



**Communist Party USA  
29th National Convention  
May 21-23, 2010  
New York City**

*Convention Discussion Document*

# ***New Opportunities to Grow the Communist Party***

*This document is meant to provide a framework to stimulate discussion and action during the pre-convention period, to help us think boldly and freshly on growing the Party, YCL and People's World/Mundo Popular, Political Affairs and Dynamic given the changing political landscape.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The CPUSA and YCL are necessary and indispensable organizations to the US working class and people, for their economic and social advancement and eventual attainment of socialism.

The 90-year history of the CPUSA and 85-year history of the YCL attest to this. Despite ruling class efforts, Communists are integral to the political, social and cultural fabric of our country. We have a great tradition of being on the political cutting edge and making invaluable contributions to the fight for unity, equality, democracy, worker rights, international solidarity, peace and socialism.

Also indispensable to the working class and people's movement is the People's World/Mundo Popular, which celebrates 86 years as a ground breaking Marxist news and opinion source. The PW/MP has launched a new era of multi-media online bi-lingual Marxist working class journalist activism. The PW/MP's stature is growing among labor, civil rights, peace and environmental and other movements.

The Party and YCL have changed and grown since the last National Convention, adjusted our strategic outlook, refined tactics, deepened activity, expanded relations, struggled to overcome sectarianism and deepen our understanding of our role, our vision of Socialism USA and path to it.

But we're still hampered by ideas and ways of working ill fitted for the new times, which prevent us from being more effective, moving forward and growing faster.

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## ROLE OF THE CPUSA

We are a vital part of the labor-led all people's movement and share the aspirations and love of country of the US people. We're engaged in the immediate struggles, the Obama legislative agenda and efforts to define the direction of the administration, the reform process and consolidation of the 2008 election defeat of the ultra right.

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But the Party and YCL are also unique because of our ability to see the bigger picture, project a strategic outlook, assess the balance of class and social forces, identify the stages of struggle and the necessary forces that must be assembled to advance the entire struggle forward and help unfold the tactics to do it.

The Party and YCL bring the most developed vision of socialism for the US reality and the democratic path there, beginning with the fight to extend and deepen any reforms in an anti-monopoly direction.

We're part of building social movements especially at the grassroots, the organizations of the working class and core forces and bringing them to leadership at every level. We're part of building unity of the all people's coalition, which elected Obama, strengthening the influence of the working class and core forces within it and deepening working class, left and socialist consciousness.

## ROLE OF THE YCL

The young generation is part of the core forces along with the working class, the African American, Latino and other nationally and racially oppressed communities and women. The YCL is an integral part of youth and student movement, the young generation overall, and the all people's coalition.

However, the YCL also has a special role to play building unity among the young generation and with the core forces. This is a responsibility of both the YCL and Party.

The YCL is a schoolhouse of struggle and learning Marxism, developing socialist consciousness and lifelong working class partisans among youth and new members to the Party.

The shifts in thinking of the young generation shaped by their material reality, their greater openness to progressive and socialist ideas means it is possible for the YCL to grow faster than the Party.

## URGENT NECESSITY TO GROW — EVERY MEMBER'S RESPONSIBILITY

The process of growing the movements includes simultaneously growing the CPUSA and YCL. This gives meaning to Marx and Engel's phrase in the Communist Manifesto about the role of communists, "in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement."

Growing the CPUSA and YCL are necessary to moving to more advanced stages of struggle on the road to socialism. Each stage is more complex requiring a bigger more politically seasoned and influential CPUSA and YCL. Navigating the path to working class power and constructing socialism is not possible without a mass communist party.

We are not engaged in effective communist mass work unless each member also builds the Party, YCL and our publications in those movements. We need an atmosphere where every member sees this as an urgent necessity and a primary political task along side building the movements. We need an atmosphere where every member is confident and excited this can be done.

## NEW CONDITIONS, NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW

The work of the Party and YCL unfolds as we enter a political transition period, as the working class and core forces struggle to consolidate the defeat of the ultra right, define the direction of the Obama administration and during the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. This new era offers great challenges to our leadership at every level.

This period provides the most favorable atmosphere for our ideas and potential for growth in 40 years. The thinking of millions is undergoing dramatic shifts including deepening anti-corporate sentiments illustrated by the popularity of Michael Moore's new movie, "Capitalism: a love story." The economic crisis has shaken confidence in capitalism and its ability to provide a decent life and future. While it is still a powerful and dangerous force, many of the ideas of the extreme right wing have been discredited.

A recent Rasmussen Poll revealed 20% of the American people (perhaps 50 million) think socialism is a superior system to capitalism, another 27% aren't sure which is better and 45% of youth think socialism offers a better future.

We need an accurate estimate of the influence of anti-communism. What effect do the virulent right wing attacks on Obama using anti-communism have on political discourse and the administration's ability to advance a reform agenda? What effect did anti-communism have on the narrow loss of Rick Nagin who still got 46% of the vote in his campaign for Cleveland city council?

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There is also a growing interest in what the CPUSA and YCL have to say, including recent media and campus appearances, interest in our publications, openness to participation in coalitions, conferences, etc.

Our challenge is to convey in a popular way our vision of “Bill of Rights” socialism to the American people, and especially the 20% who think socialism is superior. Our challenge is to help foster a wider discussion of socialism for the US reality and how to get there.

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## **GROWING A 21ST CENTURY CPUSA AND YCL**

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Our challenge is to build a modern 21st century revolutionary working class party, an outlook based on scientific socialism and rooted in the multi racial working class and core forces reflecting the best of US democratic and revolutionary traditions; that utilizes modern means of communication and organizing.

We are in the midst of an exciting transition to move our work online, to base our Party and YCL on the Internet. The revolution in mass communications, the Internet and social networking is transforming all organizations, political and electoral campaign and movements and their ability to share their ideas, mobilize people and raise money, including at the grassroots. It is revolutionizing how we function, engage our members and the American people.

Youth are especially being shaped by this new reality. They have entirely new ways of engaging one another, organization and involvement. A substantial section of new Party and YCL members joined on line and the new means of communication are second nature to them.

The new mass communications are developing with blinding speed and allow us to speak to and interact with millions. The means of communications are being democratized in a way that makes it possible to communicate with large numbers relatively inexpensively. It allows us to more effectively engage in the “battle of ideas” with the corporate mass media in real time.

The decision to fully go online with the People’s World/Mundo Popular, Political Affairs and Dynamic reflects our grasp of this revolution. We are taking steps to restructure work at all levels; develop a new culture so the entire membership masters the new forms of communications, engagement and interaction.

The new forms of communication do not replace face-to-face contact. They are the most advanced organizing and communication tools at our disposal. They actually enhance face-to-face work, lead to greater human interaction, community building and visa versa.

The new tools empower individual members, amplify their voice and allow for greater initiative and action. Every member and club can analyze and report on local political developments using the multi-media tools for the PW/MP and other social networking sites sharing them instantly with thousands.

It allows every club to build a grassroots constituency – assembling email lists that can grow into hundreds, developing community rooted web, Facebook and Myspace pages, twitter accounts, online radio shows, etc. Our clubs and members can interact with hundreds at little cost.

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## **PEOPLE'S WORLD/MUNDO POPULAR**

The PW/MP is a voice and mobilizing tool of the working class and core forces, of the labor led people's coalition, especially its grassroots expression. It is also the voice of the Party and YCL, our primary relationship builder, the central mobilizing, organizing and educating tool, updating Lenin's idea in the age of the Internet revolution.

The Internet unites the work of the Party and PW/MP with the broad movement. The new web tools help us influence and engage at the grassroots on a daily basis in the "battle of ideas."

We have a powerful tool in the Spanish language Mundo Popular. It is unique to our country and expands our reach and influence.

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Where possible, districts should establish Bureaus, or groups of party and non-party writers and videographers for the PW/NM who will cover local developments. Where feasible, local print editions may help in developing "face to face" contact aiding in recruitment, activity and sustainability of membership. An ongoing challenge is to transition to online work, including ensuring every reader and former subscriber to the PW/MP print edition is getting the daily email alerts.

## **POLITICAL AFFAIRS**

Important, meaningful changes in our country's politics under Obama today suggest a greater, not lesser, need for rigorous but popular theoretical work. Fundamental questions about our strategic policy, tactics and relationship to others are ongoing subjects for analysis. In addition, discussion and analysis of the current stage of capitalism, the class nature of contemporary issues from health care to climate change, developments on the struggle against racism, women's and LGBT equality and other central democratic questions remain vital to PA's work.

When PA made the transition to online publishing only, PA stated its main goal was to develop a broad community of Marxist ideas online, using new information technologies to build that community. PA also has an important role to play in the educational life of the Party and YCL.

## **ROOTING THE PARTY AND YCL IN ACTION; TAKING STEPS TO GROW**

If what we say is true and we are in the mist of a new wave of political activism not seen in 40 years, of a new interest in socialist ideas, if we have great politics, the best understanding of strategy and tactics; then why haven't we grown significantly membership wise?

There is no reason why every club cannot at minimum experience incremental growth among family, friends and co-workers. If sustained, such growth will transform the Party and YCL. And is it possible, that instead of incremental growth, we could be experiencing far faster growth? What's holding up people from joining? What are objective factors including the level of the class struggle, the relationship of the Party to it and our ties to the grassroots?

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## *What ideological and political obstacles are there in the thinking of our members that prevent recruitment?*

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Have we fully overcome the “mentality of marginalization”? Are we hampered by sectarianism? Do we take advantage of open doors and are we swimming with broad class and social currents?

And what are subjective factors in people's consciousness, including the influence of anti-communism both in the movement and on us? What is the level of the radicalization process and is it sufficient at this stage for a mass CPUSA and YCL?

What ideological and political obstacles are there in the thinking of our members that prevent recruitment? What is the level of understanding in the Party and YCL of our necessity and special role?

This should be the starting point for a frank and honest discussion on each district's approach to recruitment and member retention, which should result in moving it higher on everyone's priority list.

Good political work will not automatically result in growth and recruitment. It requires our actions and initiatives in political, economic and theoretical struggles be coupled with a clear methodology on recruitment based on each district and club's reality.

Party and YCL growth takes day-to-day focus and concrete steps. There are neither blueprints nor “get rich quick schemes.” But we can't simply repeat the same practices, which have yielded little if any growth and anticipate different results. It means “thinking outside the box,” with new ideas and approaches and sharing best practices.

Our aim is to give special attention to growing among the working class, African American, Latino and other communities of color, women and youth. Our work must be rooted here, engaged with people in struggle, around their daily concerns.

How well connected to everyday struggles, especially the economic crisis, are our clubs? How connected are we to the main activists and organizations?

Our clubs must be in the forefront of action and initiative on the economic crisis, rooted in struggles for jobs and immediate relief, health care, ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, greening and demilitarizing our economy, passage of financial and immigration reform, and EFCA.



We must respond to the everyday needs of communities, workplaces and campuses and what others are prepared to struggle on: helping initiate action with neighbors on home foreclosures, food banks, shelters, keeping open schools, libraries, etc.

It means being grounded in the coalitions around the 2010 elections to defeat attempts by the ultra right to regain power and help shift the legislative balance of forces in a more progressive direction.

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## **GRASSROOTS CENTERS OF ACTION, UNITY, EDUCATION, SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND CULTURE**

Joining the CPUSA and YCL are not points of entry, but points of destination. Our first objective has to be to multiply the number and variety of relationships with activists around us. We need to allow others to develop a “comfort” level with us, provide space to break down barriers, fears and misconceptions and for working closely together.

The primary place for this is in struggle and coalition. But there are also temporary or transition forms that allow others to become familiar with us: readers and writers for our publications, political and social events, Marxist study groups, individual meetings, etc. Multiple forms are needed because many clubs are weak, isolated, function inconsistently and not yet inspiring places to bring interested people to.

If anything the fight over health care reform has taught us the balance of forces needs to be strengthened in favor of the working class, especially at the grassroots. This underscores the need for political grassroots centers or action, that can engage and help organize millions.

We have a variety of valuable club experiences and its fair to say there are no models. The grassroots club, at its best with a neighborhood or workplace focus makes a real difference in the lives of people. It is a learning center for applying necessary tactics to implement our unity strategy and a place to draw lessons from the implementation of education on the issues.

As the right wing becomes more desperate it resorts to fear, to the “big lie,” and seeks to divide the labor led people’s coalition (e.g., the costs of the public option). Being able to reach out to the club constituency with a working class analysis is critical to waging the “battle of ideas” at the grassroots.

Grassroots club participation in mass struggle provides strength to those in the labor led people’s movement fighting for unity. Although many will agree with the need for unity, our experience shows certain situations may force specific elements to move away from unity for their own particular interest.

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The ability of the neighborhood club to work through these problems on the local level and to spread this to its broader constituency can be decisive. Door to door neighborhood work is a method of knowing the problems in the neighborhood or shop and responding with voter registration, get out the vote, mobilization on issues and the ability to make the difference in a close election or field a candidate.

Clubs are centers for building electoral coalitions. Voting blocs formed by the concentration club, events that focus on unity sponsored by a large grass roots club or districts that have won the respect of many elements of the labor led people's coalition through the clubs physical presence at particular actions of these different elements can be a force for unity.

*To fully take advantage of our new environment we have to not only think outside the box with fresh ideas, but to test them.*

A club that insures that its members attend actions sponsored by a broad array of the labor led people's coalition can win the confidence of many that could in turn help in questions of unity.

Our clubs should be the "destination" for those who seek higher levels of commitment in the struggle. They provide a context for their education, action and social solidarity needs. These comrades focused on unity in the struggle are not only needed by the party but by the broader movement as well.

### **THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX**

In developing plans to grow each district should determine its strengths including membership talents, interest, where comrades are active and their circles of influence. It's especially important to get to know and socialize with the new members, and find out how they see making a contribution to our work.

To fully take advantage of our new environment we have to not only think outside the box with fresh ideas, but to test them.

We can't be locked into the way we've done things, especially given the communications revolution, which is changing how people engage and interact. We can't try to artificially fit people into our model, nor "fit round pegs in square holes." We should adapt ourselves to the developing broad social practice and today's realities of working class life.

We need to find new forms that promote member (and non-member) participation and inclusion, and encourage and promote their ideas and initiatives. We should consider creating transition forms that promote involvement based on task, issue and interest.

Here are some key areas of emphasis:

- 1. Education - essential to long term recruitment and retention:**
  - Study groups, classes, and seminars (at local homes or centers)



- **The National Education Commission has study guides; districts should begin developing local teachers.**
  - **Webinars and online Marxist discussions and classes that reach a larger audience and for state organizations and membership in areas where no club exists.**
  - **Our teaching of Marxism must be rooted in reality.**
- 2. More public Party/YCL events:**
    - **Find fresh new ways to present our message and ourselves.**
    - **Emphasize what we are for and less of what we are against.**
  - 3. More actions - political and cultural:**
    - **Form structures that promote action and engage people with a variety of interests and levels of understanding, i.e. healthcare reform committee, progressive artist collective, poetry slams, mural art projects.**
    - **These collectives should primarily be based on local membership' talents and interest**
  - 4. Explore and master the use of the Internet and social media:**
    - **Find new ways to express our vision and our ideas using the Internet**
    - **Develop local video collectives**
    - **Develop online clubs and utilize social networking sites**

Questions that should be asked when developing projects or activities:

- 1. Will this activity bring in new people other than our usual circle of supporters?**
- 2. Does this activity encourage people to get involved? i.e. sign a petition attend city council or meet with a congressperson, write a letter to the editor, etc.**
- 3. Does it motivate people to come back and bring a friend?**
- 4. Does it raise consciousness?**

## **CPUSA AND YCL UNITED IN ACTION AND IDEOLOGY**

Unity of ideology and action between the CPUSA and the YCL packs power and helps grow both. The Party and YCL need to do everything to strengthen unity and be the “champion of each other’s cause.”

The Party needs to take special steps to help build the YCL. The Party can’t assume just because there are YCLers in its area or an YCL club exists, it can do without attention and political mentoring, concern about the personal lives and the political and educational development of young comrades. The YCL needs hands on attention.

Direct contact by the Party with YCLers will lead to higher membership retention. This illustrates the special responsibility of the districts and clubs to foster ways where the YCL

membership and Party can work jointly together around political struggle and organizational events. We should participate in activities where we are seen together.

There needs to be much more engagement and a back and forth relationship. The YCL brings fresh approaches and new ways of doing things, which the Party can learn a lot from. And the YCL can learn from the political, strategic and tactical experience of the Party, as well as the treasure house of Marxism.

Organizing educational opportunities with the YCL are urgently needed. Youth are hungry to learn, especially Marxism, to discuss socialism and the path to it.

At the national level, steps need to be taken as finances permit, to reestablish a full time YCL staff. YCL leaders should continue to be part of national policy discussions and the Party should invite YCL party members to be part of leadership collectives at all levels.

At the local level, each functioning Party district should assign a solid comrade to serve as advisor or mentor to local YCL group. Party members should be a political and organizational resource for the YCL.

## CONCLUSION

The period ahead should challenge us to think and act boldly, tap changing popular attitudes, stretch our imagination and test new ways to working. It can be a period of rich experience in growing our Party, YCL, People's World/Mundo Popular, PA, Dynamic and the movements for change.

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This is one of four official discussion documents issued by the National Committee of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) to engage party members, allies, friends and the public in a discussion of the issues of the day leading up to its 29th National Convention, May 21-23, 2010.

CPUSA members, bodies and collectives are encouraged to submit responses, essays, papers and other contributions to the discussion in order to help determine party policy going forward from the Convention. Submissions may be emailed to [discussion2010@cpusa.org](mailto:discussion2010@cpusa.org) or mailed to

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For the full Convention Discussion rules and guidelines, please visit [www.cpusa.org/convention-discussion-2010](http://www.cpusa.org/convention-discussion-2010).

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