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September 28, 1965

YOUNG AMERICA: LOOKING AHEAD TO 1966

Many people on the left are reaching the conclusion that the time has come for independent political action to offer the people of America a radical alternative to present government policies, both foreign and domestic.

It is commonly agreed that to achieve political power a broader base, of individuals if not organizations, must be established and that perhaps a comprehensive political program itself is a way to develop this base, as well as to provide a firm link between the interrelated peace and civil rights movements.

Coincident with this need is a source of strength, in the burgeoning enthusiasm among American youth. The purpose of Young America would be to utilize this enthusiasm in effective political action - providing all those involved with valuable political education and at the same time by bringing Southern Negroes North to participate it would create a dramatic and profound unity between Northern and Southern movements as well as offer an opportunity for all to learn by close contact with new situations and people.

The basic plan of Young America is to choose about four or five congressional districts which by virtue of the blatant inability of the present system to solve their problems seem particularly receptive to a radical alternative. (The emphasis would be on congressional primaries because these offer the best forums for a broad platform of national and international issues; this does not preclude involvement in local election campaigns). After selecting these districts and finding suitable candidates, YA, rather than attempting the organizationally improbable and financially impossible task of developing an indigenous party organization in a short period of time, would bring in its own "party organization" of approximately 300 full time volunteers about a month before the primary election. This manpower would solve the primary (excuse me) difficulty of running a campaign and in all probability provide the YA candidate with a distinct organizational advantage.

The YA volunteers would live in the community and do intensive canvassing of the entire district, asking people for their complaints and solutions and then suggest the relevance of issues like civil rights and Vietnam which might not have been offered, as well as some answers such as participatory democracy and a planned economy which the people may have considered but not articulated in a well formulated platform. The canvasser would attempt to involve interested local people in the campaign, canvassing and deciding platform issues, attempting to provide a nucleus for a permanent indigenous radical party.

Although the expense might be prohibitive, a free newspaper distributed to all district residents weekly would be an invaluable aid to providing a more sympathetic attitude than will probably be available in the local press, while at the same time providing an opportunity for more objective reports of the national and international news around which the campaign would be based.

The project is of course quite labile at this stage and modifications and changes (even a new name) will be incorporated even as the actual campaign is underway. One of the purposes of the YA project is experimentation to discover what form of political activities can be developed for a successful radical program in America.

The project should be undertaken in a form insuring several values in addition to pure experimentation. One is a campaign which forces opponents to confront issues and perhaps take positions to the left of his previous stance. Another is the political education of the district residents, who will be offered, probably for the first time, a well

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formulated program of radical alternatives. Third, the value for participants, in discovering ideas and attitudes of poor and middle class Americans; for Southern Negroes in learning the form and extent of Northern problems; for Northerners in learning effective organizing techniques and, in the process, Southern perspectives and values; and for all participants some form of seminars which would allow them to formulate and develop more completely those ideas and concepts which are the basis for the issues for which they are campaigning. If successful, it is possible that the YA project could provide the nucleus for a permanent radical organization or coalition. Of course, any actual election victory could have an extraordinary effect on the American political scene.

If this project is to be fulfilled the time to begin is now. A temporary national board must be set up to offer prospective participants some idea of the probable initial positions of YA. In order to insure maximum participation this board should be as broad as possible within the radical left and not be weighted toward any particular position or group. In the process of its activity YA will of course necessarily develop more specific attitudes, perhaps even different ones in each district project, and this would be reflected in a permanent executive body to be elected sometime during the summer. It might become feasible to elect district executives even sooner.

Another immediate need is a small staff to work with the temporary national board in surveying districts, finding candidates, recruiting participants and establishing a basic platform.

The final hurdle is financial. Although volunteers will be asked to provide for their own room and board (if past projects are any indication, the cost should not exceed \$50 a month--arrangements would of course be made for those who found this expense prohibitive), some money will be required for printing, administration, etc. If Young America is to succeed it must be almost entirely self-supporting. This means that although unions, foundations and interested individuals might provide assistance, members must assume most of the responsibility. If this involves \$5.00 a month, not even cigarette money, there are few who would be unable to afford it; Southern Negroes have paid a far higher price for their participation in the civil rights movement. Those who cannot afford the dues would be asked to contribute whatever they could. If it would be possible to get even 1000 contributors by January the project would be financially feasible.

Those who have been informally presented with the Young America project have been universally favorable. If we are to succeed we need your ideas and support now.

Please write to Jon Steinberg
Box 3153
Atlanta, Georgia

Thank you for your interest,

Jon Steinberg
Jon Steinberg

Dear Frank,

I thought you might be interested in this type of project. I would appreciate any comments. At present I am organizing a demonstration by college students for the 16th. I'll send you more details when I get it better organized.

Jon