
The Road Before Us:

Keynote Speech at the First National Convention of the Young Workers League, Brooklyn, NY — May 13th, 1922

by Oliver Carlson

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On behalf of the Young Workers League of America, I officially declare that the first National Convention of the YWL of A is officially convened.

Comrades, it would be well just for a moment to briefly review the situation as it exists now and as it was a short time ago. I shall not attempt in any way to go into detail regarding the movement of the past, I only wish to state that at the time when the mighty surge of the Left movement swept over the United States, 1918-19 and following close in the wake of the Russian Revolution, our young comrades in the Young People's Socialist Leagues manifested an active and interesting part in that movement. It is not my purpose to tell how and why the YPSL became an independent movement, nor how or why that particular movement disintegrated. We have all passed through the stormy days of Palmer and the Department of Justice; we have all passed through the dark and dreary days of 1920-21 and today, just a little over 3 years from the time when the first National Convention of the YPSL was held [Chicago: May 1-4, 1919], we gather together in this city, the best elements, the most active elements, the elements that have stood the test of the crucial days, resolving once more to carry on the fight and to build up a strong and united militant, revolutionary young people's organizations in this country which shall be second to none in the world.

Comrades. At the time of the formation of the Workers Party [New York: Dec. 23-26, 1921], a resolution was adopted pointing out the specific needs of a young people's movement here. Following closely upon the heels of this came the selection of the National Or-

ganization Committee for the young people's organization. In the course of approximately 4 months' time, we have grown into a real compact organization, a real fighting organization of young workers of America. From 2 or 3 separate groups such as of New York, Boston, Detroit, and Chicago we have today large, active, and functioning bodies in more than 46 cities of this country. Our total membership, based upon convention figures, numbers at the very least 2200.

In issuing the Convention Call, the National Organization Committee placed certain fundamental demands upon the organizations desiring to affiliate. One was unity of all existing militant, revolutionary young workers organizations; and unity in reality, not in words alone. Another point which the NOC particularly stressed, was the fact that this should be a fighting organization, a militant organization of the working class youth. It proposed that one of the fundamental means through which we could make this organization such a fighting organization, was to carry on our organizational work essentially through active participation in the class struggle as it goes on from day to day in these United States. It furthermore proposed that we should recognized that the real leader of the revolutionary workers of the world is not the traitorous Second International; not the vacillating Second-and-a-Half International, but the revolutionary Third, the Communist International, and its youth section, the Young Communist International.

Those are the fundamental points upon which we based our convention call. The response, as is shown here today by delegates from 16 or 17 states, coming from Boston, Washington, DC, and New York City in the east to St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Chicago in the west, shows that there is a desire — there is a need — for such a militant, revolutionary organization.

Comrades, we are now face to face with a big task. It depends upon you, the delegates at this first National Convention, to consider carefully the problems that must be undertaken by our organization. I want to say that the National Organization Committee has consistently worked for what it considered the interests, not only of the young people's movement as a young people's movement, but what it considered to be the interest of the revolutionary movement at large. The comrades of the National Organization Committee, and I believe you will agree with them, contend that the struggle of the working class does not subdivide itself or fall into separate sections, such as a particular struggle on behalf of the males and another struggle on

behalf of the females; a particular struggle of the blacks and the yellows as against the whites; a particular struggle of the adult workers as against that of the young workers. We contend that the class struggle is one struggle. It is a struggle between the ruling class — the owning class — and the wage-slave class. And so, comrades, in building this organization, we must bear this fundamental fact in mind, that we, as young workers, as young revolutionists, are as much a part of the general revolutionary movement as anyone else and the only reason why we create a special instrument as a Young Workers League, is that we may be able to draw into our ranks greater and greater masses of young workers who are not able as yet clearly to understand the need of unity between the young and the old. We can get them to understand certain economic problems that confront them as young workers; and being young workers ourselves, can more easily get them into our ranks. But it is not our duty to remain separate and apart from the revolutionary working class movement, but rather to struggle with all our power to become an integral part of that larger revolutionary movement.

So comrades, I say that the tasks before you are many and they are great. Upon the sincerity with which you go into it depends, to a large extent, the success or failure of the Young Workers League of America. But let me here sound a warning to anyone who attempts to break or disrupt these organizations at this time. Such persons will not be treated liberally or tolerated long, for in the revolutionary working class of the world and the working class of America, a demand is growing for a unified, revolutionary, militant organization on the political field, and those who attempt to disband, to disrupt, or to break up that organization, I say, upon them lies the task of meeting and facing those workers that demand this unity. Remember, that no matter whether you or I as individuals continue, the movement nevertheless goes on. "The mills of the Gods grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small." And so, to anyone who attempts to stand as an obstacle here or anywhere else in the country, repeat, remember that the revolutionary movement is greater than any individual and though it may be stopped for a moment, it will, in the long run, continue to go on and will pass like a mighty wave over anyone who attempts to obstruct it.

The proletarian movement in America is becoming more and more revolutionary. Into the ranks of the labor unions of America, greater and greater numbers of revolutionists are flocking and as they

get into these organizations of the proletariat, the unions are becoming more and more revolutionary. They are demanding not only words, but ACTION, and those who attempt to stand in the way shall be pushed aside while the mass of the revolutionary workers shall pass by.

Comrades, let us consider what we have to do. Let us settle down to the problem of constructing, here and now, ways and means by which the Young Workers League of America can in reality take its place as an effective organization that will rally the young workers to its banners. Let us try to found it upon the basis of centralization and discipline and upon the experience of our comrades in Russia, Germany, England, and all these other countries. Let us take inspiration from the fact that we know that over 800,000 revolutionary workers, young workers organized in the Young Communist International are anxiously watching to see what will be done in America. Let us take inspiration from the great work done by the Russian Communist Party and the Communist International, which have vanquished the bourgeoisie of Russia and which now threatens the way of life of the capitalist class throughout the world. Let us develop here a Young Workers League of America which some day may take its place within the fold and under the banners of the Communist and the Young Communist Internationals.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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