
Left Wing Carries YPSL Convention: Huge Majority Prevails as Gerrymander Flops [events of Sept. 2-5, 1937]

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The Young People's Socialist League of America becomes the first organization of the Second International to go over to the banner of the Fourth Internationalist movement by action of its 9th National Convention last weekend.

By an overwhelming majority, with a discredited handful of Right Wingers and Centrists walking out after the failure of their vicious campaign to disrupt the organization, the convention endorsed the Marxist principles for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, and enthusiastically laid plans for rooting the YPSL among young workers and all the organizations of youth.

The convention met in Philadelphia from Sept. 3-5 [1937]. Up to the last day, the "Clarity" maneuverers tried every trick to gerrymander the convention.¹ Falsification of dues records, fantastic apportionment of delegates, invalidation of legitimate elections, sale of dues stamps to Clarity circles on credit — every shady device long known to every labor faker was part of the administrations repertory.

¹ "Clarity" was the name of the faction of the Socialist Party "Militants" led by Gus Tyler, Herbert Zam, and Max Delson. The faction was based in New York state and attempted to take a middle position between the Right "Militants" headed by Jack Altman and the "Appeal Tendency" of Trotskyists headed by James Burnham, Max Shachtman, and Jim Cannon.

Frantic Centrists.

But even with all this they could not make a majority out of a small minority, and were compelled in a last frantic measure to start expelling the majority two weeks before the convention. In New York mass expulsions of the Left Wing Yipsels began for the sole purpose of lopping off a large section of the Left Wing delegation.

The Centrist administration made its last desperate stand at the meeting of the outgoing National Committee. Although the convention had been called for Thursday [Sept. 2, 1937], they postponed the opening while their majority on the committee, elected over two years ago, attempted to fix the composition of the convention. But the committee had to work in the face of a large audience of over a hundred Left Wing delegates. That already showed who had the majority of the convention.

The first question the committee took up was for the record — a motion against the endorsement of [Fiorello] LaGuardia [for New York Mayor]. But when National Chairman Ernest Erber amended it to call for condemnation of all deals with the ALP [American Labor Party], for reorganization of Local New York for violation of discipline, and for a democratic City Convention of the Party, the centrists sidestepped by tabling it.

The Key Questions.

The second point was the special issue — the expulsion of the New York Left Wing. It came up as a choice between recognizing the Left Wing District Committee represented by Hal Draper or the splitters' District Committee led by Barshop, author of the notorious dues-falsification letters. Here the pretext for the expulsion — the sale of the *Socialist Appeal* — was ripped to pieces and the political and organizational bankruptcy of the Clarity group concretely demonstrated, in a lengthy discussion. But by the machine vote of 5-2 (in the face of the great Left Wing majority of the convention!) the NEC voted to recognize the Barshop committee, thereby expelling 250 Yipsels. This job finished, they then adjourned, setting the opening of the convention for 10 am the next morning, Friday [Sept. 3, 1937].

They met again in the morning for a "short" session, at the SP headquarters, taking up the case of the suspension without a hearing of the California Party. Erber's motion to condemn Ward Rodgers

and demand the reinstatement of California, backed up by photostatic evidence of Rodgers' criminal charges against the California comrades, was met by a motion to — investigate! This debate took till 12:30. At that late hour, with the convention already more than a day overdue and with all the delegates tense for the opening of their convention, the Centrists made a motion to adjourn till the afternoon to take up still more credentials!

They backed down on this on our vigorous protest. We demanded that Hamilton present his whole report on credentials so that the situation would be clarified. Hamilton refused to make this elementary report, obviously following the tactic of lopping off one section after another piecemeal. Thereupon Comrade Gould demanded to know whether the Barshop delegation from New York, which was contested, would have the right to vote on its own contest.

Only Convention Can Decide.

It is a long-standing rule that the NEC can seat only uncontested delegations, the convention itself voting on the contest. Obviously any other procedure means the handpicking of the delegates by the outgoing NEC.

At this moment the question was clearly posed: Was the old NEC going to substitute itself for the convention? The Centrist had gone too far to draw back now. By the same mechanical vote of 5-2, they ruled that Barshop's inflated delegation of 58 (the total number allotted to New York) would vote on whether or not to seat themselves! And since Hamilton refused to present a full credentials report, we did not know in how many other cases this procedure would be repeated.

The NEC had exceeded the limit of its powers. The convention was waiting eagerly to swing into action.

The National Chairman of the League, and by his office chairman of the NEC meeting, Ernest Erber, thereupon declared the meeting adjourned and called the convention to order with the singing of "The Internationale." The old headquarters rang with the delegates' response, everyone (including the Clarityites) standing up and joining in. When the clenched fists were down, Hamilton jumped up and called upon his loyal cohorts to walk out with him and go to the Young Women's Christian Association. Gathering up his papers, he

led the retreat of about a dozen delegates out of the hall, followed by two individuals named Lazarus Becker and Mendel Mendelson.

Splitters Exposed.

In this way, the splitters made clear to the whole world who are the YPSL. They walked out. They walked out of the SP and the YPSL headquarters where the convention was being held, to foregather in the more genteel halls of the YWCA girls. They walked out, after the National Chairman had opened the convention, in accordance with his duties, long after the time set by the organization. After they walked out, the hall, crowded before, still was crowded to the doorway and the window sills. And as they walked out, the walls again resounded to "The Internationale," louder than before.

The convention got down to business immediately with the election of Erber and Blackie Palla, West Coast seaman, to the chair, and the election of convention committees. The first sessions took up the political problems around which the pre-convention fight had revolved.

Convention Decisions.

The main resolutions on Spain and on the International question were passed unanimously.

The Spanish resolution, declaring for the struggle of Socialism against Capitalism, set forth the Marxist position for which the Left Wing of the Socialist Party and League had been fighting.

The International resolution noted the bankruptcy of the two existing Internationals and of the so-called "London Bureau," and declared for the building of a new, Fourth International; the NEC was instructed to carry this out organizationally in collaboration with our party comrades. On the separated question of material aid to the Spanish government a minority of 7 was recorded. A resolution on our student tasks was passed almost unanimously, calling for a Left Wing movement in the American Student Union to fight against the Stalinist leadership's People's Front program: collective security, abandonment of militant strike action, and keeping away from labor struggles.

The resolution on the Labor Party led to a vigorous discussion after which a pro-labor party resolution received 4 votes; the minority

comrades expressed themselves as gratified by the quality and tone of the debate. The resolution on trade unions puts this work in the forefront of our activities for the coming period, calling for concentration of Yipsels in the basic industries, and provides for surveys and placement drives by the NEC. A number of other resolutions were more briefly considered and referred to the incoming National Committee. The age limit for new members was set at 23.

Working Class Delegates.

The outstanding fact about the convention, other than its directly political significance, was its composition. No other Socialist convention has approached it in its unmistakable demonstration of the existence of a really national movement (and a strong proletarian base) with firm connections with the mass movement. Some facts:

There were 104 delegates, only 29 of whom were from New York City. This proportion is itself unprecedented in the YPSL. It may be compared to the Clarity-Right Wing rump "convention" in Philadelphia, with about 60 percent New Yorkers (who represented fewer members than our New York delegation!). It may be compared with the recent Young Communist League, where over 40 percent were from New York.

From Coast to Coast.

The rest of the delegates were from centers of Young Socialist activity from coast to coast. (There were about 25 "out of town" delegates at the Clarity consolation party, including about a dozen or more from Philadelphia alone). Several of our California delegations were unable to come because of their inability to get away from their Socialist work; the delegation of 10 Californians, however, gave an excellent cross-section of their work, including 3 seamen, a young Mexican agricultural worker, Fred Martinex, representing a circle recruited entirely from this field, and other mass workers. Delegations came also from Chicago, Akron, Youngstown, Cleveland, Boston, New Haven, Lynn, Syracuse, Ithaca, Rochester, Albany, Reading, Newark, Philadelphia, Louisville, Detroit, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Eastern Pennsylvania, Indiana Harbor, etc.

There were 65 young workers among the delegates, the large majority active in their trade unions and unemployed organizations.

Among them were 3 seamen; 6 CIO organizers; 3 food workers; 6 WPA unionists; 2 auto workers; Martinez for the agricultural workers; Ed Parker representing a circle made up entirely of young steel workers in the Chicago area; representatives also of the electrical and radio field; pocketbook workers; stenographers unions; truck drivers, and others. Two delegates, out on bail, were facing jail sentences as a result of class-struggle activity — Ed Parker indicted for inciting to riot and a comrade from California for beating up a scab.

Morale High.

Nothing could exceed the unbounded enthusiasm and spirit of the delegates. On Thursday morning [Sept. 2, 1937], while waiting for the NEC meeting to begin, the hall full of delegates put on a spontaneous amateur show, with original and topical songs and imitations.

Comrade Cannon's address at the Left Wing conference preceding the convention met with a resounding reception. At the moment when the Clarityites shambled out of the hall, enthusiasm reached its height. Every last delegate at the completion of the convention, inspired, went back to his locality to build a mass League on the basis laid down by the convention.

Erber Re-Elected.

By unanimous vote of the convention, Ernest Erber of Chicago was reelected National Chairman. The new National Executive Committee was voted by acclamation to stand as follows:

Frank Demby, Hal Draper, Eleanor Fine, Manny Garrett (New York); Yetta Barsh, Irving Bern, Nate Gould (Chicago); Paula Aragon, Frank Ricco, Howard Rosen, Ray Sparrow (Calif.); Tarmo Hannula (Mass.); Al Lowenthal (Newark); Bob Stiler (Ohio); Alex Wollod (Phila.).

The alternates are:

Ben Alexander (upstate NY); Bill Brody (Minn.); Irving Howe (New York); Fred Martinez (Calif.); Saul Mendelson (Newark); Paul Picquet (Chicago); Les Reid (Youngstown, Ohio).

The national officers will be, in addition to National Chairman Erber: National Secretary — Hal Draper; National Organizer — Nate Gould; Editor of the official organ of the League — Manny

Garrett; National Student Director — Anne Kracik; Educational Director — Frank Demby.

A National Buro of 7 was set up in New York City, the new national headquarters, consisting of: Erber, Draper, Gould, Garrett, Kracik, Demby, plus a representative of the party.

The temporary headquarters of the League are at 22 East 17th Street, NYC. All circles and correspondents are to get in touch with the secretary at that address.

Program Mass Work.

Finishing with the feeble disruptive efforts of the Centrists, the convention turned its face to the future. After a preliminary tightening up of the organization through re-registration, and reorganization wherever necessary, an extensive program of action will be undertaken.

We will place groups of comrades in the fields of the basic industries, to enlarge the indispensable working class base of the League.

Field organizers will be assigned to important centers throughout the country.

The Spanish situation will be centered in our propaganda. A special program of activity on this point is to be worked out by the NEC.

For the present at least one popular pamphlet will be published in the immediate period; four district schools in four states will be set up; regular educational outlines will be issued, including specific attention to the radicalized youth around the Stalinists.

At the same time, our student comrades will begin the campaign for a militant program for the American Student Union through the organization of left wing sentiments in the organization.

All this, and the rest of the program of action, is to be coordinated through the national tours to be made by Erber and Gould, covering the entire country; and pointed toward results in a national membership drive.

Great Future.

The possibilities of mass work that open up before the League are almost unlimited. Everywhere, throughout the country, the youth comrades have already turned their minds away from the recent un-

pleasantness to turn their eyes toward building a mass young Socialist movement in America.

History places tremendous responsibilities upon us, not only as the only revolutionary force in this country, but internationally as the largest youth organization lined up for the Fourth International. Now, when the regroupment of the revolutionary socialists may coincide with the outbreak of the second World War, when the fate of the Spanish revolution and the preservation and extension of the Soviet October depends more clearly than ever on the revolutionary organization of the workers of the world, when even the most radical representatives of Centrism have sold out to the capitalist politicians through Roosevelt or LaGuardia, the Young Socialists of America raise high the banner of Marxism.

FORWARD!

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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