

Fall 2010

THE RED LETTER

NEWSLETTER OF THE YOUNG DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS

YDS Summer Conference a Hit



August 2010 marked the third time Young Democratic Socialists (YDS) held its Socialist Summer Retreat in bucolic Wurtsboro, NY. This gathering of 40 YDS members included new members from South Carolina, Florida, and California and veterans from established chapters at the College of

Wooster (Ohio), William Paterson University (New Jersey), and Wichita State University (Kansas).

The conference began with a presentation called “Radical Feminism: Past and Future” by New American Movement and Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) veteran Peg Strobel and Liza Featherstone, contributing editor for *The Nation*. In her remarks, Strobel focused on the activities of the remarkable Chicago Women’s Liberation Union (CWLU), a socialist-feminist organization active in the 1970s. From fighting for abortion rights to supporting the struggle of black women janitors for better conditions at work, the activities of CWLU showed YDS members the historical importance and contemporary relevance of socialist feminism. Featherstone spoke about the recurring trend of writing off feminism as dead and how patriarchy (yes, even in the radical left) underscores the continued need for the advancement of women’s liberation. She also reminded young activists to make their groups comfortable environments for people of all genders.

After the plenary, YDS Feminist Issues Coordinator Kat Brausch handed out newly minted “Proud Socialist Feminist” buttons to the crowd and speakers. The buttons, a small step in YDS’s new emphasis on socialist feminist politics, were worn during small group discussions with Strobel and Featherstone. New recruit Liz Charpentier of Boston mentioned her own mother’s struggles with sexism and patriarchy in the corporate workforce. Her new contact with socialist feminism helped her understand how capitalism exacerbates forms of social oppression.

Finally, the conference concluded with a discussion of the 2010-2011 Activist Agenda, the organization’s national priorities for the upcoming academic year. Members proposed two campaigns – one for free public higher education and one for a “Blue-Green Action” campaign to enlist students in the fight for green jobs and energy creation. By a margin of one vote, the members decided to devote the national organization’s resources to working on both of them instead of just one.

At last year’s summer conference, YDS unanimously adopted a five-year strategic plan to guide the organization’s growth. In a plenary session and three small groups, the members identified a number of ways in which the organization lived up to the demands of the plan. We succeeded in creating a new website and producing more YDS apparel. This year’s conference was more diverse in terms of race and gender than previous conferences. Areas for growth and improvement remain, however. YDS needs to do more ideological education and skills-building at future conferences, such as trainings in phone banking and canvassing.

At every summer conference YDS elects its volunteer leadership, the Coordinating Committee (CC). This year, elections for positions on the CC were very competitive. The Anti-Racism Coordinator, Feminist Issues Coordinator, Corresponding Secretary, and At-Large positions all had two or more candidates. The newly elected CC will be headed by Sean Monahan of Philadelphia DSA and Amber Frost of Indiana-Bloomington YDS as the new Co-Chairs. The body will also experiment with at-large members serving as regional organizers working with the Co-Chairs and national organizer to build YDS in their surrounding areas. Sadly absent was Erik Rosenberg, the National Organizer from 2008 to 2010. Rosenberg could not attend because of a family trip. Incoming National Organizer Andrew Porter, one of the founders of the College of Wooster YDS chapter, was in attendance. Porter will begin his tenure after Labor Day.

***MORE CONFERENCE
COVERAGE INSIDE!***

Activist Agenda Explained

Blue-Green Action Campaign

YDS took a historic step in the ecological direction in voting for a “Blue-Green Action Campaign.” One of our first national commitments to protecting the environment, this Activist Agenda item aims for our organization to be the red (democratic socialist) in a forthcoming blue (union) and green (environmentalist) coalition. The Activist Agenda plan commits YDS to begin establishing local coalitions which simultaneously push eco-friendly retrofitting of campuses in conjunction with the creation of unionized jobs that conform to high labor standards.

One of the first steps of this Activist Agenda item will be organizing a “Blue-Green Action Campaign Day of Action” with future coalition partners. YDS will begin working with the Student Labor Action Project to seek out potential allies.

YDS voted to keep the *Red Letter* as it exists today as a quarterly newsletter for members and chapters. Voted down was the original proposal that called for the *Red Letter's* conversion into an annual report on the “Blue-Green Action Campaign.”

Free Higher Education

At the YDS Conference the Higher Education Campaign was one of two proposals YDS chose to work on for the upcoming year. This campaign can be a huge focus for YDS university chapters because it forces a dialogue between students and administrators about student debt and the ridiculous spikes in college tuitions. The YDS Activist Agenda plan has laid out options on how local chapters can get involved in this campaign.

October 2nd is a grassroots organized march in Washington D.C. that supports and promotes a more democratic economy and puts the pressure on for jobs. This march is a great opportunity for DSA and YDS locals to get involved on the national level because this is a critical issue hitting home in local communities. For the Higher Education Campaign, DSA is urging YDS and university chapters to join in solidarity too. Young people are gathering for a feeder march from the Department of Education to the general gathering. Students are accumulating massive debt and after graduating from universities are entering a work force that is on the decline. This rally is a great start to connect our campaign to other national coalitions.

On the heels of massive rallies in California against cuts in education on this past March 4th, a coalition has been started for a National Day of Action to Defend Public Education on October 7th (see page 3). This national event, endorsed by YDS and DSA, gives students a chance to make a giant impact on their campuses, and they will not be alone. Walk-outs, protests, and workshops explaining our Higher Education Campaign is a great opportunity to get voices heard for the YDS agenda.

New YDS Coordinating Committee

Co-chairs

Sean Monahan - Philadelphia DSA
Amber Frost - Central Indiana DSA

Anti-Racism Coordinator

Richard Hutchinson - William Paterson YDS

Feminist Issues Coordinator

Gina Eastwood - Indiana Bloomington YDS

Coalitions Coordinator

Will Emmons - Providence, RI

Corresponding Secretary

Isabel Anreus - William Paterson YDS

National Organizing Committee Facilitator

Jackie Sewell - Kansas University YDS OC

Regional Coordinators

David Rodgers - William Paterson YDS - Northeast

Justin Simons - LA Coalition YDS - West

Cecily McMillan - Lawrence University - South

Matt Porter - Wooster YDS - Great Lakes

At-Large

Sarah Gollwitzer - Central Ohio DSA

National Organizer

Andrew Porter - New York, NY

The YDS Coordinating Committee has a reserved spot for one more self-identified female. To apply for this spot, please contact yds@dsausa.org.



Upper Left: The YDS meets outside;
Lower Right: Group discussion on neoliberalism

Letter from YDS Co-Chairs

By Sean Monahan and Amber Frost

This has been an exceptionally tough year for young Americans. Tuition and debt shot up yet again, barely any of us have found decent jobs, health reform failed to guarantee us free coverage, the Gulf's now covered in a filthy film of flammable goo. In addition, states are making being an immigrant a punishable offense, the wars in the Middle East drag on with death tolls mounting, and the banks still haven't given our bailout money back.

In times like these, it's so easy to feel like we have no control over our lives. But this summer, forty young organizers came from all parts of the country to a retreat in the Catskill Mountains to talk about something else: democratic socialism. We talked about the movement, the rebellion against the corruption and greed that rules this country, taking shape under the banners of immigrant rights, student rights, women's rights, human rights, and seemingly growing stronger every day. At the conclusion of this tremendous conference, YDS elected our new Coordinating Committee and we're already on the ground and running.

Among the two adopted campaigns for the year, Co-Chair Amber Frost will be coordinating the Free Higher Education Campaign. YDS has already formally endorsed the October 7th Strike and Day for Public Education, and we will continue to educate, agitate and organize ourselves and our peers leading up to the action in the spring of 2011, which no doubt will build upon the impressive walkouts of March 4th, 2010. Recognizing that the defunding of colleges and universities effects our entire generation, as well as the entire economy, YDS sees the October 7th actions as the first of many in a larger movement to make all education a human right.

YDS also took a historic step by declaring that not only education, but also labor and nature are not commodities for trade on the market. Co-Chair Sean Monahan will be heading the Blue-Green Action Campaign, joining the causes of environmentalism and unionism in rebelling against the capitalist atrocities of the enclosure of the commons and the dehumanization of labor. The prospects for our chapters' work on education, labor and the environment are exciting to say the least. With the momentum of a newly energized base of activists, a fresh wave of budding chapters, and a deepening of the solidarity with our cherished coalition partners in struggle, we are poised to become an increasingly vibrant and organized force for justice and democracy among young Americans. The next year will be an exciting one; we just need to begin to fight like our freedom is on the line.

After all, it is.

**THE
ACTIVIST**.ORG
culture, consciousness, critical thought

**ONE NATION WORKING TOGETHER:
10/2/10 March in DC!**

As the unemployment rate promises to remain high for the foreseeable future, the need for a government spending program to create jobs becomes more urgent. Many students face a bleak job market after graduation, so expanding jobs for today's workers ensures a better future for today's youth.

The Tea Partiers and deficit hawks in both parties have so far been successful in blocking the government spending we need to address the jobs crisis. But YDS and Democratic Socialists of America are ready to revitalize the dormant movement that elected Obama to force the politicians into taking action. We will march in Washington, D.C. on October 2nd to demand the change we voted for!

**DSA and YDS specific details will follow.
Check out the One Nation website today!**

<http://www.onenationworkingtogether.org>

**National Day of Action to
Defend Public Education: 10/7/10**

Inspired by the massive student protests and walkouts that happened on college and high school campuses around the country on March 4th, a new coalition of progressive student and youth activists have called for national actions to defend public education on October 7th. This decentralized effort will unite local efforts against the huge cuts in education spending occurring in almost all states and cities. Unless politicians are forced otherwise by a militant movement willing to take to the streets, they will continue to cut education and public services to the bone.

YDS encourages our chapters to officially endorse this day of action through the coalition's website: www.defendededucation.org.

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YDS Chapters and Organizing Committees

College of Wooster (Ohio) - Last year, the chapter was victorious in having their school apparel go sweat shop-free (through affiliation with the Worker Rights Consortium). This victory came right at the end of last semester, so they'll need to build up momentum again to start dealing with the logistical aspects of that affiliation. Wooster YDS is planning on going on their annual trip to the School of Americas protest in November with several other campus groups. As well, they'll be sending members to the One Nation March in Washington D.C. on October 2nd. They will be working on recruitment, and increasing Socialist education this year, both within chapter and the campus community.

Los Angeles - The LA YDS coalition is currently starting chapters at CSU-Fullerton, Long Beach Community College, and Moorpark College. The Local is planning a lecture about socialism and how it relates to higher education at Moorpark College on October 12th; they are also having the same lecture at UCLA with SDS. They plan on protesting for the One Nation solidarity march on October 2nd in and around city hall, and also on October 7th for the National Day of Action to Defend Public Education on the UCLA campus.

Wichita State - Wichita State began its semester with an Ice Cream Social and tabling. They'll be partnering with Wichita State's Ulrich Art Museum on an exhibit called "Hindsight is Always 20/20." The exhibit encompasses a photo gallery and a panel of local political figures. The photo gallery consists of an installation of 43 prints that artist R. Luke DuBois took, based on the State of the Union addresses from each U.S. president. He created an algorithm that sorted the addresses by word frequency. The prints present each president's most frequently uttered words as a Snellen chart — the charts used by optometrists to test patients' vision. *Hindsight* yields insights into the power of political rhetoric and offers a historical perspective on current politics.

Temple - After getting over 200 signatures at the campus fair, the Temple Democratic Socialists are planning a workshop on student debt.

Indiana - New chapter leaders Ryan Briles and Ben Horvath are tabling and getting ready for local actions around October 7th. Chapter activists Amber Frost and Gina Eastwood currently sit on the YDS Coordinating Committee (see page 2).

William Paterson - The chapter is planning a bus trip down to Washington DC for October 2nd, and plan on having another successful protest on October 7th in the defense of Higher Education. They also want to focus on recruitment and education this semester by repeating their last term's successful group on socialist theory. Also, they have not forgotten the anti-Sodexo campaign from last semester and they hope to continue their involvement with the efforts of the staff workers to build a stronger union presence at WPU. In order to bring a socialist presence beyond the student community, the WPU students are also trying to build a DSA chapter whose membership will encompass the whole WPU community, including employees at the school.

Valencia OC (Florida) - This new group plans on working around farm worker rights in the Sunshine State. Their first meeting is Wednesday, September 15th at 1 PM.

Rutgers University OC (New Jersey) - Former YDS Co-Chair Flavio Hickel Jr. and new member Andrew Foltz-Morrison are hosting a September 14th meeting with YDS Organizer Andrew Porter and William Paterson YDS president Hilary Weitze.

Kansas University OC - Jackie Sewell, YDS National Organizing Committee Facilitator, is building her own organizing committee with her new classmates after transferring from Wichita State. Her nascent YDS group plans on working around the Activist Agenda items of Free Higher Education and the Blue-Green Alliance.

Sam Houston State University - This new YDS chapter recently affiliated after being an independent socialist group. Under the leadership of Andrew Wang, the group is both recruiting on the campus and in the community for new members.

Penn State - This new YDS group voted to focus their energies on supporting the immigrant rights movement. They also plan to do actions in support of the "Free Higher Education" Activist Agenda Item.

Regional Organizing - The summer conference initiated a new regional organizing focus. Regional organizers have received interest in forming chapters around the country. Chapter applications have been received from Wright State University in Ohio, University of Tulsa, and University of Nebraska-Kearney.

Late news story: It's come to the *Red Letter* editors attention that the Tea Party Patriots, citing the Summer issue, have portrayed YDS as a force of "destruction" for our support of "universal healthcare, free education, to name a few." Check the full story out here: <http://www.teapartypatriots.org/BlogPostView.aspx?id=debb76fd-5d15-400e-9ce3-40b7ff69dae6>

Keep reading the socialist newsletter that's got the Tea-baggers running scared!

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