

Resolution

R23. Building Campus Consciousness, Democracy, and Militancy through Student Unions

Sponsor: **Megan C**, *Virginia Tech*

Co-Sponsors: **Michael R**, *New York University*

Margot G, *Columbia University*

Ben N, *Cal Poly Pomona*

Carlos C, *Cal Poly Pomona*

Allen D, *Texas State University*

Ali N, *San Francisco State University*

Char B, *San Francisco State University*

Carson M, *Columbia University*

Charlie M, *Brooklyn College*

WHEREAS, college and university campuses are sites of struggle between students and faculty against university bureaucrats. These struggles have the potential to radicalize masses of young people around the country, engaging them in class struggle and creating potential future socialists; and

WHEREAS, in the 2024 YDSA Convention, “R21. Building Militant and Democratic student unions on College Campuses” passed with 91%, charging the NCC to identify five schools in the next 3 years, provide NCC support, and establish mentorship committees for each of the campuses; and

WHEREAS, coalition strategies have clear limitations in their ability to engage and politicize the masses. The top-down model inherent to coalitions leaves most of the organizing and decision-making to activists, who spend most of the time organizing each other rather than their classmates; and

WHEREAS, engaging in external organizations like labor unions, where bottom-up organizing is prioritized, has grown YDSA chapters such as University of Oregon YDSA, achieving our goals of building our socialist project and YDSA as an organization. Student unions can be a similar avenue to these goals; and

WHEREAS, student unions are years-long base-building projects that will require the dedication and militancy of socialist organizers, as well as a healthy YDSA that can politicize the struggles of the student union; and

WHEREAS, so far, no campus coalition or YDSA chapter has organized department-level organization that functionally built relationships with our classmates and brought them into the supporter or activist layers of a campaign; and

WHEREAS, the student movement for Palestine, where widespread divestment was not achieved, taught us that in order to counterbalance the massive amounts of pressure that

reactionary capital, university donors and politicians put on our universities in order to uphold their complicity in US Imperialism, oppression and exploitation, we must mobilize and organize beyond the existing activist layers. In order to do this, we must engage in tactics which are oriented externally towards the supporter and apathetic layers of our campuses, instead of repeatedly burning out our activist layers through higher tactics such as encampments or occupations without the necessary support of a mass movement of students and workers; and

WHEREAS, not every YDSA chapter, due to chapter capacity, health, or organizing conditions, has the means to create successful student unions, and measured steps need to be taken in organizing them; and

WHEREAS, San Francisco State University students successfully won divestment through organizing through a student union in a democratic, open bargaining process; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Tech Students' United Front organized the largest protest in Virginia Tech's history, with thousands of students, successfully plugging in non-engaged students into sanctuary campus organizing. This organizing has also contributed significantly to the growth of their YDSA chapter; and

WHEREAS, the Columbia University student union has mobilized hundreds of students to organizing meetings even with the state of repression on its campus; and

WHEREAS, militant student unions in Quebec have successfully mobilized hundreds of thousands in the past for student strikes, stopping planned tuition hikes, and mobilized 80k for a student strike at the height of the student movement for Palestine, successfully pulling in the broadest layers of students to their cause; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, YDSA recognizes the need to create militant and democratic student unions that are open to broad layers of students and recommits itself to creating them; and

RESOLVED, YDSA recognizes the need to take on dynamic organizing tactics that lend themselves to longer-term organizing beyond a year or semester-long timeline. In order to fight back against increasing attacks on education, organizing, and our communities, we must build an increasingly mobilized mass movement that will ensure continuity in organizing and institutional knowledge that cannot be built on small timelines. In order to change the balance of our universities, we must be ambitious, think big, and start building movements that continue and plan beyond current student organizers. Organizing student unions could serve as one of the primary avenues of this, but not the only one; and

RESOLVED, The YDSA NCC will continue identifying five campuses with healthy YDSA chapters with the potential to create student unions within the next 2 years, as prescribed by 2024 R21., taking into consideration chapters already successfully organizing student unions. The factors that could be taken into account when identifying could be:

- Size and development of YDSA Chapter

- Success of recent YDSA/Student pressure campaigns
- Political consciousness of students on campus
- The location of the YDSA chapter
- Existing activist organizations
- Power and credibility of current student government; and

RESOLVED, YDSA will create comprehensive political education resources about student unions tasked by NCC members and created by chapters and members that are engaging in student union organizing, including a national political education event about student unions, doing its best to also include speakers from international student union efforts in the event. Political education resources may include:

- Pamphlets
- Handbooks
- Articles
- Reading Lists
- Presentations
- A module in the Socialism 101 curriculum; and

RESOLVED, the NCC will work to support these chapters through:

- 1:1 mentorship
- Political education resources
- Communications support
- In-person visits from NCC member(s)
- Meetings with chapter leadership to generate buy-in and work with chapter leaders to bring a proposal to rank-and-file YDSA chapter members; and

RESOLVED, the NCC will attempt to connect students doing student union work through avenues like group chats and joint meetings; and

RESOLVED, summaries of these efforts to identify campuses and support chapters organizing student unions should be publicized to YDSA membership in a manner that the NCC chooses, and a report with input from those organizing student unions should be presented at the next YDSA convention.

Work Plan

Building Campus Consciousness, Democracy, and Militancy through Student Unions Work Plan

Introductory Summary

YDSA will recommit to the student union project and recognize that there is a need for longer-term organizing efforts beyond a semester or year campaign timeline in order to radically change the nature of our universities. This will involve some work from the NCC with mentorship, identifying ideal sites for student unions, and creating political education materials for those engaged in student union efforts.

Intended Outcomes: Success vs. Failure

This campaign will be considered a success if students start to engage in organizing student unions that are able to recruit beyond the activist layers that use efforts like classroom organizing and more systematic labor-style organizing efforts. NCC members should mentor and guide these efforts, as well as task students involved with creating political education material. NCC members should try to identify and encourage two more schools to take on student union efforts this year. Effort needs to be placed on making sure that organizers do not rush into this work and that they start with a plan.

Capacity

This requires some additional capacity from NCC members, but mostly falls in line with regular mentorship expectations. Additional work would go into identifying schools, creating summaries, and tasking members to create political education material. Creating political education material might require some coordination with YPEC, but will primarily rely on the efforts of students doing student union organizing.

Recruitment & Retention

This effort will help the recruitment of chapters engaged in student union work, as the student union becomes a recruiting ground for potential socialists in and of itself. Emphasis on organizing inside the classroom and the strike will focus efforts that these student unions tend to take on, and will also lend itself to more ambitious recruitment efforts.

Timeline

Within one month of convention: Connect with the schools that are doing student union work and debrief with them. Find out what support they need and what political education material they might want to create.

During the fall: Make groupchats and connect students who are doing student union work with each other. Task members to take on political education material.

Throughout the whole year: NCC members will regularly assess and mentor chapters and students who are taking on student union work. If members express interest in student union work, connect them with students who are already doing student union work. Look for times to schedule a potential national call on student unions.

Winter Conference: Leadership from these networks would be encouraged to attend winter conference to share and discuss the progress and achievements they've made via a workshop.

During the spring: The NCC will assess and identify more schools to take on student union efforts, keeping in mind what conditions and what organizing have worked best.

During the summer: Create a report with those who have done student union organizing to present at the summer convention. Finalize identification of schools required to fit within the timeline.

Open Questions

Does it seem like more than five schools can take on these efforts? What other longer-term organizing projects can YDSA take on?