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# The National Emergency Convention Through Yipsel Eyes.

by William F. Kruse †

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The Socialist movement (not only the Socialist Party) of this country ran a convention in Chicago in the Labor Day week which must have greatly amused the capitalist class. It must have given our masters as much delight as an old-fashioned three-ring circus, which, in a sense it really was. The Socialist movement, a three-ring circus!

One of our humorously inclined comrades once said, "The Socialists movement is a movement because it moves."

In that sense it surely was a movement, for it did move — upstairs and downstairs and across the street and a few blocks down. Oh, it was a movement, all right. It was so much of a movement that the Chicago Yipsels have lost all desire to be a "movement" and they are initiating a referendum to declare themselves [the YPSL] separate and apart from all factions of the "movement." Chicago Yipsels attended each of the three conventions as "fraternal delegates" so they can

see at a glance that an attempt to line up with one or the other would immediately transplant the feud into the Yipsel field, and with the same sad results that have already been noted among the older comrades.

The writer attended only one of the three conventions, that to which he was elected by the comrades of Illinois. The convention of the Socialist Party undoubtedly had the hardest Yipsel problem to solve, since the YPSL has up to this time been an integral part of the Socialist Party. The other two groups [Communist Party, Communist Labor Party] seem to have dealt with the problem only in a general way, each feeling that the Yipsels should tie up with their respective faction. The so-called "old line" SP looked at the matter much more broadly and with greater tolerance.

Although the national constitution of the Socialist Party provides for the seating of a fraternal delegate from the YPSL, and in spite of two YPSL National Committee motions to send delegates, the league

†- William F. "Bill" Kruse was the son of German and Danish immigrants, born in the metro NYC area on the Jersey side of the Hudson River in the first half of the 1890s (his birth date has been variously reported as 1891, 1893, and 1894). A sheet metal worker by trade, Kruse joined the Socialist Party in 1912. He was elected Executive Secretary of YPSL by referendum to two terms of office, serving from July 1915 to June 1918. Kruse was the YPSL's fraternal delegate to the 1917 SPA Convention in St. Louis. Kruse was leader of American Liberty Defense League, editor of *The Young Socialist Magazine*, 1918-19, and the provisional Secretary of SPA's SSS national organization, 1918. Kruse was indicted by grand jury for alleged violation of the Espionage Act through his role as YPSL National Secretary, Feb. 2, 1918. His trial before Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis began Dec. 6, 1918 and ended Jan. 4, 1919. The case went to the jury on Jan. 9, 1919, and Kruse was found guilty along with his 4 co-defendants that same day. Sentenced to 20 years at Leavenworth on Feb. 20, 1919, Kruse was freed on \$25,000 bond. The conviction was ultimately overturned on appeal on the basis of judicial prejudice, Landis having indicated his feelings about the disloyalty of German-Americans in no uncertain terms in a previous case. Kruse was a delegate to 1919 SPA Convention from Illinois and was elected a member of the party's new Board of Appeals. He and J. Louis Engdahl authored a minority International Plank calling for affiliation with the Third International at that convention. The NEC made him head of a revamped Young People's Dept. in Sept. 1919 and he resumed editorship of *YSM*. He was the SPA's candidate for US House in the Illinois 6th District, 1920. Kruse was sympathetic to the views of the Socialist Party's Left Wing and was active in the "Committee for the Third International of the Socialist Party." When the Communist movement established the Workers Party of America in December 1921, Kruse changed his allegiance as a founding member. He was elected Assistant Executive Secretary of the WPA. Kruse was a delegate to the WPA's 3rd Convention and elected as a member of the Central Executive Committee in 1923, and was a partisan of the Pepper-Ruthenberg-Lovestone factional group. In 1926-27 he was among the first Americans at the Lenin School in Moscow. Upon his return he served as Chicago District Organizer until being expelled for failing to denounce Jay Lovestone in 1929. Kruse is believed to have died in 1952.

was entirely unrepresented at this convention. Comrade Carlson attended the Communist convention, while a Comrade [Samuel F.] Hankin of Chicago attended the Communist Labor gathering (formerly the "Right" of the Left Wing). The league would have been entirely unrepresented had not the writer been a regular delegate of the Illinois SP.

The question of the relation between the YPSL and the SP was first broached in the proposal of the Organization Committee to instruct the Young People's Department on Sunday Schools, etc., and also to regulate the age limits of the YPSL membership. Upon the explanation that the league fixed its own age limits and would resent any such measure the whole matter was referred, without action, to the Constitution Committee.

That committee devoted almost 2 hours to this problem, and several active members of the league appeared before it. Among these were Harry Wilson, City Secretary, well known for his "Left" tendencies as displayed at the Yipsel National Convention [Chicago: May 1-4, 1919], and Kurt Dreifuss, of the North Side, whose position is almost diametrically opposite. The writer, of course, also took an active part in the conference. It was made clear to the committee that the Yipsels were anxious to avoid duplicating the struggle that had torn the elder party into at least three (if not more) pieces, and they thought that they could best do so by declaring themselves, for the time being, independent of all factions in this controversy.

The committee immediately saw the strength of this view, and responded by wiping out the entire article of the Party constitution which dealt with the YPSL. The former article had been objected to by the Yipsels in the past and its removal is undoubtedly gratifying to them. It read as follows:

**Article XIV.**

**Young People's Socialist League.**

Sec. 1. The work of the Young People's Socialist League in the national field shall be under the control and direction of the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party.

Sec. 2. Branches of the Young People's Socialist League shall be under the control of the city, county, or state organizations, and must in all cases work in harmony with the constitution and platform of the city, county, or state organizations of the Socialist Party.

Sec. 3. The Young People's Socialist league shall be entitled to elect one fraternal delegate, having a voice but

no vote, to the National Conventions. He shall receive railroad fare and per diem from the party the same as regular delegates.

It has been stricken out entirely and in its place has been inserted the following:

**Article XIV.**

**Young People's Department.**

The National Executive Committee shall employ a director for propaganda and education among the young. This Director of Propaganda and Education among the young shall organize and cooperate with the existing Young People's Socialist Organization for the extension of propaganda and education among the young people.

When this was reported into the convention there was some further discussion, most of which came from friends of the Yipsels, who did not understand the purpose of this provision or that it was the very thing the young comrades themselves wanted. When it was explained, however, all opposition vanished and the provision was carried unanimously.

After the adjournment of the convention, the NEC took up the problem in its meeting and asked the writer to accept this post, at least temporarily. This request was complied with in view of the muddled condition of affairs in this department.

The details of constitutional changes and resolutions adopted would hardly interest the Yipsels. The newly elected temporary NEC of the Party consists of the following: [William M.] Brandt of Missouri; [Edmund T.] Melms of Wisconsin; [Birch] Wilson of Illinois; [William H.] Henry of Indiana; [George E.] Roewer of Massachusetts; [John] Hagel of Oklahoma; and [James] Oneal of New York. The first four of these are known to be strongly in favor of the YPSL as at present constituted, while none of the other three have been known to say a word against it. Practically every one of the committee is skilled in organization work rather than spellbinding, so a smoother working and more efficient committee can be looked forward to than we have had for many years.

Undoubtedly the Yipsels will be interested in the Manifesto adopted by the Party, as well as its stand on International Relations. The former is printed elsewhere in this issue. Regarding the latter, there were two reports submitted, a majority report signed by 13 members of the committee and a minority report

signed by J.L. Engdahl and the writer. The minority was defeated by vote of 33 to 61, and later the majority was carried by vote of 56 to 26. This is not really a fair test of strength between the two factions since at least 40 delegates who should and could have been in attendance threw away their seats by attending other conventions. Both reports will go to referendum of the membership and a more fair test of strength will ensue.

### **Minority Report.**

The Minority Report referred to above read as follows:

We consider that the Second International ceased to function as an international socialist body upon the outbreak of the world war.

All efforts to bring together the elements that made up the former international have only added strength to this conviction. The Berne Conference was a notable example of this collapse, especially with reference to its failure to take a helpful attitude toward Russia and its policy of hanging onto the tails of the Peace Conference in Paris and placid acceptance of rebuffs given it by members of that conference, the refusals of Russian passports, for instance.

Any International, to be effective in this crisis, must contain only those elements who take their stand unreservedly upon the basis of the class struggle, and who by their deeds demonstrate that their adherence to this principle is not mere lip loyalty.

When leading Socialists join their national governments upon a coalition basis they accept and sanction policies which hinder Socialists and the working class generally from taking full advantage of the opportunities for deep-seated change which the war creates. This makes the workers content with superficial reformist changes which are readily granted by the capitalist class as a means of self-protection from the rising tide of working class revolt.

And when Socialists use the military organization of the master class as a means of crushing the agitation of their more radical comrades they flatly take their position with the counterrevolutionaries whom they serve.

The Second International is dead. We consider that a new International which contains those groups which contributed to the downfall of our former organization must be so weak in its Socialist policy as to be useless.

The Socialist Party of the United States, in principle and in its past history, has always stood with those elements of the countries that remained true to their principles. The manifestoes adopted in national conventions at St. Louis (1917) and Chicago (1919), as well as Referendum "D" 1919, unequivocally affirm this stand. These parties, the majority parties of Russia, Italy, Switzerland, Norway, Bulgaria, and Greece, and growing minorities in every land, are uniting on the basis of the preliminary convocation at Moscow of the Third International. As in the past, so in this extreme

crisis, we must take our stand with them.

The Socialist Party of the United States, therefore, declares itself in support of the Third (Moscow) International, not so much because it supports the "Moscow" programs and methods, but because:

(a) "Moscow" is doing something which is really challenging to world imperialism.

(b) "Moscow" is threatened by the combined capitalist forces of the world simply because it is proletarian.

(c) "Under these circumstances, whatever we may have to say to Moscow afterwards, it is the duty of Socialists to stand by it now because its fall will mean the fall of Soviet republics in Europe, and also the disappearance of Socialist hopes for many years to come.

J. Louis Engdahl,  
William F. Kruse.

### **Majority Report**

The Majority Report, referred to above, which was adopted, read as follows:

1. The Second International is no more. We repudiate the Berne Conference as retrograde and failing to act in the interests of the working class. It is the duty of the Socialist Party of the United States actively to participate in the speediest possible convocation of an International Socialist Congress and to make every effort to reconstitute the functioning of the International.

2. In the reconstituted Socialist International only such organizations and parties should be given representation which declare their strict adherence by word and deed to the principle of the class struggle.

3. To such an International must be invited the Communist Parties of Russia and Germany and those Socialist Parties in all countries which subscribe to the principle of the class struggle. No party which participates in a government coalition with parties of the bourgeoisie shall be invited.

4. In such Congress our Party should urge the reconstruction of a worldwide organization of the Socialist Proletariat upon closer and firmer lines than have prevailed in the past, to the end that the Revolutionary Proletarian forces of the world may at every critical moment be effectively mobilized for simultaneous and harmonious action.

### **Comparison of Reports.**

A comparison of the two reports reveals that the convention was absolutely unanimous upon many vital points. All agreed that the Second International was dead. All repudiated absolutely the Berne Conference. All agreed that the new International would have to be organized upon the definite and rigid basis of the class struggle. All repudiated the social patriots who

had stood by their warlords in time of test and struggle. All agreed that those who entered coalition governments with the bourgeoisie could not sit in the International. The distinction came on the point of whether the Third International should come into being through the call issued by the Communist Party at Moscow, or upon some subsequent call, complying with the conditions laid down in both reports, coming from some other source among the revolutionary socialist parties of Europe. The Minority took the Italian and Swiss position while the Majority leaned more to that of the French and British comrades. A motion to submit both reports to referendum was carried unanimously.

Barring certain unpleasant episodes incidental to the time of stress and struggle through which we are now passing, the convention was entirely worthy of maintaining the principles and history of organized socialism in this country. It is to be hoped that the Yipsels will study the experience of the elder socialists in this crisis and take such action as will prevent the schism from being extended into their ranks. The Yipsels are not called upon to support any one of the three conventions as against the others. They have an organized movement of their own to maintain, and if it

will appear to them that they can best preserve their integrity as a unified organization by divorcing themselves, be it temporarily or permanently, from all factions of the elder movement, the Socialist Party will put no obstacle in their way, but will wish them Godspeed. Whether independent or united with our Party, the Yipsels may be assured of our interest and cooperation. If there is anything that the Young People's Department can do for the league we shall be glad to learn of it. Our young comrades are reminded that the Young People's Department of the Socialist Party was in existence long before a national organization of the YPSL was born.† We who helped, through this medium to give birth to the Yipsel national organization will be glad to use the same means to maintain and extend it. Any new leagues organized through our efforts will be immediately referred to the league office, and we trust that the existing leagues will reciprocate by keeping us informed of all changes in address of their meetings and officials. Perhaps in the near future the situation will have cleared sufficiently to make possible a closer unity between the old movement and the young, and until that time we wish you the best of luck and pledge our wholehearted service to the young movement.

†- Independent Socialist youth groups spontaneously began to emerge in America based upon the European example from about 1907. The Socialist Party established its "Young People's Department" to coordinate these independent organizations in the fall of 1913, and it began operations out of the SPA National Office on Oct. 13 of that year. This Department worked to amalgamate the various already-existing youth groups under its umbrella and to organize new chapters of the national Young People's Socialist League. This national YPSL elected its own Secretary (Kruse) in 1915, and reelected him in 1917. It is not definitely known when this national YPSL achieved organizational consciousness, but Kruse's representation of the chronology leaves much unsaid, at a minimum.

*Edited footnotes by Tim Davenport.*

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