
Warns Against “Cold Feet”

by James M. Reilly

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Editor of the Forum:

In stating his reasons for disapproving practically every act of the Emergency Convention [St. Louis: April 7-14, 1917], Comrade [Allan] Benson portrays that body as he saw it.

But he did not see the convention as it was. He was absent from most of its sessions. After his war program had been defeated he attended none of the remaining sessions. It is doubtful if another delegate took less interest in the convention than Comrade Benson.

With regard to his assertion that the delegates were “intolerant,” I can only say that in 15 years’ party membership, during which time I have attended 4 national conventions, I have never attended one at which a greater degree of tolerance for all viewpoints was maintained.

Comrade Benson speaks of “young hot-heads” among the delegates. The fact is, there were very few young comrades among them, and none got nearly so “hot” as Comrade Benson did on the one occasion when he took the floor.

The German delegates were not “pro-German,” as he charges. Most of them voted against the majority report. They preferred the Boudin document, which certainly was not “pro-German.”

The platform which Comrade Benson denounces was written by such “young hotheads” as [James] O’Neal, [Mahlon] Barnes, [Ludwig] Lore, et al. The constitution, which he also disapproves,

was drafted by such “ultra-radicals” as [George] Goebel, [Winfield] Gaylord, [Walter Thomas] Mills, [John C.] Kennedy, et al.

Without desiring to trespass too much upon *The Call’s* space or go over ground already covered by others, I wish to answer some of Comrade Benson’s objections to the majority report of the Committee on War and Militarism.

This report may be construed as treasonable by the courts. So may the substitute. From present indications, any criticism of the government, to say nothing of opposition to the war, is apt to be construed as treasonable before very long.

War having been declared, the Socialist convention had to declare in favor either of supporting or opposing it. The majority of the convention delegates took the view that the interests of the working class required that the party oppose the war. If this is treason, I suppose we must take the consequences.

Comrade Benson takes exception to the statement that the entry of the United States tends to lengthen the war. The government is preparing for a long war. Secretary [Franklin K.] Lane speaks of a 3 year conflict.

Of all the Allied Powers, England alone, says Comrade Benson, wants to crush Germany. Without Uncle Sam’s aid, does comrade Benson figure England could carry on the war long enough to do it? Is it not more reasonable to suppose that, had we stayed out of the war, the Allies would shortly be willing to make peace on terms such as

suggested by Comrade Benson? Does he really believe that, by ceasing our public opposition to the war and "living on plain fare next winter," we can "prevent England from jamming Germany to the limit"? Does he imagine that our capitalists have brought us into the war in order to secure liberal terms of peace for a defeated Germany? Does he believe that by supporting the war (for this is what "living on plain fare" amounts to) we can have any influence on the government at all?

Comrade Benson says that the statements of the majority report regarding the causes of modern wars, while true, "could be found in any encyclopedia." So much the better for the encyclopedia. But encyclopedias, even the handy volume editions, are not distributed broadcast among the workers, as we plan to distribute our manifesto. And, having declared our unalterable opposition to the war, it was advisable to declare our reasons for this opposition.

As to the effect on the party of opposing the war, Comrade Benson seems to be ignorant of American history. Otherwise he would know that Lincoln, in Congress, opposed the Mexican war, and within 14 years was elected President. He would also know that the Democrats in 1864 practically declared the Civil War a failure. Ten years later they gained control of both houses of Congress, and in 1876 elected Tilden to the Presidency.

If there are members of the party who are opposed, on principle, to the majority report, let them vote for the minority substitute. But, if they agree with its principles, let us hope they will not get "cold feet."

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Edited by Tim Davenport.

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