its officers. The "supreme governing body" of the AYC was the National Congress, which would meet at least every two years, and was composed of delegates from all youth and youth-serving organizations. The National Assembly included a representative from each cooperating organization as well as members of the cabinet. The Cabinet, composed of officers, conducted business in between the national meetings. Officers would manage daily activities and operations of the

³⁰² Ibid, 10

³⁰³ *Delegates Manual: 6th American Youth Congress*, 10

organization.³⁰⁴ The 1940 congress concluded having accomplished its goals, however, the coming year would prove difficult for the organization and its reputation.

American Youth Act

The *American Youth Act* can be considered the American Youth Congress' most ambitious effort, and reflected the primary issues in which the organization and movement were founded: to provide educational and vocational opportunities for American youth. The AYA was conceived from the AYC National Council in 1935 and as described in the first draft of the AYA, the bill would,

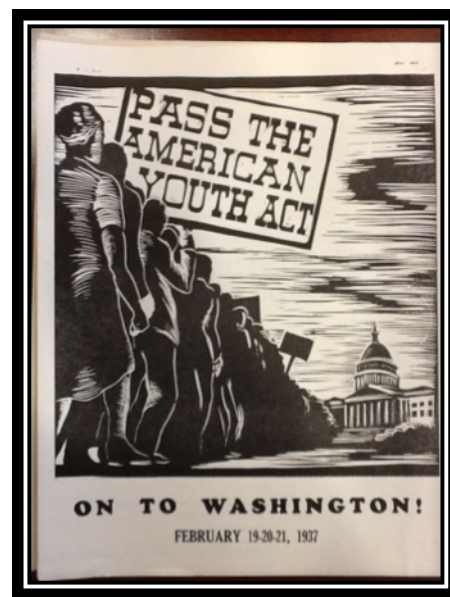


Illustration 6: Pamphlet cover for AYA hearings, c. 1937 (From the author's private collection)

"...provide under the...National Youth Administration vocational training and regular employment on public enterprises of unemployed youth between the ages of 16 and 25; to provide for full educational opportunities and vocational training for high school, college and post-graduate students, and for other purposes..."³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ *Youth Defends America*, 45-46.

³⁰⁵ *American Youth Act* (New York: American Youth Congress, n.d.), 1.

The AYA called for more generous wages for college graduates and living expenses for high school students and provided for aid for “needy people” from the ages of 16 to 25. High school students would receive not less than \$15 per month and college students not less than \$25 per month. The AYA would also put in place an administrative oversight group that was not comprised of federal officials, but rather leaders of labor, social service, education, and youth organizations. Funding would come via the Federal Treasury, and administered by newly created Youth Employment Commissions, from increased taxes on inheritances, gifts, and individual and corporate annual incomes of \$5,000 or higher.³⁰⁶ The legislation also called for specific roles and responsibilities for the Secretary of Labor and Commissioner of Education in establishing and managing systems of vocational training and employment. It also included provisions for these commissioners to work in tandem with the proposed Youth Employment Commissions.³⁰⁷

The proposed legislation went beyond what the Roosevelt Administration had provided at that time for young Americans through

³⁰⁶ Senate Committee on Education and Labor, Hearings, 74th Cong., 2d sess., 1936, 6

³⁰⁷ *American Youth Act* (New York: American Youth Congress, n.d.)

the NYA. The NYA was established in 1935 as a facet of the Works Progress Administration and provided federal support for vocational training for unemployed youth and part-time employment for needy students. President Roosevelt appointed Aubrey W. Williams as Executive Director of the program as well as a National Advisory Committee, charged with making recommendations on improvements and adjustments in the NYA program. Members of the Committee represented leaders in labor, business, agriculture, business, and youth organizations and state and local committees assisted with the implementation of NYA projects in their communities.³⁰⁸ Within a week of the NYA being established, the AYC was asked to endorse the organization and its efforts. Although the aim of the NYA was to support American youth, AYC leaders felt that the program fell short. In an update given to the Brooklyn College Student Council, William Hinckley stated, "One week after the N.Y.A. was introduced the American Youth Congress was asked to endorse it. We laughed and

³⁰⁸ Records of National Youth Administration (NYA), National Archives online, <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/119.html>
Franklin D. Roosevelt: "Executive Order 7086 Establishing the National Youth Administration.," June 26, 1935. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15092>.

proceeded to draw up a truly democratic and adequate plan. The only hope for young people lies in the *American Youth Act*.”³⁰⁹

Although the AYC supported some of the NYA activities, they worked tirelessly to extend facets of the program and to implement new services and programs for youth. There was concern by the AYC National Council that there would not be adequate funding of programs, given that the federal education budget had decreased in prior years.³¹⁰ Additionally, the AYC leadership objected to the composition of the NYA National Advisory Committee because they believed that it was not a truly representative and independent body. The vehicle chosen for to pursue their goals was proposing federal legislation via the *American Youth Act*.

In 1936, the AYC began pushing harder for the *Act* to pass as the NYA - established as part of a federal relief package – was scheduled to retire that June. The *AYA* was first introduced to Congress on January 13, 1936 and having been heard before the U.S. Senate twice, on March 19, 1936, S. 3685, *The American Youth Act* was brought before the U.S. Senate Committee on Education and Labor and was presented by Senator Benson of Minnesota. It was described

³⁰⁹ “Hear Waldo McNutt On Youth Congress at Council Meeting,” *Brooklyn College Spotlights*, November 1, 1935, accessed September 16, 2013, http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/bc/spotlight/nov1_1935.html.

³¹⁰ Ibid

as, "A bill to provide vocational training and employment for youth between the ages 16 and 25; to provide for full educational opportunities for high-school, college, and post-graduate students; and for other purposes."³¹¹ The hearings included 62 statements from youth, civic, and political leaders who spoke on behalf of and in support of the bill. An additional thirty-three briefs were submitted in support of the *AYA*. William Hinckley, then Chairman of the *AYC*, spoke before the committee and immediately provided to the Senate Committee endorsements from 336 organizations and individuals; among them youth, civic, social, education and labor organizations, and government, business, education, and society leaders. Hinckley spoke to the Committee, first citing difference between the *NYA* programs and the *American Youth Act*. Most notable, he believed that the *AYA* had a much broader focus for which it served - capturing all youth "in need" including the unemployed, homeless, and economically needy. He also argued that the administration of the *NYA* had been comprised of corporate directors, rather than the intended diverse group of community, business, agriculture, and youth representatives.³¹² The issue of true community and young adults'

³¹¹ Senate Committee on Committee on Education and Labor, Hearings, 74th Cong., 2d sess., 1936, 2

³¹² Senate Committee on Committee on Education and Labor, Hearings, 74th Cong., 2d sess., 1936, 3-5

involvement in youth program administration was a significant issue for the AYC and a clear provision outlined in the AYA.

Energized by having had participated in hearings on the *American Youth Act*, on February 20, 1937, American youth converged upon Washington, D.C. to continue their lobbying efforts for passage of the legislation. An estimated 3,000 members of the AYC participated in a march down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House to submit petitions to President Roosevelt, calling for passage of the proposed legislation. The march was organized by state affiliates, with representatives dressing in costumes to reflect their states' heritage – a covered wagon for the California delegation and Nebraskans donning overalls, sunbonnets, and farmers' hats – provided a visual display for the proposed AYA and who would be the beneficiaries should the legislation pass. During the visit, delegates met with their state Representatives and Senators to discuss the passage of the AYA. Additionally, leaders of the AYC met with FDR and Aubrey Williams of the NYA to discuss the critical importance of the legislation and the need for Federal funding for youth. The meeting was cordial, but did not produce the results the leaders had hoped.³¹³

³¹³ *American Youth Congress Newsletter*, Vo. 1, No. 3, March 10, 1937. New York City

The February event had drawn scrutiny from the F.B.I., who had been monitoring the AYC's activities due to the belief it was a communist-led organization. On January 29, 1937, J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the F.B.I., sent a memorandum to Homer S. Cumming, Attorney General, alerting him of the AYC's planned trip to Washington. In the correspondence, Hoover expressed his concern by stating "This pilgrimage to Washington has been highly publicized in the *Daily Worker*, the official organ of the Communist Party, U.S.A." implying that the AYC was in fact, communist.³¹⁴ Although a well-planned event, the young leaders were not prepared for what would immediately follow. Upon arriving at the White House, the youth activists were directed by U.S. Congressional leaders to take a seat on the street. Soon after, William Hinckley and Abbott Simon, AYC legislative chairman, were placed under arrest for violating their parade permit. Both young men were released on bail in time for their scheduled 4:30 p.m. appointment with President Roosevelt, where the President offered continued expansion of the NYA.³¹⁵ The NYA program had come under some criticism in its initial year for not providing

³¹⁴ Letter from John Edgar Hoover to Homer S. Cummings, January 29, 1937.

³¹⁵ "2,500 Lobby for Passage of American Youth Act," *Vassar Miscellany News*, February 2, 1937, accessed June 26, 2013, <http://newspaperarchives.vassar.edu>.

enough funding for jobs training and as a result, in 1937 the focus of the NYA shifted toward skills development of American youth.³¹⁶

In 1938, Joseph Cadden initiated a campaign to get the *American Youth Act* reintroduced to the U.S. Congress, dedicating less time to the improvement of the NYA, however, the NYA would continue to be a priority for the current Congress. Cadden wrote New York Congressman Vito Marcantonio, of the Labor Party, seeking assistance. Marcantonio was an advocate for many of the same issues pursued by the AYC including providing unemployment insurance and eliminating compulsory military training.³¹⁷ In March 1938, the AYA was heard before the sub committee of the Senate Committee on Education and Labor and was brought forth by Minnesota Senator Lundeen, of the Farmer-Labor Party. Sixty-nine individuals representing various organizations were heard before the committee. The bill was overhauled version of the original *American Youth Act*, integrating themes and conditions of the AYA into the existing NYA program structure. The Bill extended the NYA, providing greater funding, thus addressing issues pertaining to wages of labor, vocational training, and financial aid. Joseph Lash, president of the ASU, was the first speaker

³¹⁶ Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project. George Washington University, "National Youth Administration", <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/>

³¹⁷ Letter from Joseph Cadden to Vito Marcantonio; John J. Simon, "Rebel in the House: The Life and Times of Vito Marcantonio", *Monthly Review* 57, no. 11 (April, 2006)

and urged the committee to pass the AYA, noting that the NYA was established as an emergency solution and that long-term consistent support was needed for youth. Dr. Bruce Melvin, Principal Research Director of the Works Progress Administration, and Dr. Robert Fechner, Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps also spoke on behalf of the legislation.³¹⁸

While AYC leaders pursued the passage of the *American Youth AYA*, state youth councils were concurrently proposing bills to their state legislatures to address youth issues on the state level. Mirroring provisions of the AYA, these state commission bills strived to improve the living and working conditions of youth. However, by 1939, there was little progress in state legislatures passing youth commission bills. For example, both Maryland and New York state youth councils, who were among the largest, were finding that support for their youth bills was not strong. In the spring of 1939, the Maryland House of Delegates approved a \$400,000 appropriation for a youth bill, but it met with defeat in the Senate. Youth leaders did not give up and continued their efforts to push for passage of the youth bill in the following legislative session.³¹⁹ Yet, these efforts did not thwart the enthusiasm of the youth leaders and during a January, 1939 AYC

³¹⁸ Senate Committee on Committee on Education and Labor, *American Youth Act Hearings Report*, 75th Cong., 3rd sess., 1938, S. Rep. 1463. p. 14-15

³¹⁹ Youth, May 1939, "Youth Bill Squashed", page 6

Resident Board meeting, members discussed the status of the *American Youth Act*. The AYC leadership decided that revisions to the document be minimal and that additional Congressional support be sought before the *Act* be reintroduced. Additionally, it was determined that Senators who have advocated for the legislation in the past be consulted about simplifying the legislation.³²⁰ That same month, Joseph Cadden traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with Lewis B. Schwellenbach, Senator, and Chairman of the Special Committee on Conservation and Utilization of Aquatic Life. On that day also met with Senator Ernest Lundeen and Congressman Vito Marcantonio to garner more support for the *AYA*.³²¹

In January 1940, Senator Murray of Montana reintroduced the *AYA*³²² and with this news, the AYC stepped up its lobbying efforts. Members of the AYC Housing Commission discussed that all members should increase efforts to support the *AYA* and agreed that they would reach out to friends and study groups and look for opportunities to discuss the legislation or to write articles in publications. The commission also agreed that they needed to reach out to public officials in the housing area to speak and advocate on behalf of the

³²⁰ *Resident Board Minutes January 19, 1939: American Youth Congress* (New York City: American Youth Congress, 1939).

³²¹ Letter from Joseph Cadden to Lewis B. Schwellenbach, January, 1939

³²² Letter from Leslie Gould to Helen Siouseat, January 19, 1940.

AYA.³²³ At the National Youth Citizenship Institute in February, 1940 the passage of the *American Youth Act* was a top issue of discussion, as well as Congress' lack of support. In a speech to the delegates, Joseph Cadden stated that over the prior six years in which the AYC had been pursuing the *Act*, that it was also supporting other federal legislation that would benefit American youth. This included the Social Security Act, the National Labor Relations Act, the Wage Hour Law, and supporting the establishment of agencies such as the NYA and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Cadden, however, expressed his deep concern that the positive social gains that had been made would be compromised for the advancement towards a "war economy."³²⁴ He further pointed out President Roosevelt suggested cuts in youth programs including the NYA and the CCC and because of this, Cadden reiterated to the delegates that passage of the *AYA* and permanent youth agency was the Congress' top priority.³²⁵ However, Cadden's pleas would not be heard since the Federal Government had larger issues to deal with. When the New Deal programs came to end in

³²³ *Housing Commission Meeting Minutes February 28, 1940: American Youth Congress* (New York City: American Youth Congress, 1940)

³²⁴ Here's a Real Job for You. Pass the American Youth Act!, American Youth Congress, New York, 1940. Speech delivered by Joseph Cadden, Executive Secretary, American Youth Congress at National Youth Citizenship in DC, February 10, 1940, pg. 3.

³²⁵ Ibid

1938, FDR did not look to additional social reforms, but economic ones. Although his hopes were that the social programs of the New Deal would spur economic progress, his hopes were not fulfilled. War loomed heavily and in 1939 as Germany invaded Poland, Roosevelt could not ignore the possibility of another world war, although he communicated publically that the United States would remain neutral as Europe went to war. During this time, balancing the federal budget became a Presidential campaign issue and federal spending was at its greatest in history during peacetime. Eventually, more federal funds would go towards wartime requirements including the expansion of the military craft industry as to fuel the purchasing needs of foreign countries. Roosevelt found the silver lining in these circumstances, knowing that rising employment in the defense industry due to production increases would be politically beneficial.³²⁶

In a March, 1940 AYC Cabinet meeting, Joseph Cadden stated that there needed to be very strong public opinion of the NYA in order for the budget to pass in the coming year. In attending a house Subcommittee on Appropriations, Cadden provided testimony on the NYA budget, but told his fellow AYC officers that he felt there was no

³²⁶ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*; "Federal Spending Reaches Highest Peace Time Rate," *Washington Post*, November 21, 1939, accessed June 4, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/151140716?accountid=13626>; "Roosevelt Declares Taft Budget Plan Would Save Little," *Wall Street Journal*, January 10, 1940, 3, accessed June 4, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/131269786?accountid=13626>.

interest from the Committee that appropriations for the NYA be increased. However, this did not discourage the youth leaders. A promotional piece, a pamphlet on "Jobs," was completed and ready for distribution.³²⁷ It was believed by the AYC leadership that the piece could encourage advocating for funding for the NYA and passage of the AYA. However, the AYC leadership was dealt another blow as later that month, Joseph Cadden reported that Aubrey Williams had informed him that NYA representatives would no longer be housed in the AYC's National Office. Although no reason was given, Cadden was informed by a New York City council member that the reason was due to the AYC's strong focus on the passage of the AYA rather than support of the NYA. This troubled Cadden and the others as Williams had been well informed of the *Act* and had even testified during the 1936 hearings. In addition, the AYC worked to further promote the NYA and continued funding of its programs as it promoted passage of their legislation. Members of the AYC Cabinet, including Mary Jeanne McKay, Joseph Lash, and Louise Meyerovitz, agreed to follow up with Aubrey Williams about the pull out of the NYA representatives.³²⁸

³²⁷ Cabinet Meeting Minutes March 7, 1940: American Youth Congress (New York City: American Youth Congress, 1940)

³²⁸ *Cabinet Meeting Minutes March 21, 1940: American Youth Congress* (New York City: American Youth Congress, 1940)

Nevertheless, despite their efforts, the relationship between the NYA and the AYC would remain severed.

At the July 1940, American Youth Congress held in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, many of the proposals for action came back to the passage of the AYA, which addressed a wide range of issues relating to American youth. Delegates were once again asked to vigorously support the legislation within their individual organizations and regional council. The AYC leadership accused the Roosevelt administration of not passing the bill and instead preying upon needy youth who desired work by enrolling them in military training programs.³²⁹

Neither the House nor Senate ever brought the *American Youth Act* to a full vote. The Roosevelt Administration raised concerns in hearings on the bill that it was too expensive and would have provided some of the same services already administered through the CCC and NYA. However, both of these programs would be eliminated in the early 1940s as administration reorganizations occurred within the Federal Executive departments and agencies.³³⁰ By the end of the

³²⁹ *Youth Defends America: Delegates Manual 6th American Youth Congress* (New York: American Youth Congress, 1940).

³³⁰ Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth: Background and Policies* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 18.

decade, the AYC would be facing must greater challenges than the passage of the AYA.

Although the AYC had been successful in many of its efforts to bring youth issues to light, much of that success had to do with their relationship with the First Lady. Throughout the AYC's formative years, Eleanor Roosevelt advised and guided the youth leaders in making headway with Congressional leaders. The relationship between Eleanor and the AYC was mutually beneficial, as her platform as First Lady focused on children and youth issues. But her relationship with the AYC would come under scrutiny in the late 1930s as the AYC was under investigation by the HUAC. Concerns from the public and federal government over communist activities in America would come center stage for the AYC while they tried to maintain focus for their organization. The organization soon found that their support base for their organization would suffer greatly by the close of 1940.

CHAPTER FIVE:

A Tangled Web: The American Youth Congress, the Roosevelts, and the Dies Committee

*"Don't be afraid to join the Party. Look at the people we
associate with."³³¹*

- Kenneth Goff

A Shift in Political Ideology

Since its founding, the AYC tried to reach out to non-radicals, using a very liberal voice in its messages. This approach was one of many factors that lead to the growth of the AYC, because young people believed they were becoming involved in a liberal activist organization. However, at the First Annual American Youth Congress, the voice became increasingly moderate causing an uprising from its delegates and an eventual control in the leadership ranks by young communists. Despite the shift in political ideology, the AYC leaders never shared with its members the political affiliation of its leaders, and the political philosophy that was dominating the organization and

³³¹ Goff, an officer in the Young Communist League, remarked during an October 1939 hearing of the Committee on Un-American. Dies inquired about how the AYC's relationship with the Roosevelt persuaded others that they were a group not to be feared as communist.

its platform. As noted by Cohen (1989), many AYC leaders intentionally hid or even lied about their affiliation with the CPUSA.³³² Even AYC ally Eleanor Roosevelt was unaware of the young leaders' political affiliation until HUAC brought to light the extent of communist influence in the leadership of the organization. Regardless, this information did not influence the First Lady's opinion of, or support of, the organization³³³. The dominant presence of communist-affiliated organizations within the AYC not only drew attention of the HUAC but ultimately assisted in the demise of the organization.

The change in political ideology of the AYC in 1934 was not a subtle shift but a well-orchestrated move by the CPUSA. Gil Green, then national secretary of the YCL, made the first move to bring a communist influence to the organization. His efforts to do so were well planned and arranged in advance of the First Annual American Youth Congress. In a September, 1935 issue of the *Daily Worker*,³³⁴ Green recounted his efforts to assault the leadership of Viola Ilma and to shift the political philosophy of the congress. Green believed, like many,

³³² Cohen, *Student Activism*

³³³ August Raymond Ogden, *The Dies Committee. A Study of the Special House Committee for the Investigation of Un-American Activities, 1938-1944* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 1945), 147.

³³⁴ The *Daily Worker*, established in 1924, was a newspaper published by the Communist Party USA. The publication generally reflected the prevailing views of the party; Gil Green, "Youth Carries On - The Traditions of '76," *Young Worker*, July 2, 1935.

that Ilma was a fascist and was steering the congress towards a destructive ideology.

"A year ago, when we learned that a fascist group, with the aid of the government, had called a congress of youth for support of a reactionary program, we made our first important break with sectarianism. We decided to go to the congress and meet the enemy face to face...together with other anti fascist youth we defeated the enemy and turned the youth congress into a broad united front around the immediate needs of youth."³³⁵

However, the communist organizations were not the only ones with an agenda to infiltrate youth organizations. The Socialist Party, via the YPSL, were also instructed to join influential youth organizations as a way to shape policy decisions.³³⁶ In the 1930's, communist activities within youth organizations and movements expanded and leaders of these efforts blended radicalism and liberalism, hiding their ideological loyalties, confusing many youth and the public. Communist influences were also present in the labor unions, which young activists staunchly supported as they saw the working class as a critical vehicle for social change. Many young activists, as working adults, eventually found themselves as union organizers, supporting the work of some labor groups such as the CIO. This subtle influence infiltrated many youth

³³⁵ Vincent Mooney, "American Youth Congress," *Observer*, January 4, 1940.

³³⁶ Haas, *As They Saw the Thirties*

organizations at the time, including the AYC, ASU, SNYC, and the
NSL.³³⁷

From its very beginning, the AYC experienced ideological battles. Although on the surface the AYC projected itself as being open to intellectual differences between groups regardless of their political, social or racial affiliation,³³⁸ through an intentional infiltration, communist youth took control of the organization, even recruiting those who were previously unaffiliated with a political party. This happened even though the founder's of the AYC promoted an egalitarian message and used messages from America's liberal heritage³³⁹. Gil Green's efforts to infiltrate the AYC and recruit individuals who staged a coup at the First Annual American Youth Congress was successful. Communist youth secured leadership positions and active committee roles within the AYC, shaping the AYC platform.³⁴⁰ The CPUSA was successful in gaining involvement from youth due to its tactic of capitalizing on the grievances of youth, labor, and racial minority groups and relating them to the interests of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The party constructed its arguments based upon the audience, targeting the circumstances the

³³⁷ Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young*, Cohen, *Student Activism*

³³⁸ Ibid, 22

³³⁹ Cohen, *Student Activism*, 9

³⁴⁰ Haas, *As They Saw the Thirties*, Cohen, *Student Activism*

group was facing in order for groups and individuals to view the USSR and the CPUSA favorably.³⁴¹

Key leaders of the AYC were recruited either into the Communist Party or into the YCL, including Waldo McNutt, William Hinckley, and Joe Cadden. Although Jack McMichael was never fully recruited, he was sympathetic to the communists.³⁴² Waldo McNutt, who elected was Chairman of the Continuation Committee in 1934 and AYC National Chairman in 1935, adopted the anti-fascist jargon of the CPUSA, and used it in his public speeches. At a November, 1935 speech at a student council meeting at Brooklyn College, McNutt spoke about how the AYC was working to combat fascism, "We must face fascism and fascist developments here at home. They are even more important than the war developments abroad."³⁴³

Despite the efforts of the CPUSA, many individuals fought against its strategy to infiltrate the AYC and brought to light its tactics. Marty Plavner started a campaign against the AYC, publically calling it a Communist-led organization. Plavner had run for office in the AYC in its early days and failed. At a May 1939 Congressional dinner attended

³⁴¹ Barrington Moore, Jr., "The Communist Party of the USA. An Analysis of a Social Movement", *American Political Science Review* 39 (1945): 31-41. doi:10.2307/1948827.)

³⁴² Ibid; Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young*

³⁴³ "Hear Waldo McNutt On Youth Congress at Council Meeting, *Spotlight*, November 1, 1935.

by many political and social leaders supportive of the AYC, Plavner informed the patrons they were aligning themselves with a communist-led group. He sent a letter to all participants of the event, informing them that they are listed as supporters of the AYC and that the "that this organization which claims to represent American youth, is merely one of the communistic front organizations."³⁴⁴ He went on to inform them that he was publishing a book to prove this point and later that year published a booklet, *Here are the Facts: Is the American Youth Congress a Communist Front? Its History, What It Is, How It Works*, that provided an argument for the Communist influence in the AYC. Plavner not only documented AYC leaders' roles in communist organizations, but also criticized the policies and programs of the organization as being a reflection of Communist doctrine.³⁴⁵

By 1940, organizations affiliated with the AYC began distancing themselves from the organization. For its 1940 Citizenship Institute, the Republican Party said it would not send a representative to the event because the group failed to eliminate its "communist elements." The Republican Party based its decision a report from the Dies Committee, which was investigating communist activity in the U.S. The

³⁴⁴ Alan Hartman, "Youth Finds Its Own Answers the American Youth Congress of 1939", *Survey Graphic* 28, no. 8 (August, 1939): 492.

³⁴⁵ Marty Plavner, *Here Are the Facts: Is the American Youth Congress a Communist Front? Its History, What It Is, How It Works* (n.p.: Publisher Union, 1939)

Committee cited several affiliated organizations that were controlled or heavily influenced by the CPUSA, including the AYC.³⁴⁶ Later that year, Mary Jeanne McCay, AYC Cabinet member, proposed that member organizations state their position on Soviet Union and its policy. Most cabinet members were angered by the proposal stating it was forcing the AYC to take a definitive political stance, moving away from its original platform of focusing on jobs, education, peace, and civil liberties. The move caused more groups to break from the AYC including the Young Judea and Unitarian Youth. By that summer, a lack of support for the AYC became quite visible as only 244 affiliated organizations were represented at the Annual American Youth Congress, whereas twice as many attended the prior summer's congress.³⁴⁷ The subtle infiltration of the Communist Party into the AYC and ultimately gaining control of the organizational leadership, lead to its ultimate demise as support from young Americans and the public alike, significantly diminished.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶ "Republicans Shun Youth Congress," *New York Times*, February 5, 1940. 1, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/105183107?accountid=13626>.

³⁴⁷ Haas, *As They Saw the Thirties*

³⁴⁸ Cohen, *Student Activism*

The Roosevelts: Adversaries and Allies

During FDR's presidency in the 1930s, at times the AYCM would enjoy a productive relationship with the White House, while at other times it was strained. Youth leaders sometimes found themselves at odds with the President's platform, causing tension with administration leaders. This tension was smoothed over by Eleanor Roosevelt who was a staunch supporter for youth organizations and an advocate of the AYCM.

The President and the New Deal

President Roosevelt's New Deal program attempted to address issues facing American youth in the 1930s, yet its narrow solution to



Photograph 7: Parade float for the inauguration of the NYA, c.1937 (Courtesy of the FDR Library, Marist College)

problems, focusing mostly on economic relief, did not sit well with the young activists of the time. Many leftist youth organizations, including the AYCM, initially were not supportive of FDR and his New Deal program. However, they eventually did find common ground in the establishment of the NYA. The NYA, a

signature program of the President, attempted to solve issues facing young Americans, although it would eventually come under attack by

youth organizations. Criticisms of the President and his program often focused on a supposed fascist influence, but by the mid-1930s, these comments waned. By that time, youth organizations viewed the President as well meaning, but incompetent.³⁴⁹

Although the AYC was supportive of some of FDR's programs outlined in the New Deal, the young activists had hoped to move the federal government beyond the President's new programs, especially the NYA, advocating for more generous social legislation than what the President proposed. The AYC developed their own legislation believing they could better meet the needs of American youth. The central focus of that effort was the *American Youth Act (AYA)* that included a substantial financial package for youth programs and services.³⁵⁰ In 1937, during an AYC mass pilgrimage to Washington, FDR and Aubrey Williams from the NYA met with several youth leaders to discuss the AYA. All in the meeting agreed that youth needed Federal financial assistance, however, FDR was clear that the budgetary provisions in the *Act* were not feasible. However, he did communicate his commitment to youth issues by stating that the NYA would be made a

³⁴⁹ Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young*

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

permanent agency.³⁵¹ In a 1939 message to Congress on the Reorganization Act, FDR requested an appropriation of \$123 million dollars for the NYA for the following fiscal year, a 66% increase over the current appropriation. Additionally, the NYA, along with other agencies including the CCC and WPA, were reassigned to become a part of the newly formed Federal Security Agency.³⁵² As for the AYA, Congress never brought the legislation to a full vote, because FDR pointed out its expense and the redundancy with the services already administered through the CCC and NYA.³⁵³

As President, FDR had hoped to advance a new form of liberalism constructed by visionary Democrats and progressive Republicans; but his efforts failed as other political viewpoints and organizations were beginning to take root across the nation. David Niles, an advisor to FDR, warned the President of emerging progressive and liberal organizations around the country. Organizations like the League for Independent Political Action (LIPA), with its anti-capitalist standpoint supported the New Deal and a

³⁵¹ *American Youth Congress Newsletter* (New York City: American Youth Congress, 1937).

³⁵² *Youth*, Reorganization Plan Augers Permanent Set-Up for NYA, May, 1939, 10. Franklin D. Roosevelt: "Message to Congress on the Reorganization Act," April 25, 1939. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15748>.

³⁵³ Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth: Background and Policies* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 18.

"controlled and humanized socialism."³⁵⁴ This was a viewpoint that created division between the Democratic and Republican parties and in 1935, the LIPA advocated for a third political party, one that supported government and collective ownership as a means of production and distribution. Yet, the most radical and threatening group of the time was the CPUSA, which believed in a complete reconstruction of American society in the Soviet model. The CPUSA saw the Great Depression as an opportunity to spread its doctrine and it called the National Recovery Administration³⁵⁵ program a 'fascist slave program.' The CPUSA did make inroads with industrial workers, but the organization remained small in the early 1930s.³⁵⁶ However, through strategic organizing efforts and a focus on American youth, the CPUSA and support for communist thought took on a much greater role in the Roosevelt Administration in the latter part of the decade.

Eleanor: First Lady, Mentor, and Advocate

"The need for a government program to help unemployed people; the need for a government program to help youth get

³⁵⁴ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 221

³⁵⁵ The National Recovery Administration was one of the most sweeping of the early New Deal programs. Its purposes were twofold: first, to stabilize business with codes of "fair" competitive practice and, second, to generate more purchasing power by providing jobs, defining labor standards, and raising wages. Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Fireside Chat On the Purposes and Foundations of the Recovery Program" (lecture, White House, Washington, D.C., July 24, 1933.) National Archives Identifier: 197304

³⁵⁶ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*

more training for a job; and the need for various groups to get together to discuss their own difficult situations, is why we have forums, workers' alliances, and a youth congress."

– Eleanor Roosevelt³⁵⁷

Early on in the AYC's history, organizational leaders looked to Eleanor Roosevelt for support and advocacy. The First Lady had been a vocal supporter of addressing youth problems, and the AYC used this to their advantage. As early as 1933, Viola Ilma, then editor of *Modern Youth* magazine, had written the First Lady asking for her perspective and commentary on the magazine's contents, specifically articles written by contributors.³⁵⁸ Mrs. Roosevelt declined, stating that although she supported a youth movement, her viewpoints were somewhat different from the authors' in the magazine.³⁵⁹ In 1934, Viola had reached out to the First Lady again and invited Eleanor to be an advisor of the newly formed AYC organization, however, unsure about the organization and its purpose, the First Lady declined the offer.³⁶⁰ Nonetheless, Eleanor did pay attention to the AYC and its First Annual American Youth Congress and was aware of the split that occurred during the events and was displeased with the outcome of

³⁵⁷ Allida M. Black, *Courage in a Dangerous World: The Political Writings of Eleanor Roosevelt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 125

³⁵⁸ Letter from Viola Ilma to Eleanor Roosevelt, March 25, 1933

³⁵⁹ Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Viola Ilma, April 25, 1933

³⁶⁰ Letter from Viola Ilma to Eleanor Roosevelt, June 15, 1934, Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Viola Ilma, June 26, 1934

the event, which she viewed as undemocratic. Because of her interest in youth issues, during her husband's presidency, Eleanor became a liaison between the Roosevelt Administration and the youth movement.³⁶¹

By 1935, Eleanor Roosevelt focused much of her attention and efforts on youth and with the newly organized AYC, she saw an alignment with the youth leaders' goals with her own. The AYC was focused on addressing discrimination, housing, and jobs - issues in which she felt strongly. An advocate for grassroots activism, the First Lady was happy to hear of the AYC's second congress scheduled for Detroit that summer. By this point, the AYC had become a major focus of the First Lady's time and attention and she would become one of the group's most vocal champions. She was equally energized by another large youth organization, the ASU, which was under the leadership of Joseph Lash and Molly Yard. The ASU was also addressing issues of importance to her including combating fascism, war, and race bigotry. Eleanor viewed these two activists groups as a means for creating democracy and change.³⁶²

³⁶¹ Haas, *As They Saw the Thirties*, Blanche Wiesenthal Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, 2nd ed. (New York City: Viking, 1999), Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Viola Ilma, August 14, 1934

³⁶² Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*; Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young*

In January 1936, AYC National Council leaders requested a meeting with the First Lady to discuss their proposed AYA and to oppose the NYA – an agency that was the First Lady’s idea. The initial meetings did not go smoothly since Eleanor invited Aubrey Williams, Executive Director of the NYA, to discuss the proposed legislation with the young leaders. In the meeting, she told the AYC leaders she could not support the *American Youth Act*, as she believed it would be too expensive.³⁶³ After the January meeting, Eleanor worked with Williams to forge an alliance with the AYC. She held private meetings with the youth, agreeing to hear their concerns about the NYA, but standing firm in the NYA’s support. Yet, the First Lady was not always on opposite sides of the table with the AYC, since they did share common goals. Given her special interest in the politics of the youth movement, Roosevelt worked with the AYC leadership, advising them that partnering with the President’s administration would help them in achieving common goals. During these meetings, she advised and counseled the young leaders about their approach, encouraging them to exercise politeness in their endeavors. She viewed their brashness

³⁶³ Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young*; Brax, *The First Student Movement*

and direct style as youthful enthusiasm and embraced the AYC's energy for social change.³⁶⁴

Although there were common interests between Eleanor and the AYC, there were some points of disagreement. She was anti-war, but was clear about the need for national security – a dividing point for the two parties. She publically spoke about the need for collective security and united action as a means of preventing war. However, the AYC made statements against compulsory military training and in support of pacifism. In February 1936, she addressed the AYC, condemning their commitment to absolute pacifism, but agreed with the group's stance that military training should not be required, but made available for those who want it. She also criticized supporters of Youth Against War and Fascism, an AYC affiliated organization, and those who supported the Oxford Pledge, which stated that there are no circumstances in which nations should go to war.³⁶⁵

During this time, the First Lady was invigorated by the leaders of the AYC, and she found herself spending more time with the activist youth and their causes. The desire for the AYC to address problems she cared deeply for, filled the void left in Eleanor when the women's movement of the 1920s waned and largely collapsed. She believed the

³⁶⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, *American Youth Congress*; Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*

³⁶⁵ Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*

members of the AYC were committed supporters of the New Deal who worked for liberal unity and against fascism. Although she was aware that some were communists involved, she believed they did not run or control the organization. In March 1938, the AYC elected The First Lady to their advisory board and though she had accepted this invitation in the past, she declined this time as the group was under investigation by the HUAC.³⁶⁶

In the late 1930s, as the AYC and its leaders came under attack for suspected communist activity, the First Lady stood by the youth leaders and continued to do so after the HUAC investigations of the organization had declined. Additionally, as in prior public comments, she did not show disdain for the CPUSA as many public leaders had at the time, but rather showed an understanding for their existence. In an editorial she wrote for *Liberty Magazine*, she stated,

"Like so many other countries in the world, we are seizing upon the fear of communism as a good excuse for attacking anything we do not like. Of course we have communists in this country, and of course they appeal to youth. The Communist Party leaders are giving youth training; they will help them to live while they volunteer as workers in something which they believe is going to help other young people. They are giving them a feeling that they are important. We who believe in democracy could do just the same for youth if we would take the trouble..."³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ Ibid

³⁶⁷ Black, "Why I Still Believe in the Youth Congress," in *Courage in a Dangerous World*, 126

Mrs. Roosevelt would continue to state that she felt that American leaders and adults were apathetic to the needs of youth. Such comments led many to question her political leanings as well as the AYC's.

Eleanor Roosevelt spent most of the summer of 1938 in her Hyde Park home as the AYC was hosting the World Youth Congress at Vassar that August. Even though FDR encouraged her to travel with him, she declined. He specifically asked her to join him in Canada on August 18 at the dedication of the International Bridge and the extension of the Good Neighbor Policy to Canada - a major international statement for his Presidency - but she again declined, choosing to stay in Hyde Park for the World Youth Congress. The First Lady was excited about the event and wanted to lend her support where needed and had agreed to address the delegation. She attended the congress, casually mixing with and talking to the delegates. She listened to the speeches, often knitting while doing so. The event ended with the Vassar Pact, which pledged delegates to "reverse the present ominous drift toward international anarchy and armed conflict." The delegates sought arms reduction and an absence of force

in conflict and Eleanor was discouraged by this statement, but nonetheless left the congress energized.³⁶⁸

The Roosevelts, especially Eleanor, were committed to issues pertaining to children and youth. Again, the First Lady found support for children issues in the AYC. Conferences pertaining to children had been held in recent years; however, the April 1939 White House Conference on Children in a Democracy was a first for participation from American youth organizations. Joseph Cadden, then Executive Secretary of the AYC, served as the primary representative for youth organizations and was joined by Edward Strong, chairman of the Negro Youth Congress; Joseph Lash of the ASU; Mary J. McKay of the National Student Federation of America; Helen Fuller, chairman of the Council of Young Southerners; and Gladys Talbot Edwards, Youth Director of the Farm Union. The conference convened again in January of 1940 and issued a final report. Many of the recommendations aligned with those pursued by the AYC via annual events and as outlined in the *American Youth Act* including increased jobs for the unemployed via public and private enterprise and establishing federal work projects as a permanent national policy. The AYC also advocated for federal assistance provided to every state for the expansion and

³⁶⁸ Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*

enhancement of public schools and enrichment of the professional education of school teachers.³⁶⁹

By the close of the decade, although the relationship between the First Lady and the AYC began to cool, both parties still publicly supported of one another. In February 1940, the AYC held its first AYC Annual Fellowship Award Dinner and Mrs. Roosevelt was the guest of honor and the first recipient of the Fellowship Award, established by the AYC National Council, in recognition of her efforts on behalf if American youth.³⁷⁰

An Attack on Communism

The concern over communist influences in America had been prevalent over the prior two decades and an issue addressed by the Federal government. In 1919, a Senate Committee on the Judiciary began hearings on communism and its threat on America. The committee's report, based on interviews with individuals who had travelled to Russia, found that only a portion of the supporters of the Blosheveski doctrine actually supported the ideology in whole. Yet, it started a decades long effort to investigate and eradicate communism

³⁶⁹ *Youth, Conference On Children Stresses Responsibilities of Democracy, May, 1939, 7.*

³⁷⁰ *Youth, AYC Award Dinner Honors First Lady, January, 1939, 1.* The award was established by the AYC's National Council.

in the U.S. In May 1930, the House convened yet another exploratory committee, chaired by New York representative Hamilton Fish, to investigate communist propaganda in America.³⁷¹ Yet it was the Special House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities (HUAC) formed later in that decade that held the most widespread investigations and garnered the greatest impact on the attack on communism.

Communist Organizations in America

In the 1930s, the CPUSA was focused on deliberate attempts to establish a new set of social and economic institutions. This intention was communicated in the 1935 journal, the *Communist Party: A Manual on Organization*, where the aim of the party was described,

"As the leader and organizer of the proletariat, the Communist Party of the USA leads the working class in the fight for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, for the establishment of a Socialist Soviet Republic in the United States, for the complete abolition of classes, for the establishment of socialism, the first stage of the classless Communist society."³⁷²

The journal provided CPUSA members with strategies for organizing around the country and became a handbook for those who

³⁷¹ Ogden, *The Dies Committee*

³⁷² Moore, *The Communist Party of the USA*

looked to penetrate youth organizations.³⁷³ Through concerted and organized efforts, the CPUSA infiltrated many youth organizations including the National Negro Congress, League for Peace and Democracy, the ASU, the International Labor Defense, and the AYC.³⁷⁴

The CPUSA approached its organizing efforts through the training of its leaders, promoting and organizing labor strikes, and the infiltration of existing social and political organizations. Additionally, the communists' technique was to obtain key positions in organized pressure groups – like the American Youth Congress - whose political behavior and platform they could then control. Embracing other leftist organizations became policy after the 1935 Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, whereby the party abandoned the principle of attacking such groups and instead urged cooperation for the mutual threat of fascism. At this time, propaganda to overthrow the American government, common previously in communist propaganda, dissipated as well.³⁷⁵ Although there was focus on permeating national organizations, smaller, regional organizations, like the American Negro Labor Congress and the Workers Alliance, also

³⁷³ Ibid; Julia M. Allen, *Passionate Commitments. the Lives of Anna Rochester* (Albany, NY: State university of New York Press, 2013)

³⁷⁴ "Roosevelt Names Used by Red Chiefs, Says Dies Witness," *New York Times*, October 10, 1939, (<http://search.proquest.com/docview/102804780?accountid=13626>.)

³⁷⁵ Moore, *The Communist Party of the USA*

sprang up around the country and were being targeted. Fighting for higher wages from the WPA, the Workers Alliance met resistance as the WPA called for workers to be paid the "prevailing wage," an amount difficult to determine at the time.³⁷⁶

Some American labor unions were especially friendly to the CPUSA and the communist organization encouraged unions to be more politically active. The CPUSA came in at the beginning of the growth of mass unionism in the U.S. and members won strategic positions as labor union officers. With this strategic positioning, the CPUSA could pursue its political efforts. In 1937, for two weeks, the party conducted training on techniques to use for strikes for automobile workers in Detroit and that same year, the Communist Party dominated the conduct of the Chrysler Automobile Company strike.³⁷⁷ The following year, communists gained a stronghold in the CIO, largely through their willingness to take on the challenging process of trade union organization and maintenance that many member organizations were not interested in pursuing. Many regular members were more interested in the benefits gained from organizing, rather than the unions becoming a political and social force in the country. The strike,

³⁷⁶ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*; Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*

³⁷⁷ "Says 'Reds' Framed Student Platform," *New York Times*, November 30, 1939. 12, (<http://search.proquest.com/docview/102907553?accountid=13626>)

a strategy used frequently by the CPUSA, increased with the formation of the CIO and from 1936-1937 almost half a million workers were involved in labor strikes. The CIO ultimately became a target of the HUAC, however, the report from the 1939 hearings exonerated the CIO stating that the great majority of its members, as well as its president, were not communists or sympathizers. However, the committee did find that many CIO member unions had some communist influence within the organizations and among their leadership.³⁷⁸

The Federal Government Takes Action

The Special House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities (HUAC) was established by the House of Representatives in May 1938 and was a loose continuation of similar committees that existed for similar purposes. The committee was charged with investigating alleged disloyalty and subversive activities on the part of private citizens, public employees, and those organizations suspected of having communist ties. The committee worked for seven years and was chaired by conservative Texas Democrat, Martin Dies. The HUAC, often referred to as the "Dies Committee," held the power to subpoena

³⁷⁸ Ogden, *The Dies Committee*; House Committee on Committee on Special Committee on Un-American Activities, *Investigation of Un American propaganda activities in the United States: report pursuant to H Res. 282, 77th Cong., 1st sess., 1941, H. Rep. 282, 19-21*

witnesses and hold people in contempt of Congress if they refused to testify. As a Congressional leader, Dies was originally an enthusiastic supporter of The New Deal and an ally to FDR. As president of the tongue in cheek "Demagogues Club," Dies and his colleagues pledged to vote for every appropriations bill and against every revenue bill. However, by 1938 Dies had switched loyalties and became aligned with those in Congress who fought against the President's signature program.³⁷⁹

Martin Dies propelled his career towards the eradication of communism during the 72nd Congress. During the first session, many bills were brought forth aimed at combating communism, yet it was Dies' bill that received the most attention. His bill was aimed at the investigation of immigrants who were believed to be communists and although the bill did not initially pass, it was eventually reintroduced and passed establishing a committee to conduct investigations. Two laws came out of the committee's report; one requiring the registration of all publicity, propaganda, or public relations agents who represent another country, and Congressional committees sitting outside of the District of Columbia were given the same authority to

³⁷⁹ Kenneth O'Reilly "The Roosevelt Administration and Legislative - Executive Conflict: The FBI Vs. the Dies Committee", *Congress and the Presidency: A Journal of Capital Studies* 10, no. 1 (Spring, 1983): 79-94; "House Un-American Activities Committee," Eleanor Roosevelt's Papers Project, accessed April 19, 2014, <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/glossary/huac.cfm>.

subpoena records and deal with uncooperative witnesses as was
already posed by committees within the District.³⁸⁰

In addition to the HUAC, the NYA also was involved in addressing communist activities, focusing on youth. In 1940, the NYA began requiring all students receiving funding from the agency to take an oath of allegiance to America and democracy. The oath was instituted to comply with a provision of the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act, which barred communists, nazis, and other advocates to overthrow the U.S. government. Students were ordered to take the oath before receiving any financial assistance.³⁸¹ The First Lady, a staunch supporter of youth and their organizations, did not buy into the hysteria of communism that was taking hold in the Roosevelt administration or elsewhere around the country. She likened the fear of communists to the impending Martians in H.G. Wells infamous radio show, *War of the Worlds*.³⁸² Despite her objections, the HUAC, as well as other federal agencies, moved forward and focused heavily on investigating her beloved youth activist organizations, including the AYC.

³⁸⁰ Ogden, *The Dies Committee*

³⁸¹ "Students Aided by NYA must Vow Loyalty in New Move to Bar Nazis and Communists," *New York Times*, September 27, 1940. 22,
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/105446383?accountid=13626>

³⁸² Black, "Keepers of Democracy," in *Courage in a Dangerous World*

The FBI, under the direction of Herbert Hoover, was also investigating many youth organizations across the country for potential communist activity. In February 1937, American youth converged upon Washington, DC to lobby for passage of the *American Youth Act*. More than 3,000 members of the American Youth Congress participated in a march down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House to submit petitions to President Roosevelt, calling for passage of the Act.³⁸³ Hoover had the AYC on his radar and had alerted Attorney General Homer S. Cummings of the group's arrival, a group "...which is understood to be strongly communistic." He cited that the youth pilgrimage was publicized in the *Daily Worker*, the official publication of the CPUSA.³⁸⁴

The AYC took the lead in addressing this FBI activity, calling attention to national leaders about the unconstitutionality of such investigations and in March 1940, Joseph Cadden wrote to Attorney General Robert H. Jackson, complaining about the Bureau. Investigators from the Bureau were allegedly dispatched to student rallies in California and Cadden criticized of this action noting that the student organizations had not violated any law, and therefore, should

³⁸³ "2,500 Lobby for Passage of American Youth Act," *Vassar Miscellany News*, February 24, 1937.

³⁸⁴ Memo from J. Edgar Hoover to Homer S. Cummins, January 29, 1937

not be investigated.³⁸⁵ However, the Department of Justice denied any investigative action and assured Cadden there had been no request made to the FBI to look into the activities of youth groups in California.³⁸⁶ Cadden and other AYC leaders did not believe these assurances and Cadden soon found out that he too was being investigated as well, as that same year the FBI, inquiring about Joseph's country of birth, contacted his relatives. The FBI assumed he was born in Russia, when in fact he was born in New Jersey. Again, Cadden wrote the Attorney General expressing his anger at the FBI's actions and had suggested that agents contact him directly about his birthplace of origin.³⁸⁷ The FBI would ultimately be accurate in their assessment that Cadden was a communist, or at a minimum, a sympathizer. Cadden eventually joined the YCL and later become active in the American Labor Party.³⁸⁸

The Dies Committee

Congressman Dies, through his congressional committee, targeted a range of organizations and individuals for his investigations;

³⁸⁵ Correspondence Joseph Cadden to Robert Jackson, March 19, 1940

³⁸⁶ Correspondence Matthew F. McGuire to Joseph Cadden, March 27, 1940

³⁸⁷ Letter from Joseph Cadden to Robert Jackson, August 18, 1940

³⁸⁸ Joan Cook. "J.E. Cadden Dies; Fought in Spain." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 17, 1980. 1, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/121328627?accountid=13626>.

however, a significant effort was targeted towards youth organizations.

In noting his concern over the infiltration of communist activity within American youth organizations, Dies cited that at the 1935 Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, the organization adopted a resolution that declared it the duty of YCL members to join religious and youth organizations in an effort to gain mass influence over youth. In 1939, the Committee targeted the Chicago Branch of the American League for Peace and Democracy, formerly known as the American League Against War and Fascism, as a communist organization. The group complained that agents working for the Dies committee illegally seized records of the organization, and subsequently filed suit in Federal court, requesting the records be returned. Other groups subjected to investigation included the Negro Youth Congress, the ASU, the National Negro Congress, The American League for Peace and Democracy, the AYC, as well as various student governing bodies at colleges and universities.³⁸⁹ Dies played upon the patriotism and fears of the American people while conducting his

³⁸⁹ "Roosevelt Names Used by Red Chiefs, Says Dies Witness," *New York Times* Martin Dies, *The Trojan Horse in America* (New York City: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1940); "Dies Inquiry Asks President for Aid of Bureau Forces," *New York Times*, August 24, 1938.
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/102439389?accountid=13626>.; "Thomas Charges New Dealers Back "Communist Fronts"," *Corpus Christie Times*, December 12, 1939, 3

investigations. In a 1938 interview, he commented about the status of the investigations, saying,

"The hearings thus far have revealed a startling situation which should arouse the active interest of every patriotic citizen...The testimony thus far heard tends to indicate that foreign governments are influencing, if not directing, policies and activities of certain organizations in the United States and that these foreign governments are using these organizations as 'fronts' to advance their cause and interests in the United States."³⁹⁰

Such rhetoric was well received by much of the public, but Dies found that his support was not as widespread in Washington.

The Dies Committee did not always garner the support of the Roosevelt Administration or Congressional leaders and in the fall of 1938, members of Congress as well as President Roosevelt, questioned Martin Dies' use of the committee. It was believed by many Congressmen that disgruntled Republican members of the committee were using their position for political purposes, however Dies denied such accusations and continued with the committee's investigations.³⁹¹ Yet, Dies himself would use his political position as Chairman of the HUAC to fight against the New Deal, its programs, and its personnel. Publically, he would equate the programs as 'Un-American' liking them

³⁹⁰ "Dies Inquiry Asks President for Aid of Bureau Forces," *New York Times*

³⁹¹ O'Reilly "The Roosevelt Administration and Legislative - Executive Conflict: The FBI Vs. the Dies Committee"

to Fascism, Nazism, and Bolshevism in nature. In these efforts, Dies found a vocal ally in J. Parnell Thomas, a senior Republican committee member from New Jersey, who publically stated he believed that "the New Deal is either for the Communist Party or is playing into the hands of the Communist Party."³⁹² Thomas implied that the White House was aligned with communist front organizations and suggested that groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union, Consumers' National Federation, National Lawyers Guild, as well as many youth organizations were communist-led and supported by the Roosevelts. Thomas also called for an investigation of Assistant Attorney General Thurman W. Arnold, whom he believed was heavily influenced by the CIO.³⁹³ Despite these strong accusations, Thomas and Dies were not alone in their concern about the White House and its affiliations. FBI officials were also skeptical about the New Deal reform, the subversive nature of some of the program's personnel, and the political focus of some of the liberal and labor organizations aligned with the Roosevelt Administration. The Bureau collected information on numerous prominent New Dealers including Attorney General Frank Murphy,

³⁹² Ibid, 81

³⁹³ "Thomas Charges New Dealers Back "Communist Fronts"," *Corpus Christie Times*

Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, and the First Lady, Eleanor
Roosevelt.³⁹⁴

Many administration officials who were uncomfortable with Dies' tactics urged FDR to confront Dies publicly, however, he would not. By the late 1930s, FDR and his New Deal legislation were on shaky ground, and he was hesitant to take any public action that would alienate members of Congress – even if it meant protecting his allies. FDR and members of his administration considered Dies a liability given his erratic and scattered approach to the investigations, however, Roosevelt did not want to pursue action against Dies. Many officials, including those in the Justice Department and the FBI, engaged in a practice of covert political action against the committee chairman. The FBI, under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover and with consent of the White House, investigated the Dies Committee and employed friendly contacts in the media to manage publicity of the committee. Hoover was more than happy to oblige the White House as he viewed Dies and his committee as a threat to the FBI's turf. Attorney General Jackson and Justice Department Officials launched a campaign in 1939 to discredit Dies and his committee and went as far as projecting that employees of the committee were communists who were steering the committee's investigations toward the FBI and

³⁹⁴ O'Reilly "The Roosevelt Administration and Legislative - Executive Conflict: The FBI vs. the Dies Committee"

suggested that all employees be investigated.³⁹⁵

Although the HUAC and the FBI ultimately found common ground in their disdain for the New Deal, the FBI did not embrace Martin Dies. Dies would often publically criticize FBI agents and their methods and J. Edgar Hoover felt Dies was unwilling to take his advice and lead on matters, and ultimately became an enemy of the FBI as well as the White House.³⁹⁶ Later, Dies and his committee members publically responded to the criticisms of how they approached their investigations,

"...in short, the committee warns against the possibility that a wave of hysteria may supersede an informed public opinion on matters which have to do with the subjects of its investigation. Such a situation would do much to defeat the very ends and workings of democracy which the committee's inquiry is calculated to serve..."³⁹⁷

Official reports from the Dies Committee also boasted about their ability to expose and eventually cripple organizations that were loyal to totalitarian dictators.

³⁹⁵ Ibid

³⁹⁶ Ibid

³⁹⁷ House Committee on Committee on Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Un American propaganda activities in the United States: report pursuant to H Res. 282, 77th Cong., 1st sess., 1941, H. Rep. 282, 2

The Investigation of the American Youth Congress

"It is a tragic thing when thousands of American youth, under the guidance of the American Student Union and the American Youth Congress or under the instruction of Marxist professors, are led to the theory that the government owes them a living."³⁹⁸

-- *Martin Dies*

The HUAC started its hearings on August 12, 1938 while the AYC was hosting the World Youth Congress at Vassar College; an event Martin Dies believed to be attended by communists. Early during the committee's investigations, Dies believed that the AYC and the ASU were significant organizations under CPUSA control. He also accused the American League for Peace and Democracy of directing AYC activities. Dies believed that the AYC's platform was playing to the needs of the working class and that promoting the right of a job was in conflict with the values of the country's founding fathers and what was set forth in the *Bill of Rights* and the *Declaration of Independence*.³⁹⁹In addition to the AYC's affiliations as a cause for concern, the organization's publications were cited by the Dies Committee as examples of communist propaganda. The *Youth Arsenal of Facts* was often quoted as a source of information on youth activity, labor issues, education, and issues pertaining to social justice. The Labor Research

³⁹⁸ Dies, *The Trojan Horse*, 246

³⁹⁹ Ibid

Association, an organization with strong communist ties, produced the *Arsenal*. Grace Hutchins, Anna Rochester – both members of the CPUSA – and others founded the Labor Research Association in 1927. Hutchins was the principal author on wage-earning women for the CPUSA and Rochester was a Marxist historian, economist, and CPUSA member and was integral to the *Arsenal*. The AYC embraced information in the *Arsenal*, billing it as a "...handy little book that brings together facts and figures from scores of books and documents on the primary problems of the world."⁴⁰⁰

During the November 1939 hearings, a former AYC member admitted to the committee that he helped the CPUSA take control of the Second Annual American Youth Congress, held in Detroit. Michael W. Howsowick was a graduate of a training school for communist agitators, and worked with others including Gil Green, Marian Gilpin, Arthur Clifton, and Waldo McNutt to gain control of the congress.⁴⁰¹ It was during the First Annual American Youth Congress that Harvey Zorbaugh and Gil Green convened a group of several organizations to promote specific issues at the event, eventually causing the

⁴⁰⁰ *Youth, 'Youth Arsenal' Boils Down Stacks of Facts*, May, 1939, 11; Allen, *Passionate Commitments*

⁴⁰¹ "Says 'Reds' Framed Student Platform," *New York Times*

organization to splinter.⁴⁰² Said Howsowick, "But our group came out of that Detroit convention feeling we had won a complete victory in getting the adoption of a declaration of rights which we drafted in more or less detail and that we had beaten the Young People's Socialists League crowd."⁴⁰³ The *Declaration of Rights* adopted at the 1935 American Youth Congress called for the country to be "turned over to the working and farming people of America," a move, not explicitly stated, that would require a move away from capitalism.⁴⁰⁴ However, Viola Ilma was eager to have another perspective heard on the early years of the AYC. Specifically, she wanted to address the break that occurred at the 1934 congress, and wrote Dies and Eleanor Roosevelt stating she would like to testify. In her letter to Eleanor, Viola blamed herself for the communist group takeover, because of her "undemocratic approach to the proceedings" as chairperson.⁴⁰⁵ However, Viola was never asked to testify before the committee.

During the hearings, committee members brought to light how communists involved in the AYC used their ongoing relationship with

⁴⁰² Ilma, *Political Virgin*, 78

⁴⁰³ "Says 'Reds' Framed Student Platform," *New York Times*

⁴⁰⁴ House Committee on Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Hearings, 76th Cong., 1st sess., 1938, H. Rep. 282, 6971.

⁴⁰⁵ Letter from Viola Ilma to Martin Dies, December 6, 1939; Letter from Viola Ilma to Eleanor Roosevelt, December 6, 1939

Eleanor Roosevelt to calm fears that others might have about the group's affiliations and members. Kenneth Goff, a leader in the YCL, admitted that the AYC used correspondence from Mrs. Roosevelt in their meeting publications as a way of showing the public that the White House was supportive of their activities. He stated that the communist youth mocked her support and even bragged about how a group of young communists had tea with the First Lady in her Hyde Park home.⁴⁰⁶ Additionally, Goff admitted to using correspondence from the President to the AYC to not only help align the AYC with the White House, but to demonstrate the Roosevelts' support of the communist ideal. He provided an example from a 1937 letter used by FDR at the opening of an AYC event,

"The problem and opportunities which we face as a nation are numerous, and challenging. This is no time for complacency or indifference; it is a time when vigorous and intelligent participation in the solution of our common problems is needed...the American Youth Congress has become an important instrument in achieving this end and, as such, has the good-will and the best wishes of all who are concerned with the future of American democracy."⁴⁰⁷

Despite the kind words used by the President in his speech to the AYC, his wife was the true staunch supporter of the group. Mrs. Roosevelt responded to the committee's remarks about her relationship with the

⁴⁰⁶ Ogden, *The Dies Committee*

⁴⁰⁷ "Roosevelt Names Used by Red Chiefs, Says Dies Witness," *New York Times*

youth by saying she never inquired about the political affiliation of the individuals whom she met and that the AYC recommended youth leaders to her.⁴⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the First Lady viewed her position and influence differently than perhaps the public did. In reflecting upon her experience with the AYC, specifically at the 1940 Citizenship Institute, she stated,

"I did not go to answer questions for the Citizenship Institute as the Presidents wife. I went as Eleanor Roosevelt, to answer, as honestly as I could, questions that were going to be put to me as an individual. I had the obligation not to place the President or the administration in any difficulty through my answers."⁴⁰⁹

As Dies suspected and remarked, such interactions between the White House and youth leaders gave the AYC credibility on the national scene. During the hearings, Dies also accused other "prominent government officials" of giving aid and support to the CPUSA, referring to the assistance the AYC received from federal departments



Photograph 14: William Hinckley
testifying before the HUAC, 1939
(From author's private collection)

⁴⁰⁸ Ogden, *The Dies Committee*, 147

⁴⁰⁹ Black, "Why I Still Believe in the Youth Congress", *Courage in a Dangerous World*

and leaders during the efforts to pass the *American Youth Act*.⁴¹⁰ Dies¹⁸⁸ would later comment, "The First Lady of the Land has been one of the most valuable assets which the Trojan Horse⁴¹¹ organizations of the Communist Party have possessed, due to the immense prestige which her sponsorship has conferred upon them."⁴¹² Despite such assertions, the First Lady's support of the AYC did not waiver. During the 1939 HUAC hearings, she often chose to sit with members of the AYC rather than her peers.⁴¹³

Eleanor Roosevelt condemned the Dies Committees handling of the investigations when it came to the AYC. She pointed out that the committee had made accusations of Communist control of the AYC in a committee report when no one from the organization had been interviewed. When interviews were scheduled several months later, initially William Hinckley, prior Chairman AYC was subpoenaed. Since he was no longer affiliated with the AYC at the time, he had requested that Joseph Cadden and Jack McMichael join him at the hearing. It was not until the day before the interviews that Cadden, the prior

⁴¹⁰ "Roosevelt Names Used by Red Chiefs, Says Dies Witness," *New York Times*

⁴¹¹ Martin Dies wrote a book, *The Trojan Horse in America*, in 1940, which focused on communism in America.

⁴¹² Dies, *The Trojan Horse*, 292

⁴¹³ Ogden, *The Dies Committee*

Executive Secretary, was subpoenaed.⁴¹⁴ At the start of the November 30 hearings, The First Lady was invited to sit with the members of committee, but instead took a seat in the gallery alongside the youth leaders. On that day, Hinckley, McMichael, and Cadden were scheduled to testify and the prior day, Eleanor had lunch with the three young men, advising them on their upcoming testimony.⁴¹⁵ In an unusual move for the committee, Cadden was permitted to make a statement on the work of the AYC, but only after Hinckley had read a resolution violently attacking the Dies Committee and calling for the ceasing of the hearings. The resolution stated that the Dies Committee was misusing its power and was attempting to discredit labor unions by suggesting they were communist-led organizations. The statement further suggested that the committee was creating hysteria and promoting 'witch hunting.' Committee members regarded the statement as hostile, yet it was persuaded to change its tone on how they viewed the AYC. Committee member Joe Starnes told Hinckley and Cadden that the committee's only concern was that they believed that left-winged groups had gained control of the AYC and that many

⁴¹⁴ Black, "Why I Still Believe in the Youth Congress", *Courage in a Dangerous World*

⁴¹⁵ John B. Oakes, "Mrs. Roosevelt Silent Auditor at Dies Inquiry," *Washington Post*, December 1, 1939, 1, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/151119308?accountid=13626>; Brax, *The First Student Movement*

of its affiliated organizations were also communist controlled.⁴¹⁶

However, Starnes was more aggressive as the hearing proceeded and was confrontational when McMichael was asked questions about communist groups affiliated with the AYC. McMichael tried to provide information, only to be cut off by Starnes who instead focused on the sharing the information he and the committee had gathered that implicated the group. Again, Hinckley protested the approach of the hearing and the accusations being made.⁴¹⁷ During the interviews with Cadden, McMichael, and Hinckley, Fulton Lewis, Jr. implied that the Citizenship Institute planned by the AYC was a communist influenced event represented by AYC affiliated organizations, although the event was open to any youth and youth organizations from around the US. In response to these allegations, Mrs. Roosevelt acknowledged that it is highly likely that organized communist groups were represented at the institute.

⁴¹⁶ Ogden, *The Dies Committee*, 170; John B. Oakes, "Mrs. Roosevelt Silent Auditor at Dies Inquiry.

⁴¹⁷ House Committee on Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Hearings, 7042-7045



Photograph 15: Agnes Reynolds and Joseph Lash, ASU members during 1939 HUAC Hearings. (From the author's private collection)

Eleanor Roosevelt was again present during the December 1939 hearings when Joseph Lash, national secretary of the ASU, testified before the committee. Like Cadden a month prior,

Lash was given an opportunity to speak of the work of the ASU, before being questioned about the group's relationship with communist groups. Like his colleagues in the AYC, he was questioned about the level of influence and control communists had with the AYC. He did acknowledge that communist were members, as well as those members of the CPUSA, and that some held positions. In this regard, he indicated that in fact they did have influence, as did all officers.⁴¹⁸ After sitting through the hearings, Eleanor stated in one of her *My Day* columns that she did not see any evidence that the AYC was communist controlled.⁴¹⁹ Mrs. Roosevelt noted that there could be communists or fascists involved in an organization, but that does not necessarily indicate control. She even drew a comparison between the youth organizations being investigated to the condemnation of Judas

⁴¹⁸ House Committee on Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Hearings, 7061-7092

⁴¹⁹ Ogden, *The Dies Committee*

Iscariot, who she noted eventually repented.⁴²⁰ That same month, in a press conference, she told reporters that she had investigated the AYC long before the HUAC was established, and had found nothing "to indicate outside control." She further stated that she arrived at her opinion because she personally had known the officers over the years, and had also read all documents and resolutions put forth by the AYC. Mrs. Roosevelt also commented on the youth leaders' behaviors during the hearings, complementing their poise. During the press conference she was asked whether the HUAC should continue or cease, she took no position stating that was not her decision to make, but Congresses.⁴²¹

Decades later, as the First Lady reflected upon the AYC and the HUAC, her view of the youth organization had changed. In an editorial on communism, she stated "The only organization I sponsored which had any degree of Communist control was the American Youth Congress in the early thirties." Although she ultimately did believe there was control by CPUSA, she maintained that the majority of the AYC members were not communists.⁴²²

⁴²⁰ Eleanor Roosevelt, My Day, December 5, 1939. A Comprehensive Electronic Edition of Eleanor Roosevelt's "My Day" Newspaper Column. The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project. <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/> Accessed May 5, 2014

⁴²¹ "First Lady 'Clears' Youth Congress," *New York Times*, December 5, 1938. 8, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102978101?accountid=13626>.

⁴²² Black, "Senator Joseph McCarthy", *Courage in a Dangerous World*

At a symposium held by the AYC in December 1939, the leadership of the organization called for the Dies Committee to be dissolved as they contended that the group was spreading misinformation. Although there were those who still supported and defended the AYC, like in the first months of the AYC, an alternate-viewed faction was making its presence known. Leaders from the American Youth League and the Provisional Committee for American Youth charged the platform at the symposium, calling the event undemocratic. Although the event closed with no further uproars, it was a clear signal that the unified youth organization was falling apart.⁴²³ A few months later, the First Lady began to distance herself from the AYC and the ASU. At a May 1940 event at the City College of New York, Mrs. Roosevelt made an off-hand comment about the Nazi's occupation of the European Low Countries – a statement viewed as a fascist support by ASU members. Additionally during this time, Eleanor had grown impatient with the AYC and ASU organizations since they advocated for an isolationist policy for the U.S.⁴²⁴

Before the public hearings concluded in 1939, Dies started his campaign to seek a continuation of the committee as the HUAC was

⁴²³ "Dies Inquiry Denounced," *New York Times*, December 17, 1939. 3, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102767982?accountid=13626>.

⁴²⁴ Brax, *The First Student Movement*

scheduled to expire on January 3, 1940. Dies asked the House to extend its work for another year, citing that the committee held vital information and had 'hundreds of leads' affecting national defense. Although the manner in which hearings were being conducted improved over time, there were still many members of Congress who did not support the committee's investigative tactics. However, in January 1940 the house approved the continuation of the Committee along with a 75,000 appropriation, a \$50,000 increase over the prior year's budget.⁴²⁵

Upon conclusion of the 1938 hearings, the HUAC determined that the AYC was not originally founded as a communist organizations, but through the actions that occurred at the First Annual American Youth Congress and formal organization that occurred the following year at the Second Congress, it was ultimately infiltrated by communists and set up as a "red front." Additionally, the committee recognized that there were many organizations affiliated with the AYC that were not communistic in nature, but that there were in fact over a dozen communist, communist front, and communist sympathizing movements within it. They finalized their observations from the 1939 hearings by stating that the communists saw value in the national

⁴²⁵ Ogden, *The Dies Committee*; John B. Oakes, "Dies Committee Asks House to Prolong Work for a Year," *Washington Post*, October 17, 1939. 2, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/151141372?accountid=13626>.

events planned and hosted by the AYC and used these opportunities to spread their doctrine.⁴²⁶ In the committee's 1941 report, they claimed that their greatest accomplishment was breaking up the Peoples Front movement via the American League for Peace and Democracy. The committee claimed that in the 1930s the League had more than seven million members, but that the work of the committee forced it out of existence. It also laid claim to crippling the AYC as a Peoples Front organization by exposing its relationship with communist groups; causing it to lose its prestige and support from youth and sponsors. The report further stated that in keeping the spotlight on the AYC, "...it is clear to all that, in spite of a degree of participation in its activities by many fine young people, it [the AYC] was never at its core anything less than a tool for Moscow."⁴²⁷

The committee's observations were also shared by the AYC's founder and in her autobiography, Viola Ilma stated that she believed the AYC became the first real communist front in America and that it helped the communists and socialists join hands. She also reflected about her experience immediately after the first annual congress, and

⁴²⁶ House Committee on Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Report Investigation of Un-American Activities and Propaganda, 75th Cong., 1st sess., 1939, H. Rep. 282

⁴²⁷ House Committee on Committee on Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Un American propaganda activities in the United States: report pursuant to H Res. 282, 77th Cong., 1st sess., 1941, H. Rep. 282, 21-22

she felt that she might have contributed her own downfall by not allowing elections from the floor. "We were young, idealistic kids, unschooled in political chicanery or Roberts Rules of Order, and had no ideas of subversive plots or coups."⁴²⁸

In November 1940, the President called a meeting with Martin Dies. Although the President was complimentary about the Chairman's work in the committee to raise awareness of subversive activities with the American people, his purpose of this meeting was not to give accolades. Troubled with the relationships between Dies and Hoover, he advised Dies to meet with Attorney General Jackson to work out a plan to call a truce with the FBI and to find a way to be more cooperative with the Bureaus efforts. On the surface and in the public, the two organizations appeared to be cooperative, yet behind the scenes the FBI continued to monitor the Dies Committee. The relationship eventually softened and the Dies Committee continued its work until 1944.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁸ Ilma, *Political Virgin*, 83-85

⁴²⁹ O'Reilly, "The Roosevelt Administration"

CHAPTER SIX:

Conclusion

After the 1940 youth congress events and the parting of ways with the Roosevelts, the AYC began a swift collapse. With the breakdown of the AYC, both the leftist activist movement and the generation of that time lost an invaluable political asset and a staunch advocate for youth issues. As America entered the 1940's, FDR was into his third term as President and the country was involved in World War II. The New Deal Programs of the 1930s, including the NYA, were all but dissolved as the White House and Congress focused energy and resources on the war. The lack in focus on youth issues left the AYC struggling for support from federal leaders. Jack McMichael, AYC Chairman, held a Town Hall Meeting in 1941 in Washington, DC, to reenergize the vision of the AYC and to focus on its original goals. Unlike other national events held by the organization, political or social leaders did not support or attend the event. Later that year, the AYC dissolved.⁴³⁰

Despite its challenges, the AYC represented one of the most diverse American youth movements, uniting those from a range of racial, religious, political, and socio-economic backgrounds ever in an

⁴³⁰ Haas, *As They Saw the Thirties*

effort to organize on behalf of social change.⁴³¹ The organization served as a vehicle for young Americans to learn about social activism and the political process. Viola Ilma continued working on behalf of youth after her involvement with the AYC and after disbanding her version of the organization, she founded another publication, *Voice of Youth*, a publication dedicated to advocating on behalf of the needs of young Americans.⁴³² She then went to work for the National Municipal League researching public policy and youth issues and by the late 1930s, began working for the Young Men's Vocational Foundation where she assisted at risk young men, including veterans, in helping them find work and housing. During this time, Viola had occasional contact with the AYC leadership, as the Foundation's offices were located in the same New York City building as the AYC's.⁴³³ Publically, she was still viewed as a youth leader and in 1939, The Rotary International asked her to speak at their annual convention in Cleveland. In her speech, she encouraged club members to help

⁴³¹ Robert Cohen, "American Youth Congress." *Encyclopedia of the Great Depression* (New York City: Macmillan Reference USA, n.d.), 43-44, accessed June, 24, 2014, <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX3404500035&v=2.1&u=new67449&it=r&p=GVR&sw=w&asid=d32d40fd0c764da7552441912b20b1bc>.

⁴³² Ilma, *The Political Virgin*

⁴³³ Haas, *As They Saw the Thirties*; Memo from Joseph Cadden to Eleanor Roosevelt, November 6, 1939

American youth address their challenges and meet their needs.^{199 434} The young woman who sparked a national movement used her experiences and connections made as an AYC leader to further serve young Americans.

Research Goals

As the research began for this dissertation, the expectation was that a story would emerge about an energetic and proactive group of youth compelled to shape public policy in America – a group that set the stage for youth organizations to follow laying the groundwork for other young citizens to be actively engaged in the legislative process. Through the process of history, it has been determined how the AYC was founded and the sociopolitical events that triggered the formation of the movement. These events also inspired young men and women to position themselves as change agents during a tumultuous time in history. Additionally, a thorough and accurate picture of the key leaders of the organization has been provided giving proper recognition. However, the story that emerged was more complex and compelling than anticipated. The AYC was an influential youth group that met with a level of success, but it was also one that clearly became a communist front organization and a vehicle for promoting

⁴³⁴ Viola Ilma, "How Can Rotary Serve Youth?" (Address, Thirtieth Annual Convention of Rotary International, Cleveland, Ohio, June 20, 1939).

the communist agenda. In exploring the details of the rise and fall of the AYC, it is difficult to balance the enthusiasm for young Americans trying to make a change in their society with the frustration of knowing that they were puppets in a political theatre. Viola Ilma, often portrayed as a fascist in the literature, was a curious woman who embraced a range of political ideologies. It is important to note that the public commentary about her leadership in the AYC was propelled by individuals affiliated with the Communist Party or with the communist press. Nonetheless, these unexpected truths are part of the AYC history and the story of the ambitious young adults who believed they were changing the world.⁴³⁵

The historical approach to the research, focusing on 'history from below', allowed the views and perspectives from AYC leaders to be central to the historical text of American youth activism. Exploring the correspondence and speeches AYC leaders as well as organizational documents and publications, provides a clear understanding of the youth activists' perspectives and motivations for forming and sustaining the AYC.

⁴³⁵ In pursuing this aspect of the research, it was difficult to accept the reality that the AYC was a political front organization as the young people involved were striving for noble aims. Extreme effort was made to be objective in recounting the facts that arose during the research process.

Impact of the American Youth Congress

Despite its organizational, ideological, and reputational difficulties, the AYC did accomplish many of its goals established during its formative years. They reached out to youth and other social organizations as a way to ascertain the needs and challenges of young Americans. Although heavily influenced by the Communist Party, the AYC successfully involved individuals and organizations from a range of political viewpoints. Most notably, the AYC was inclusive in involving racial minority groups, focused on addressing their issues, and advocated for anti-discrimination laws.

Eighty years after its founding, young Americans are still feeling the impact of the AYC. The AYC successfully collaborated with other organizations and legislative bodies to propose new public policy regarding unemployment, education, equal rights, financial aid for college students, and job training. This collaborative approach to addressing youth issues is common today as national organizations like the American Student Government Association⁴³⁶ work with collegiate student governments to coordinate joint lobbying efforts and research pending legislation at the state and federal levels. The AYC

⁴³⁶ The American Student Government Association, a consortium represented by more than 1,200 higher education institutions' student governments, provides student leaders with networking, research, and information resources and is focused on teaching colleges student to be more effective, ethical, and influential leaders on their campuses (<http://asgaonline.com>)

also conceptualized the concept of the Model United States Congress, a program still being held today in states across the country. College students today enjoy the freedom to lobby legislative leaders, attend and participate in congressional hearings, and serve in elected positions because the members of the AYC paved the way for their involvement decades ago.

Importance of Research

Writing a history of the AYC adds to the body of scholarly work in various disciplines including educational policy, American history, and public policy. The study of activism in America and of youth development transcends many boundaries and offers a unique perspective on a historical event.

Scholars have determined that for young adults, there are benefits of being involved in youth activist efforts and have noted that one of the defining features of youth activism is its collective focus. Participation in these activities involves a shift in focus from the individual to the group—from “what I can do alone” to “what we can do together.”⁴³⁷ Youth learn how to work effectively with one another because their projects and initiatives would otherwise not succeed, or

⁴³⁷ Ben Kirschner, “Introduction: Youth Activism as a Context for Learning and Development,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 51 (November 007): 369, accessed June 10, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0002764207306065>.

at least, flourished as had hoped. Through collaboration on a social or political action campaign, youth can learn how to bridge differences related to race, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status.⁴³⁸ For the young Americans involved in the AYC, this was evident as diverse organizations from around the country came together to address common issues that were not being successfully addressed in isolation. Those affiliated with the AYC were exposed to opportunities to work across geographical and socio-economic boundaries on a range of initiatives.

Youth who are involved in activist groups are exposed to experiences that forge their identities as powerful civic actors. For example, actions that youth activists take in the public realm by participating in public forums such as city council meetings, Congressional hearings, town hall meetings, youth position themselves—and are positioned by others—as competent political actors.⁴³⁹ Leaders of the AYC, such as Viola Ilma and Joseph Cadden, were propelled into the public eye and viewed as leaders of American youth. Although many of their public comments and positions were critical of elected leaders, those leaders recognized the role Ilma and Cadden played within the AYC and among American youth. Therefore,

⁴³⁸ Ibid

⁴³⁹ Ibid

it is not surprising to find that Ilma spent many years of her life in public service as an advocate, volunteer, and author,⁴⁴⁰ roles she developed as the founder of the AYC. Joseph Cadden, upon leaving the AYC, served in the Army during World War II and upon his return, became active in the American Labor Party and worked with his long-time supporter, Vito Marcantonio. Later he was active in Henry A. Wallace's unsuccessful Presidential run in 1948.⁴⁴¹ Active involvement in the AYC instilled in these two individuals the importance of public service and social activism.

This dissertation supplements the evolving body of knowledge on the sociopolitical development of youth. The field of sociopolitical development is the understanding of the political, economic, cultural, and other systemic forces that shape society and one's status within it, and the associated process of growth in relevant knowledge, analytical skills, and emotional capacities.⁴⁴² As noted by Watts and Guessos (2006), sociopolitical development is the missing link in research and policy concerning youth, arguing that much of the relevant literature focuses on youth being *objects* of policy, rather than *actors* in the

⁴⁴⁰ Ilma, *A Political Virgin*

⁴⁴¹ Cook, "J.E. Cadden Dies"

⁴⁴² Pedro Neguara, Shawn A. Ginwright, and Julio Cammarota, Eds., *Beyond Resistance! Youth Activism and Community Change: New Democratic Possibilities for Practice and Policy for Americas Youth* (New York City: Routledge, 2006)

policy development process. There is a gap in the literature and what does exist, focuses heavily on individual, rather than collective action.⁴⁴³ Integrating youth activism in the 1930s and its influence on individual actors, specifically the AYC, into the dialogue on the developmental importance of participation in social activism expands the understanding of activism's influence on young people.

The dissertation also expands upon the historical literature about the 1930s, especially as it concerns the role of youth in American society. As noted by Keniston (1971), "...youthful opposition is not merely an interesting sociological phenomenon, but a political and historical force to be recon with."⁴⁴⁴ Much of the scholarly work on youth activism and impact of youth activism on educational and social development focuses heavily on political activities in the 1960s to the current day. In this regard, there is a need to consider more fully earlier movements as most studies focus on civic engagement and youth development because of activist experiences that occurred in

⁴⁴³ Roderick Watts and Omar Guessos, "Sociopolitical development: The missing link in research and policy on adolescents," in Pedro Neguara, Shawn A. Ginwright, and Julio Cammarota, Eds., *Beyond Resistance! Youth Activism and Community Change: New Democratic Possibilities for Practice and Policy for Americas Youth* (New York City: Routledge, 2006), 59-60.

⁴⁴⁴ Kenneth Keniston, *Youth and Dissent: The Rise of a New Opposition* (New York City: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1971), xi.

the past 40 years⁴⁴⁵. However, there is a growing, but significant, body of knowledge focusing on youth activism in the early 20th century, including the 1930s. The types of youth activism during this period can further expand this aspect of American history by delving into the issues and challenges facing young Americans and their approaches to addressing such problems. Additionally, it is important to note the differences in the life experiences of young adults during the 20th century, as the socio-political climate of each decade varied, creating different experiences for citizens. As noted by Magolda (1992), a student's way of knowing, or his or her worldview, is socially constructed and influenced by his or her interactions with peers, teachers, and members of the community.⁴⁴⁶ Therefore expanding upon the experiences of youth activists in the 1930's provides a richer understanding of activists' involvement in sociopolitical change throughout the 20th century and beyond.

Future Directions for Research

Peace, Freedom, and Progress: The American Youth Congress Movement, 1934 – 1940, can serve as the basis for future research

⁴⁴⁵ Robert Kunzman and David Tyak, "Educational Forums of the 1930s: An Experiment in Adult Civic Education," *American Journal of Education* 111, no. 3 (May, 2005): 320-40.

⁴⁴⁶ Magolda, M.B. *Knowing and reasoning in college: Gender-related patterns in students' intellectual development* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), 1992.

that can focus on youths' participation on shaping public policy, the influence of communist organizations on American youth in the early part of the 20th century, and the role sexism played in the early years of the AYC. As noted previously, there is a need for further research on youth activist groups' role in sociopolitical activities in America, specifically, their role in shaping public policy at the state and federal levels. The AYC was actively involved in lobbying Congress on a range of issues and pending legislation. However, what is not known is the group's specific influence in the amending, passage, or rescinding of legislation under consideration. For example, the AYC took special interest in the Fair Labor Standards Act, which addressed child labor issues, maximum workweek hours, and a federal minimum wage. The Act was passed in 1938; however, did the AYC's involvement in the vetting and committee process influence that actual legislation that became law? This question requires further study. Many labor laws that the AYC took an interest in passed during the 1930s, however, their role and influence in the passage of those pieces of legislation are not fully known.

Another area of the AYC's and youth activist's story that needs to be explored is the role that communist groups had in the indoctrination of American adolescents in the early part of the 20th century. This can add to the understanding of youth leaders who took

on specific roles in organizations like the AYC and why the communist ideology was so appealing to many. The Children Communist Program that was organized from the 1920s through the 1950s was coordinated by the CPUSA and the YCL. They established children's organizations, after-school programs, and summer camps with the aim of developing "revolutionary consciousness" in the minds of the youth.⁴⁴⁷

Participation on such organized activities may have influenced activist leaders like Gil Green, Joseph Cadden, or Jack McMichael. However, this is not known unless their upbringing is further explored as well as any possible contact they had with the Children Communist Program.

Finally, a review of literature shows little recognition of women's roles in the AYC. Consideration needs to be given as to whether this is as intentional historical oversight in an effort to devalue women as historical subjects or a reflection of a lack of women's involvement in the organization. Additionally, further exploration should occur as to why Viola Ilma was targeted by Gil Green's communist-led group and pushed out as leader. Although this research did not result in any confirming facts, Viola was accused of being a fascist given her interactions with various social and political leaders. The anti-fascism message was central to the communist ideology, so making such a claim would garner the support of those who followed Green and the

⁴⁴⁷ Mishler, *Raising Reds*, 38

YCL. However, was the character attack related to her assumed political affiliation or her gender? Two points should be considered in exploring this question. First, the young men who assumed primary leadership positions within the AYC were not necessarily supporters of the CPUSA or even affiliated with communist groups. Individuals like Jack McMichael and William Hinckley had liberal leanings, however, no more or less so than Viola. The Communist Party did advocate for women labor unions and worker rights in the 1920s and 1930s, however, this does not mean that it was free from entrenched sexist attitudes. Much of the writings by male communists and texts in communist newspapers like the *Daily Worker* had subtle sexist undertones and cartoons in the *Daily Worker* would often portray women in a derogatory manner.⁴⁴⁸ Therefore, it might be assumed that individuals like Gil Green also held those sexist viewpoints and therefore pushed out Ilma due to her gender, and not necessary her political viewpoints. Only further study could determine if this in fact was the case. Feminists have countered the issue of women being overlooked in historical texts and therefore coined the term 'herstory' by giving value to a perspective previously ignored and to insist on

⁴⁴⁸ Foley, Barbara. "Women and the Left in the 1930s." *American Literary History* 2, no. 1 (Spring, 1990): 150, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1300345020?accountid=13626>.

female agency in making history.⁴⁴⁹ Further research into the role of Viola and other women in the AYC can allow them their proper place in history.

Final Thoughts

The journey into the American Youth Congress and the lives of youth in the 1930s has been an enriching and surprising learning experience. As a student and educator, I have valued the role that young adults can play in the political process and the personal growth that can occur from these experiences. Delving more into this subject is a journey that I look forward to in the coming years. More importantly, I have learned about historical research during this process, an approach I did not anticipate using as I began my doctoral studies. I have found this form of research captivating as I delved into documents I felt as if I was being transported to another time. I have come to know some people during this process, and only wish I could have known them during their lifetime rather than through historical texts. However, I am honored to help write their history and share their stories with public today.

⁴⁴⁹ J. W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, Revised Edition. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 18-19.

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Appendix A

Declaration of Rights of American Youth

On the Fourth of July 159 years ago our forefathers declared their independence from despotic rule in order to realize their inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. —Today our lives are threatened by war; our liberties threatened by reactionary legislation; and our right to happiness remains illusory in a world of insecurity. —Therefore, on this Fourth day of July, 1935, we, the young People of America, in Congress assembled, announce our own declaration—A Declaration of the Rights of American Youth.

We declare that our generation is rightfully entitled to a useful, creative, and happy life, the guarantees of which are: full educational opportunities, steady employment at adequate wages, security in time of need, civil rights, religious freedom, and peace.

We Have a Right to Life

Yet we are threatened by wars that are even now being prepared by those who profit by destruction, wars from which we can reap nothing but misery, mutilation and death. We oppose this war and its trappings of militarized youth and mounting armaments. We do not want to die! We assert our right to peace and our determination to maintain peace.

We Have a Right to Liberty

In song and legend America has been exalted as a land of the free, a haven for the oppressed. Yet on every hand we see this freedom limited or destroyed. Progressive forces are persecuted. Minority nationalities are exposed to arbitrary deportation. The Negro people are subjected to constant abuse, discrimination and lynch laws. Workers who strike for a living wage are met with increasing violence. —These we affirm to be the omens of that modern tyranny, fascism. More brutal, more vicious and reactionary than even that against which our forefathers rebelled in 1776. —We are determined to realize in actuality the ideals of a free America. We demand not only the maintenance but the extension of our elementary rights of free speech, press and assemblage. We oppose company unions and affirm the right of workers to join labor unions of their own choosing in order to advance their economic interests. We consider full academic

freedom essential to progress and enlightenment. We strongly oppose fascism, with its accompanying demagoguery, as a complete negation of our right to liberty.

We Have a Right to Happiness

Our country with its natural resources and mighty industries can more than provide a life of security and comfort for all. But today we are not provided with this security, are not permitted to enjoy its comforts. We want to work, to produce, to build, but millions of us are forced to be idle. We graduate from schools and colleges, equipped for careers and professions, but there are no jobs. You can find us along the highways, or in army-supervised camps, isolated from friends and family. We refuse to be the lost generation.

We urge a system of unemployment and social insurance as an immediate improvement in the condition of unemployed youth and we affirm our right to be employed on all relief projects at equal wages for equal work.

We who are employed express our dissatisfaction with the prevailing low wages, long hours and the intense speed-up which destroys health and stunts our development. We insist upon our right to higher wages and shorter hours.

For the youth on the farms, the right to work means the right to security in the possession of their farms, free from the burden of debts. We stand unalterably opposed to any program which destroys crops and livestock while millions remain unfed and undernourished.

While we proclaim the right to work for ourselves, we also proclaim the right of freedom from toil for all children for whom labor can only mean physical and mental harm. We therefore demand the abolition of child labor with full and adequate maintenance for needy children. Our right to work includes the right of proper preparation for work.

Education must be available to everyone without discrimination, poor as well as rich, Negroes as well as white, through free scholarships and government aid to needy students. Our educational system should provide for vocational training at adequate wages, under trade union supervision

We declare that the workers of hand and brain, the producers of our wealth, the builders of our country are the decisive force with which all true friends of peace, freedom and progress must ally themselves. We recognize that we young people do not constitute a separate social group, but that our problems and aspirations are intimately bound up with those of all the people.

We look at this country of I ours. We love it dearly; we are its flesh and marrow. We have roamed its roads; we have camped in its mountains and forests; we have smelled its rich earth; we have tended its fields and dug its earthly treasures. We have toiled in it. Because we know it so well, we know that it could be a haven of peace, security and abundance for all. Because we love it so dearly, we demand that it be turned over to the working and farming people of America.

Therefore, we the young people of America, reaffirm our right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. With confidence we look forward to a better life, a larger liberty and freedom. To those ends we dedicate our lives, our intelligence and our unified strength.

Appendix B

Creed of the American Youth Congress

I dedicate myself to the service of my country and mankind.

I will uphold the American ideal, which is the democratic way of life. I will help assure its bounty to all races, creeds, and colors.

I will maintain my country, founded by men and women who sought a land where they could worship God in their own way, as a haven of the free conscience and the free religious spirit.

I will safeguard the heritage of industrial development, technical skill, natural resources and culture, which has made my country the inspiration for the youth of all lands, and I will use whatever talents I have to add to that heritage.

I will be a social pioneer, helping to forge new tools for an era in which education, the chance to make a decent living, the opportunity for health, recreation and culture will assure the fullest development to all.

I will respect and defend the Constitution, keystone of American liberties, which includes the Bill of Rights granting freedom of press, of speech and assemblage. I will seek progress only within the framework of the American system of government, which is founded on the principle that all political power is inherent in the people, and I will oppose all undemocratic tendencies and all forms of dictatorship.

I will help make the United States a force for peace and pledge that my patriotism will not be at the expense of other peoples and nations, but one that will contribute to the brotherhood of man.

I will not permit race prejudice, religious intolerance, or class hatred to divide me from other young people. I will work for the unity of my generation and place that united strength at the service of my country, which I will defend against all enemies.

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Appendix C

American Youth Congress Constitution

ARTICLE I

Name and Purpose

This organization to be known as the American Youth Congress is established as a non-profit, educational association to serve as a cooperating center and a clearinghouse for all youth organizations, youth-serving agencies, local, state and regional youth councils or assemblies, and organizations desiring to promote the welfare of youth.

ARTICLE II

Basis of Cooperation

Any national organization, independent regional organization, or any local, state, or regional youth council or assembly whose youth membership desires to cooperate in any one or more activities or projects of the Congress and to utilize its services may be a cooperating organization in the American Youth Congress.

ARTICLE III

National Congress

Section 1. The supreme governing body of the American Youth Congress shall be the National Congress which shall meet at least once every two years.

Section 2. The National Congress shall be composed of delegates from all youth and youth-serving organizations, youth-serving agencies, youth councils or assemblies, and organizations desiring to promote the welfare of youth, that cooperate with the American Youth Congress or desire to cooperate. The National Congress shall be governed by such rules of procedure as shall be adopted by the majority of the delegates.

Section 3. The findings of the National Congress shall guide the Cabinet of the American Youth Congress in developing activities and projects of the American Youth Congress.

ARTICLE IV
National Assembly

Section 1. One official representative from each cooperating organization (for definition: See Article II) and the members of the cabinet shall constitute the National Assembly. The assembly shall meet at least twice annually. It shall meet at a date set by the previous meeting of the Assembly, at the call of the Cabinet or must be called by the Cabinet upon the petition of five national operating organizations and five state youth councils.

Section 2. The Assembly shall review the work of the Cabinet, approve the budget for the coming fiscal year, and shall establish policies in accord with the findings of the National Congress. Its members shall regularly receive minutes of Cabinet meetings and shall be consulted on all matters of policy.

Section 3. The National Assembly shall be empowered to convene National Congresses, to establish qualifications for delegates and to recommend an order of business subject to approval by the National Congress.

ARTICLE V
Officers

Section 1. The officers of this organization shall be Chairman, seven Vice Chairmen, nine Regional Representatives (New England, Middle Atlantic, East Central, South (2), Southwest, West Central, West Coast, and Rocky Mountains), and Executive Secretary, Administrative Secretary, Organizational Secretary, a Recording Secretary and a Treasurer.

Section 2. An officer or Cabinet members may be suspended from office by a two-thirds vote of the National Council.

Section 3. Officers and Cabinet members shall be elected by the National Congress.

Section 4. The delegates to the National Congress from each region shall choose one person who shall be the candidate for Regional Representative from the region.

ARTICLE VI
Duties of Officers

Section 1. The duties of the chairman, vice chairmen, and regional representatives and the executive, administrative and

organizing secretaries shall be defined by the Cabinet subject to the ratification of the National Assembly.

Section 2. The recording secretary shall keep a correct record of all meetings of the American Youth Congress, of the National Assembly and of the Congress and shall perform other duties as may be assigned to him by the Chairman of the Congress.

Section 3. The treasurer shall be the custodian of all funds belonging to the American Youth Congress. He shall keep a true and accurate account of such funds only upon signed order by himself countersigned by either the executive secretary or the administrative secretary.

Section 4. The Cabinet shall bond the treasurer in such sum as it may designate. An audit of the treasurer's accounts shall be made by a certified public accountant, previously approved by the Cabinet for this purpose, immediately prior to each National Congress meeting.

Section 5. The treasurer shall make a full financial report at the request of the Cabinet and at all National Assemblies and the National Congress.

ARTICLE VII Cabinet

Section 1. In the interim between National Assembly meetings, the business of this organization shall be conducted by the Cabinet composed of the officers of the Congress and thirteen additional members at large, all elected by ballot by the National Congress to serve until [remaining text not included in archival copy].

Section 2. Vacancies occurring on the Cabinet shall be filled by the National Assembly, until the succeeding National Congress.

Section 3. The Cabinet shall meet regularly between meetings of the Assembly and shall be responsible for the realization of the policies established in the findings of the National Congress and the program formulated by the Assembly.

Section 4. The Cabinet shall be empowered to provide for the financial support of the Congress, and to hire such administrative personnel as it deems necessary, subject to the approval of the National Assembly.

Section 5. The Cabinet shall be empowered to establish such committees and commissions as it deems necessary to carry the program of the American Youth Congress into effect, subject to the approval of the National Assembly. It shall be empowered to establish regional boundaries for purpose of representation.

ARTICLE VIII
Advisory Board

Section 1. The Cabinet shall be empowered to establish an Advisory Board, the members of which shall be invited to aid in the work of the National Congress.

ARTICLE IX
Parliamentary Procedure

Section 1. The rules contained in Roberts Rules of Order (Revised) shall govern this organization in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are consistent with the Constitution of the American Youth Congress.

ARTICLE X
Amendments

Section 1. This Constitution may be amended by a majority vote of the National Congress.