
Rhode Island Party Reorganized: One Week's Whirlwind Campaign Puts State Back Into Socialist Ranks. [events of Oct. 20-25, 1919]

Unsigned report in the *New York Call*, v. 12, no. 304 (Oct. 30, 1919), pg. 6.

“Except for the fact that there are some individual faces missing,” said one old-timer at the recent convention of the Socialist Party of Rhode Island, “I would never imagine that anything out of the ordinary had happened to the party here.”

And it was true. The convention room was full to overflowing, more chairs had to be carried in from the lower floors, and the enthusiasm was there aplenty. Nine branches from all parts of the state were represented: Newport, Woonsocket, Westerly, Conventry, 2 from Pawtucket, and 3 from Providence. The 75 delegates went to work with a will, elected a new State Executive Committee and a new State Secretary, and made plans for the first real state organization they have ever had.

The new State Secretary is Comrade E. Sherwood, a veteran in our movement, the candidate for Governor in the last election. Included on the SEC are the well-known names of Rotenberg, Onorato, Ganz, Sherwood, Livermore, Parker, and Markus.

Resolutions on the general party situation, of appreciation of the past good services of Joe Coldwell, who has now joined the seceders [the CLP] and who is about to go to prison, of greeting to Eugene V. Debs and of appreciation of the work of National Organizer William F. Kruse in building up the state movement in so short a time, were passed by the convention.

The state constitution will be revised by the State Committee, and will be acted upon at the next membership convention, after copies of the proposed changes are sent to all branches at least one month previous.

Enthusiastic support will be given the National Office plans for the “Freedom of Class War Prisoners”

drive, and many other ways and means of activity were suggested to the branches.

A Remarkable Recovery.

Only a few weeks ago, when a mass convention, by vote of approximately 60 to 30, decided to join the Communist Labor Party, no one imagined that the regular Socialist sentiment could be so speedily crystallized. But it was soon found that 3 Providence branches remained loyal to the party and that comrades from all over the state were wondering where they were really at. The CLP boasted of having 95 percent of the membership and the whole state organization. But the basis of such claims was very suspicious and investigation proved them unfounded.

A whirlwind campaign of organization, lasting one week, was decided upon and National Organizer Kruse began his work on October 20 [1919], under the very capable direction of Local Organizer J. Rotenberg. Monday [Oct. 20] found a general membership meeting in Providence ready to carry on its work. Tuesday [Oct. 21] an English branch at Pawtucket was reorganized with 11 members. This branch had previously gone over to the CLP by a vote of 5 to 3. The German branch, reinforced by a number of Russian comrades, was visited the same evening and was found in a spirited battle between rival Communist factions. The branch had joined the Communist Party, not the CLP, and most of the discussion centered around which was the biggest organization and which was the most muddleheaded and clique-ruled.

Wednesday [Oct. 22] a propaganda meeting was held at headquarters. Thursday [Oct. 23] a meeting

was held at Newport, another supposed CLP stronghold, the largest branch in the state. Both factions turned out full force, and it was found the CLP had “captured” this branch by vote of 8 to 6. Their CLP branch now boasted of a strength of 10 members, while 18 were said to be entirely with the [Socialist] party and that when factional bickering stopped they would come back.

Saturday [Oct. 25] the branch at Woonsocket was reorganized despite the obstruction of a drunk who, when awake, kept yelling: “I don’ want no Shosh-lis’; gimme Communish!” and the appeal for “proletarian mass action” by a local mill superintendent.

Communist Yipsels Stage Rumpus.

Friday night [Oct. 24] was Yipsel night. Two weeks previously the league had voted unanimously to have a meeting addressed by Comrade Kruse, who is the former National Secretary of the YPSL and now under sentence of 20 years’ imprisonment for his activities in that organization. A small group of CLP members of the YPSL started the meeting before most of the others could attend and took control of it. They kept proposing business upon business until finally the other members lost patience, recalled the chairman, elected another, and passed a motion that Comrade Kruse be given the floor. After a motion to adjourn by the CLP members was defeated, about 8 of them arose and stamped noisily out of the room, yelling and singing. They went to the room above where they stamped on the floor and yelled “Bolshevik” and sang “The Internationale” — very much out of tune. They then demanded that Joe Coldwell leave the room — or had he turned “Right Winger”? Even Coldwell’s influence could not quiet them. The meeting was held successfully, even after the bolters came back into the room to make more noise there. Even those Yipsels who were

sympathetic with the CLP were disgusted at such tactics.

Ordered Away From Kruse Meetings.

There was some difference of opinion as to whether or not the officials of the CLP were responsible for this horseplay. Early in the week a notice appeared on the bulletin board instructing all CLP members to stay away from meetings addressed by William F. Kruse and for the most part the order was obeyed. Still, these young rioters belong to a group that is the mainstay of that organization here and it is doubted that they would take such action without consulting those higher up. A rival convention was even called by the CLP to try to hold their forces in line, and Ben Gitlow of New York was advertised as the star attraction to draw the crowd away from the gathering where Kruse and George E. Roewer of Massachusetts spoke. Gitlow did not show up so local talent substituted. Their convention was nowhere near as large or as businesslike as the Socialist convention.

Prospects for Organization.

The rebuilt state organization is composed of 9 branches, 5 of which are English-speaking (Providence, Newport, Coventry, Woonsocket, and Pawtucket), 2 of which are Finnish (Westerly and Pawtucket), and 2 Jewish [Yiddish language] (both in Providence). Most of the active workers of old days are standing with the [Socialist] party. Candidates for Governor and Lieutenant-Governor at the last election are on the new Executive Committee, former State Secretary and present State Treasurer are also taking their place there. There is every reason to believe that the Socialist Party of Rhode Island will emerge from its present travail stronger than it has ever been in the past.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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