

PURPOSE OF ORGANIZATION

The union's interest in youth work runs along several lines which need to be seen separately in order to sort out some of the problems and achievements.

1. UNION SERVICE FOR YOUTH

Young workers, including apprentices are members of the unions exactly like any other worker - they pay a percentage of their wages as union dues and are entitled to the same kind of services on grievances, meetings, educational and cultural opportunities, legislation, representation in public bodies and the like.

2. TRAINING FUNCTIONARIES

The unions are concerned about finding and training future functionaries. They seek through the youth groups to interest young people in the unions and to train them for future activity.

3. RECREATION AND EDUCATION

Trade union youth groups offer working youth an opportunity to organize and develop educational and recreational programs.

On the whole, it is probably safe to say that union youth leaders themselves see their program more and more in terms of education and recreation services with other objectives being secondary. Their own oft-reiterated statements of aims and purposes sound very much like those of the group of agencies which, in America, are called character-building youth agencies - youth organizations set up to serve and educate individuals through group experience and activity. Union leaders, on the other hand, would probably state the purposes primarily in terms of recruiting potential union members and training potential union leaders. These purposes are far from contradictory or mutually exclusive, but they do result in different emphases and methods which certainly cannot be reconciled until they are recognized and understood.

Essentially this difference of opinion concerns methods of group work. In the matter of program, for instance, one school of thought believes that it is a group leader's function to work out an interesting and attractive program for a group (this may even be the point of view of a national youth department). The result can be a well-balanced offering of sports, music, handicrafts, camping, lectures, and trips.

Such a program is set up to recruit people to the group, interest them, and indoctrinate them. As one youth leader put it: "The purpose of a program is simply to win people for the union."

The other point of view in group work is that participation in programbuilding has itself an educational value. Through planning and carrying out its own program, a group develops its interests and the members develop their ability to assume responsibility and to work with other people while learning the particular sport, songs, or handicraft in which they are interested.

When one considers how little opportunity working youth in Germany has to make choices, to develop its own ideas, to make and carry through decisions with a group, the opportunity which youth groups can offer for this kind of experience is especially important.

To most union executives, the first type of program seems more likely to succeed. They see the youth groups as the chief, perhaps the only, source of supply for new functionaries. They will support youth groups which can fulfil this function but they have no particular interest in the larger educational purposes which youth groups may serve.

Although this attitude is certainly not peculiar to the trade union movement alone, it is from time to time acute there. If union officials take time to analyze and examine the issue, they can, of course, see the wisdom of an educational rather than an indoctrinational approach. But when one measures youth work solely by the standard of its quick production of young leaders, many reports from youth groups on their activities may seem merely frivolous, dilatory or expensive.

Youth group leaders for their part consider their chief function to assist groups to have an educational experience through building their own programs and taking responsibility for carrying them through. They testify, moreover, to the drawing power which this approach to program has for young people who welcome the freedom and opportunity for genuine self-government offered in the trade union youth groups. Youth leaders are remarkably united in their statement of their purposes; their problem is how to do their jobs more skillfully. In endeavoring to work with their groups, they meet many practical personal and group problems with which they are frankly not equipped to deal and on which they want help.