

Eighth National Convention of the Young Communist League

Report of Gil Green, National Y. C. L. President

An abridged text of the report of Gil Green, national chairman of the Young Communist League to the recent National Convention of the Young Communist League, follows:

Fellow Delegates, Comrades and Friends:

We were elected as delegates to this convention from hundreds of branches of our League, after months of preparation and discussion. We were elected as those most qualified to represent the views of our membership, and thus best suited to review the policies of our organization and its leadership.

In approaching our deliberations these coming days, we must do so in a spirit of modesty and self-criticism. We must not permit our successes or our youthful enthusiasm to dull our proper sense of proportion. We must discuss our problems as they flow from the burning problems of the young workers of the people of this nation, and on the basis of the conditions existing in this country and the world.

What characterizes the situation throughout the world at this historic moment? At our National Conference in January of this year we said:

"The Eighth National Convention of the Young Communist League will take place at a time when war is no longer a remote possibility but an alarming actuality. International fascism has engaged in a new foreign adventure which has as its immediate objective the colonial enslavement of Spain and its people. Nothing brings home to us more clearly the conditions of the world we live in than the Spanish war. Spain is the sharpest expression of that struggle which rages in one form or another throughout the world between the forces of democracy and those of fascism. All the more certain is it, therefore, that only the defeat of reaction and fascism can save our generation from another world slaughter and enable humanity to move forward in the direction of true democracy, socialism."

LESSON OF SPAIN

There is little need to add to these words. What is the great lesson of Spain? It is that when all progressive forces are united, when all anti-fascist masses are welded together into a mighty people's front, it is possible to stop the advance of fascism, it is possible to defeat fascism. Without the unity of the masses, without the creation of the mighty Spanish People's Front, fascism would have been victorious as it was in Germany and Austria. If the combined armies of Hitler and Mussolini have not been able to conquer Spain, if the government forces are growing stronger from day to day, the credit goes to the unity of the Spanish people and to the growing united movement of the toilers throughout the world. Unity can defeat fascism—that is the lesson of Spain.

The masses of youth of this country have shown their sympathy with the people of Spain. They stand against the fascist monsters who in cold blood maim and kill women and children, who rape to the ground entire cities and towns. But not all of them yet understand that what has happened in Spain can also happen here. That in this country as well, the issue is one between democracy and fascism. That in this country as well, reactionary forces are working to destroy the democratic liberties of the toilers, are striving to lead us toward fascism and war.

If we examine the actual situation in this country, we will see how real this danger is, we will understand that it is not a matter of someone shouting "wolf, wolf." The wolf in this case is more real than any of us relish.

WHAT DOES YOUTH WANT?

What do America's young people want, what are they striving for? Mr. Homer P. Rainey, director of the American Youth Commission, has answered this question for us. On the basis of thousands of replies from young people, he believes that America's youth want "employment, a happy home life, guidance, a satisfactory philosophy of life, and how best to discharge their duties as citizens."

But what keeps young America from achieving the objectives set forth by Mr. Rainey? The daily papers tell us that this country has emerged from the economic depression. We are told that prosperity is here. And so it is—for the duPonts, the Fords, the Rockefellers and for the Morgans. Profits are higher than in 1929, but where are wages? They are 29 per cent below 1929. Production is close to 1929 levels, but 10,000,000 workers are still out of work, 5,000,000 of whom are young people. Property for the few; permanent unemployment, low wages, reduced standards of living for the many. That is the life in our present prosperity delirium.

UNREST AMONG TOILERS

It is, therefore, not surprising that there is a deep dissatisfaction and unrest in the ranks of the toilers, old and young alike. Having borne the brunt of the last economic crisis, they want their share of the increased profits and wealth of the American ruling class. They want a higher standard of living and social security through higher wages and shorter hours of work in industry and through a program of progressive social legislation financed through increased taxation of the rich.

It is for these things that the people of this country voted last November. It is for these things that labor is on the march. It is for these things that youth framed and supported the American Youth Act.

But Wall Street refuses to give up any of its huge profits and fabulous wealth. In order to defeat the progressive demands of the people, it attempts to destroy and replace existing democratic liberties with reactionary measures of violence, with fascist methods of rule.

Some young people think that the reactionary forces were defeated in the November elections. This is incorrect. They were checked but not defeated. This can be seen at every turn. The employing class flagrantly violates the Wagner Labor Act, the law of the land. It refuses to recognize organized labor. Where it makes concessions these are only wrested from it by the militant struggles of the workers.

FASCISM—ENEMY OF MANKIND

The discredited Liberty League is silent, but those who were its guiding lights, the Hearsts, Smiths, duPonts, are once again

gathering their forces for battle against the toilers. Fearing the democratic power of the masses, the reactionaries wish to keep the Supreme Court packed as a supreme oligarchy vetoing the progressive legislation demanded by the electorate. Everywhere they call for balancing the budget and government economy so as to abolish every form of federal and state aid to the millions of jobless.

Most youth understand that the policies of these gentlemen are directed against their interests. But often they do not understand that these people are actually striving to lead America toward the path of fascism and war. But how come? Do not these people speak about Americanism? Do they not speak about democracy? Yes, and that is precisely why they are so dangerous, because they endeavor to mislead the masses in order to betray them. They know that democracy is deeply entrenched in the traditions of the American people. They know that if they openly spoke their minds, they would have no following.

But as clever as these gentlemen are, sometimes the truth slips out despite themselves.

This is what happened at a mass meeting held in New York City, a few weeks ago. At this meeting, the Tammany Hall politician Al Smith spoke together with the Old Guard Republican Harvey. What did these gentlemen have to say?

RUBBER HOSE

It appears as if Mr. Harvey, who is President of Queens, has further political ambitions. He wants to be the New York Chief of Police—no less! He promises to keep the city clean—that is, of all Communists—and in no less than two weeks. (What a man for Hitler!) And how does he intend to do this?

According to the New York Times of April 14th, Mr. Harvey said that if he had control of the New York Police Department, he would give each policeman three feet of rubber hose with instructions to be used liberally on all Communists.

Of course, we can tell Mr. Harvey that better men than he have tried it and failed. But if we have anything to say about it, Mr. Harvey will never get his chance.

We are interested in one other aspect of this question. Does he mean only the Communists? Well, if memory keeps, we remember that only a short while ago Mr. Harvey accused the WPA administrator of being Communist. We also remember a certain speech delivered by Mr. Al Smith only a year ago in which he accused President Roosevelt of Communism. And what about John L. Lewis and the other leaders of the C. I. O.? They stand for industrial unionism—they must be Communists. Does Mr. Harvey wish to use his gentle methods of persuasion also against these people? Apparently, for this select gathering boomed not only the name of Comrade Browder, but also that of Mayor LaGuardia. The methods of force and violence he advocated are to be used not only against the Communists, but against every organization or person who disagrees with his reactionary policies.

In Union There Is Strength

In face of this growing danger, larger and larger masses are beginning to understand the need for unity in the fight for economic security, for peace and democracy. That is to be seen first of all in the growing militancy of labor. It is to be seen in the growing movement of the masses of common people not only on the field of economic struggle, but also on the political arena. Under the leadership of the working class, new political realignments are taking shape, in some states in the form of Farmer-Labor Parties, in others in the form of progressive groupings within the confines of the two old parties. The people are moving in the direction of a mighty People's Front, in the direction of a Farmer-Labor movement which will defeat reaction and improve the immediate lot of the masses of toilers—the majority of American people.

Under conditions such as these, the task before our League is to help youth achieve their objectives. For our League has no problems, no interests separate and apart from those of the young people, from those of the people of this country. Our whole purpose in life, our whole reason for existence, is to educate and serve the youth of the nation, and, through them, the people of this country and of the entire world.

Our first task in this connection is to build an organization of American youth that can educate them in an understanding of the world they live in, that can teach them how to defeat the forces of reaction, how to win a better life.

This we did not understand a few years ago. We had a narrow approach to our League and its tasks. We thought that we needed a League with a full Communist program and leadership; a League which would be a duplicate of the Communist Party among the youth. We therefore approached the work, the organizational structure and the membership of our League in a very rigid and formal fashion. But our experiences these past few years have convinced us that the teachings of Lenin and Stalin are correct; that the working class needs only one vanguard, a Communist Party.

WHAT KIND OF LEAGUE?

The League, if it is to fulfill its function, should be an organization which, in the words of the resolution of the Sixth Congress of the Young Communist International,

"Should be adapted entirely to the desires and requirements of the youth themselves, so that while learning, organizing and fighting for the vital interests of the toiling classes, the youth would become educated in the spirit of the fight for freedom, for socialism, against reaction, against imperialism war."

For some years our League had repeated the need for transforming itself into an organization broader and larger than the Communist Party. It was the Sixth Congress of the Young Communist International which, however, defined the character of the League under the present world conditions. It called for the establishment of "non-party youth organizations, consisting not only of Communists, but also Socialists, and non-party, national revolutionary, pacifist, religious and other sections of the youth, organizations

which would, through their daily attention toward economic, political and cultural interests and rights of the toiling youth, educate their members in the spirit of the class struggle, proletarian internationalism, Marxism-Leninism."

For the past year and a half we have been working in this direction. Since the Seventh Convention of our League we have more than doubled our membership to 13,000, but what is also of significance is that besides the growth of the League itself, we have helped establish independent youth clubs and organizations with programs very similar to ours and who, together with us, total some 55,000 young people.

UNITED YOUTH LEAGUE

Why do we not propose an immediate merger of these organizations? Because the forces working in the direction of such a united league are only in the first stages of crystallization. Through the work for the building of an American People's Front; through the rising militant labor movement; through the extension of the unity in the ranks of the youth—through these streams it will be possible to unite hundreds of thousands of young people into an organization for education and struggle; into an organization comparable to the great United Socialist League of Spain with its 300,000 members.

In the meantime, while continuing to help build such organizations as the Youth Division of the International Workers Order with its 17,000 members; as the American Student Union with its 20,000 members; as the youth organizations around the Farmer-Labor Parties; as the dozens of independent clubs under our influence; we must especially emphasize the need for a radical transformation of the character of our Y.C.L. on the basis of the decisions of the Sixth Congress.

I am sure that you comrades will agree with me when I say that the growth and development of the Y.C.L. itself in no way corresponds to our increased political influence, to our greater possibilities. The main reason for this is that the content and form of our internal life are still too narrow. We do not yet satisfy the many-sided desires of the youth.

NATURE OF LEAGUE

You comrades who come from the branches of our League know how true this is. Of course, you are most frequently not to blame. The leadership too often works in the old way. It puts one demand after another upon the organization. The responsible comrades in the branches in turn "put the screws on their members," so to speak, with the result that, try as you may, you often cannot transform your branch into the type of youth organization that would attract and hold the hundreds and thousands of youth of your community. When criticizing the leadership for wrong methods of work, I do not speak only of the state functionaries. I speak also of the national functionaries.

In order to correct this state of affairs our proposed draft constitution gives the right to every branch or affiliated organization to decide for itself on its activities. We hope that the comrades in our League branches will take advantage of this, will develop their own initiative in making their branches into real popular youth organizations.

BRANCH FUNCTIONING

A good branch of the Y.C.L. is not only one which has friendly relations with the organizations of youth in its neighborhood, but also one which has its own headquarters, its own athletic and social equipment, its own library and its own educational program and classes. Of course, these things cannot be achieved overnight. But they are realizable if the comrades do not plan on a fly-by-night basis, but over a period of time.

A comrade from the Hartford branch tells how his branch grew from five to 30 members in a few months by living up branch meetings. Here is how these comrades on their own initiative were able to get motion pictures to show at their branch meetings. Let the comrade explain:

"For quite some time motion pictures have played an important part in our meetings. Again comrades will say: 'But we can't afford motion pictures.' Neither can our branch, which functions on a budget of \$12 a month. [How many other branches even know what a budget means?] We get them for nothing, that is for the postage, and so can any other branch."

DISCUSSED FORD SPEED-UP

"The U. S. Bureau of Mines, Department of Interior, Pittsburgh, Pa., and the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., have hundreds of motion pictures which can be borrowed merely by agreeing to pay the postage. The subjects are many and interesting, as how steel is made, making a V-8 engine, water power, etc. Of course, these films are made by the corporations, but after showing the V-8 engine films, we discussed the speed-up in the Ford plant."

If Henry only knew!

Another comrade wrote of how one of the Harlem branches of our League educates its members. As the comrades in this branch are greatly interested in developments in Puerto Rico, they set up a special project to study the history, geography and economic and political conditions of the islands. A number of comrades are working on different aspects of this survey and when completed it will be presented to the entire membership.

A few comrades wrote on the question of permitting our members and active forces more leisure time. One comrade gave an example of how a father became antagonistic to our League because after he had convinced his daughter to join, she never spent an evening at home. She was busy all the time. Another comrade showed how difficult it was to get Irish and Italian girls to join because their parents did not want them to stay out late. These examples all prove that we still have a too rigid approach to our members, that we often make it impossible for them to study, to enjoy themselves, to live normal lives.



A delegate from the North is shown above greeting a Southern delegate at the recent National Convention of the Young Communist League held in New York City recently.

One of the major problems we face is that of making our League a national organization in the true sense of the word. We are especially weak in the basic industries. In these regions, the League is not an organization answering the requirements of youth. One comrade wrote about a branch in Chicago in which there are twenty members who are leaders of twenty-six organizations. But why these leaders can't lead some of their followers into the Y.C.L. was not explained. We want our members to be leaders, but we do not want our League to be restricted to leaders. We want the masses of youth.

In many places the Y.C.L. cannot function openly. Here we should be flexible. We should permit our local comrades to build youth clubs educating the youth along the aims and purposes of our League. These, where possible, can affiliate to the Y.C.L. and while functioning in their own club names also have the benefits connected with being part of our national organization. Many existing youth clubs can be drawn into the Y.C.L. on the same basis. This is why our proposed draft constitution proposes an affiliated form of membership.

To Meet the Requirements of Youth

It is of utmost importance to know the youth among whom we work their level of understanding and their desires. I could mention at least one branch on the East Side of New York where it would be impossible to organize the kind of project adopted by the branch of Puerto Rican comrades. In fact, any kind of study reminds them of school and, as far as they are concerned, the less said about school the better. Certainly, for such young people, educational forms will have to become indirect instead of direct. Athletics and social activity may become the major activities for them.

On the other hand, we have in our ranks more mature comrades who want to study Communism, who want to master Marxism-Leninism basically. Can we tell them because they are more advanced, to live on social and athletics? No! These youth must also find in the League the medium for their education.

UNION COMRADES

We often also find that young people who are busy in trade union activity or in the work of other youth organizations cannot be involved in all of the phases of a broader branch life. We must find suitable organizational forms for such members. If young trade unionists only have time for a class, good! Let a class be their Y.C.L.

Where young people want to specialize on one or another interest or activity we should permit such in our Y.C.L. For example, in Cleveland, an operetta group was formed. The members of the group, in order to excel in their activity, want to practice many nights a week and refuse to undertake other assignments. We should permit, and in Cleveland have permitted, this operetta group to become an affiliated club of our League and the members of the group have full power to decide on the nature of their group activity.

In Negro communities our League must base its life and activity around the traditions, interests and needs of the Negro youth. The development of a cultural program is of great importance in this respect, as the Negro youth, because of meager educational opportunities, because of drab home life, because of few recreational centers, gravitate especially toward social and cultural activities. Our League must help answer this desire for a fuller, richer life on the part of Negro youth.

Of all sections of the youth, the group among whom we have the least organization, is the farm youth. These have many progressive organizations, such as the Farmers Union Juniors, the Non-Partisan League Juniors and a variety of sport teams and leagues. We should encourage these organizations to grow and to adopt more progressive principles and aims. We should help in the establishment of all sorts of cultural facilities for farm youth. Motion pictures, circulation libraries, educational lectures, athletic equipment—all these are sorely needed among farm youth. The Y.C.L. should help them get these.

EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION

The changed conception and structure of the League which we wish to propose to this convention and which we have already been carrying into life these last months, are embodied in the draft program and constitution submitted to this convention for approval and adoption. By studying the constitution you will note that the structure proposed is greatly different from that of the Party, and certainly different from that of our League heretofore. In proposing these two documents our aim is to make it possible to transform

our League into the organization of education and service that it must become.

If the basic character of our League is to be that of education, what should be the content of this education? First, we must bear in mind the teachings of Lenin on this question. Young people cannot be educated solely through book learning. Our conception of education is the combination of study and practice. We not only favor the study of Marxist-Leninist theory, based on the accumulated knowledge of all past mankind, but also advocate active participation in the daily struggle of the working class and the toilers. Our whole educational program is based on a combination of these two elements.

Without making any extended report on the content of our educational work, I wish to emphasize briefly a few questions which bear special importance at this time. First, our whole program implies education in the spirit of internationalism. Why is internationalism so important at this time? Because the reactionary forces in every country are working to instill in the minds of the youth national and racial hatred. They try to poison the youth into believing that their nation and their people are destined to be the rulers of all mankind because of certain superior racial or national qualities.

WE ARE INTERNATIONAL!

We have the greatest love for our country and its people. We have the greatest respect for the revolutionary and democratic traditions of this country and its people. We are those who carry forward these glorious traditions. But we do not love our country and its people as opposed to other countries or other people. The development of transportation and commerce have tied together the fate of the people of the whole world. It is impossible for us to win freedom without at the same time helping the people of the world win freedom. We can assure our brother delegates from Puerto Rico and Cuba that we shall continue our struggle for their independence and freedom from the yoke of Yankee imperialism. We pledge to continue our fight for the freedom of Ernst Thaelmann and Carlos Prestes. We pledge support to the people and youth of all lands in their struggle against oppression and exploitation.

One of the most important expressions of our internationalism is the fact that our League is affiliated, together with youth of sixty other lands, to the great Young Communist International. This affiliation has often been attacked by the most reactionary forces of this country as tending to prove that our League is not an organization of the youth of this country, but an organization of foreign origin and foreign domination.

But these same people who object to our international affiliation are themselves part of industrial trusts and commercial combines. They object to our international affiliation only because they object and disagree with the principles and purpose of this affiliation. For it is a known fact that nearly every important national organization of youth is affiliated to one or another world body. Yet who would dare accuse these organizations of foreign domination? Who would dare accuse the YMCA or YWCA of being dominated by Geneva? We shall continue to maintain and defend our international affiliation in the spirit of our program and principles.

SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY

Second, our program implies education of our members in the spirit of democracy. For a most essential element in educating youth is to permit them freedom of discussion and action, permit them complete independence to decide for themselves the character of their organization and its activity. This was emphasized by Lenin as far back as 1916, when he said:

"We must be decidedly in favor of the organizational independence of the youth leagues . . . for unless they have complete independence, the youth will be unable either to train good Socialists from their midst or prepare themselves to lead Socialism forward."

The members of our League should carefully study the recent report of Comrade Stalin, in which he deals with the question of Party democracy and the role of leadership. What Comrade Stalin emphasized for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is of even greater importance for our League precisely because we are not a Communist Party. We are a much broader organization in program and structure.

It is therefore necessary to combat every form of bureaucratic leadership which destroys the initiative of the lower bodies. A few months ago I attended a meeting of branch presidents of one of the counties in New York. At this meeting we discussed some of the problems of inner League democracy, and one of the comrades at this meeting gave an example which showed a

flagrant violation of the spirit and content of democratic organization.

The organizer of her section, a capable comrade, was needed for other more important work. He was released from his section responsibilities and another comrade was assigned to replace him. The branches of the League in that section were never consulted. The members did not know of the change until they were confronted with the accomplished fact. Such practices cannot be tolerated in the future.

LEAGUE LEADERSHIP

The League membership has the right to decide on its leadership. The leadership in turn is responsible to the membership. The leadership cannot treat the members of the organization as soldiers who must carry out their commands. The leadership must discuss its problems with the membership and must be ready to learn from the membership and from the masses of the youth, if they are to lead correctly.

Our leading comrades must understand the significance of the words of Comrade Stalin who, speaking on this question, said:

"Lenin taught us not only to teach the masses, but also to learn from them."

"What does this mean?"

"It means, first, that we as leaders must not become conceited; that we must not think that if we are members of the Central Committee or our People's Commissars this means that we possess all the necessary knowledge to give correct leadership. An official position in itself does not prevent knowledge and experience. This is still more true with respect to a title."

"This means, second, that our experience alone, the experience of leaders, is insufficient to give correct leadership; that, consequently, it is necessary that one's experience, the experience of leaders, be supplemented by the experience of the masses, by the experience of the working class, by the experience of the people."

These remarks of Comrade Stalin should be studied over and over again. For in our League as well a title does not automatically add to one's knowledge and experience although it may sometimes add to one's conceit.

While making sure that the principles of democracy are not violated within the ranks of the League, it is also necessary for the leadership to be extremely vigilant against the enemies of the working class and organization. We must remember that freedom does not imply freedom to disrupt. Every trade unionist knows how important it is to keep rats and stooges out of his union.

Our League must understand that it faces a hostile ruling class which will attempt to use every method at its disposal in order to disrupt and destroy our organization and its work. In this respect, it is necessary to be vigilant especially against those who mouth loud revolutionary phrases in order to disrupt the organization, in order to give aid to the enemy. We especially refer to the Trotskyists, whose whole history is one of disruption, whose whole purpose in life is to destroy our organization and with it the broad united movement of youth.

INDIVIDUAL'S DEVELOPMENT

Third, our educational program must aim at character building and leadership training. We should develop the personalities, the talents and abilities of our members and the masses of youth. We are concerned with the development of the individual. We do not want automatons or Robots, as often accused. We want conditions under which the individual can expand, can become articulate, can acquire knowledge and ability for leadership. It is for this reason that we stand for a socialist society, for only under such a society can all the conditions be present for the development of individual personality.

As a means of developing the individual and through him the collective as a whole we want our League to answer and satisfy all of the normal interests and desires of youth. We want our members and youth around our League to be able to develop not only their minds, but also their bodies. As Lenin said: "Young people particularly need the joy and force of life. Healthy sport, swimming, racing, walking, bodily exercises of every kind, and many-sided intellectual interests. Learning, study, inquiry, as far as possible is common. Healthy bodies, healthy minds!"

Youth Can Win Leadership

Yes, we want our members to grow up in the spirit of clean living. We want them to have a moral and ethical code, but not one based on hypocrisy, not one which has one set of ethics for William Randolph Hearst and another for the masses of people. Our ethical code, as defined by Lenin, is based on the needs of the toilers. Clean living, personal honesty and integrity are necessary if we are to help rear a generation which will be capable of contributing to the struggle for a new social order.

We want a League which will carry forward everything that is honest and progressive in American life. We want a League which will educate its members in the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, which will help develop from its ranks leaders of the people, those who will be part of that vanguard which will lead the American working class and the American people toward the final victory, toward Socialism.

Some years back we thought that if the youth were to obtain economic security, peace and democracy, if they were to achieve a life with a purpose, the Y.C.L. would have to get it for them. This was a false view. These things can only be won by the youth themselves, only through their own efforts. Our League as an organization serving and educating the youth can help them do this, but cannot do it for them.

This we understand today. It is therefore necessary to examine how our League has been working to help unify the ranks of the youth, to help them win their immediate needs. In doing this, we must constantly bear in mind that the youth do not constitute a separate class in society. They cannot solve their problems all by themselves. They can

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Report of Gil Green, National Y. C. L. President

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only solve them together with all progressive classes and forces in this country. It is for this reason that the first concern of our League must be that of helping to build a powerful labor movement. Only a mighty militant labor movement can lead the fight against reaction, can guarantee an improvement not only in the conditions of young workers, but of all youth.

We are happy to note that American labor, led by the C.I.O., has made giant strides forward in the past year. For the first time in the history of this country, hundreds of thousands of auto workers are organized in their own industrial union. In steel, likewise, a large percentage of the workers are organized and have won important concessions and partial recognition from the steel trust. Hundreds of thousands of young workers are proud members of labor unions for the first time in their lives.

The Y.C.L. has been and will continue to be a loyal worker helping to build the trade union movement, helping to organize the millions of young workers, so as to raise their wages, shorten their hours of work and improve their working and living conditions. In auto and steel our task at the moment is to help consolidate the new unions so that in time these unions can win their rights as labor's sole bargaining agencies. To accomplish this, our concrete task is to help these unions find such forms and methods as will activate their younger members and make them conscious fighters for the labor movement. An important means by which this can be done is through the building of a labor sports movement. In steel, steps have already been taken to build baseball leagues and to organize other athletic activities in conjunction with the Amateur Athletic Union. In Cleveland, a Labor Sports League has been established. In New York a trade union sports conference was held and a number of unions have already established a variety of athletic activities. In Detroit, in Flint, in other industrial centers, similar steps are being taken.

AID ALL UNIONS

While supporting the industrial union form of organization, we also will continue to aid the craft unions. We favor a united trade union movement and oppose the reactionary policies and splitting tactics of the A.F.L. Executive Council.

As Y.C.L.ers we shall endeavor to convince both the industrial and the craft unions as to the need for helping young workers to acquire skill. The employers are organizing apprenticeship schools in order to get young workers at cheaper rates of pay, and as a means of training their own supply of skilled labor which they hope to use in lowering the wage standards of the workers in both the craft and industrial unions. We favor a federal system of apprenticeship under the jurisdiction of the trade union movement.

We shall also continue to work to convince all youth of the need for defending labor's right to organize and to strike. Where labor uses the strike weapon it is not for the sake of striking but only because this is the only way to force the employers to recognize their grievances and demands. The sitdown strikes have proven to be most effective weapons in defense of labor's rights. We unreservedly support labor's right to use the sitdown strike weapon.

Confronted with ever more pressing problems; influenced by the growth and activity of the labor movement, the youth of the country have in the past three years marched steadily forward toward greater unity.

STUDENT PROGRESS

In 1934, at our seventh convention, we hailed the first student strike, which involved some 25,000 youth, as a historic event—and it was. But compare it with this year's peace action in which close to a million youth participated in response to the call issued by 13 of the leading national student organizations.

In 1934, there were two radical student organizations, the Communist-led National Student League and the Socialist-led Student League for Industrial Democracy. Today, both of these are united with thousands of other student youth in that great progressive organization, the American Student Union.

The American Youth Congress was not yet in existence at the time of our seventh convention. It was born in August, 1934. In this relatively short span of time it has become established as the most important center for the collaboration of America's youth. The fourth American Youth Congress to be held in the city of Milwaukee from July 2 to 4, will be modeled after the Congress of the U. S. and is being called together by 73 leaders of the outstanding national youth organizations of this country.

Forty-one denominations of Protestant youth are united around their Declaration of Christian Conviction in the progressive movement of Christian Youth Building a New World. The Negro youth, who make up important parts of all of these movements, have also set up federations of their own, and in the South have established a movement representing 250,000 organized Negro youth—the Southern Negro Youth Congress.

The general peace movement of youth has also grown, not only through such agencies as the American Youth Congress and the United Student Peace Committee, but also through such movements as the Youth Section of the Emergency Peace Campaign. As a result of the activities of these agencies, 40 American youth represented this country at the First World Youth Congress, held in Geneva last summer. The United States Continuations Committee of that Congress is at this moment engaged in conducting a nationwide youth peace poll.

The Y.C.L. is proud that it played a modest part in helping to build this unity these last three years. It was able to do this, however, only to the extent that it broke away from former narrow sectarian conceptions.

It is an open secret that in former years we frequently looked upon ourselves as the only progressive organization of youth, as the only progressive force among them. We were, in fact, God's only children.

Today this has changed. We know we are not the only organization that stands for progress. We know that millions of American youth are progressive. Of course, the situation in the world these last years has helped to make many of them socially conscious for the first time.



CARL ROSS
Executive Secretary, Young Communist League

admit that for many years there have been progressive minded men and women in the settlement houses, church organizations, and other organizations of youth—although we often did not know of them.

We are proud of the fact that once we became convinced of the need for establishing unity, we worked with every means at our disposal to achieve this end. We can also say that through this work we learned to know and respect the personalities and views of other youth. We learned from them. We feel certain that they also learned something from us.

UNITY AT BEGINNING

Our task at this convention is not only to record the growth of the movement of youth these last three years, but to emphasize that this unity is only at its beginning. It would be wishful thinking to believe that the vast majority of America's youth are already united. It would be mistaken to believe that even most of the members of these organizations participating in one or another form of progressive collaboration are conscious of these movements and are actively involved in them.

And certainly there are whole strata of young people who have hardly been touched by these movements. First of these are the Catholic youth, whose organizations have in the main stood apart from the student peace action, from the movement for the Youth Act, and from other such progressive developments. Second are the farm youth and such important farm youth organizations as the 4 H Clubs.

We know, however, that the vast majority of youth want improved conditions, want peace and democracy. We are certain that before long the overwhelming majority of organized youth will be united around their immediate needs.

UNITY BRINGS RESULTS

No one can deny that through the American Youth Congress, through the movement for the American Youth Act, through such actions as the recent pilgrimage to Washington, the plight of the younger generation was dramatized before the people of this country as never before. And if the Federal Government for the past two years has been forced to recognize this problem and has given a certain amount of relief through the National Youth Administration we must say that this, though inadequate, is certainly a concession won for the youth of the nation. This was admitted by none other than Aubrey Williams, the director of the National Youth Administration. Speaking to the National Council of the American Youth Congress, shortly following the recent pilgrimage, he said:

"I think that your whole position in calling the attention of this country to the need, the great need of youth, is a very fine thing and I know that it has already yielded some good results and that it will yield more and I am in a pretty good position to know whether it yields anything or whether it doesn't."

It must therefore also hold that if unity is further broadened and cemented other concessions can be won in the form of jobs, student aid, recreational facilities, etc. The very moment the movement for such measures as the Youth Act ceases, the government will continue its policy of slicing relief at the expense of the youth. Conceding to the pressure of the reactionary forces, it will end the NYA or reduce its budget for the new year. That is why the movement for state youth bills and for the American Youth Act must be broadened and extended. We cannot permit the conditions of the youth to be worsened. They must be improved.

CIVIL RIGHTS PUSHED

It is not also true that the cause of civil liberties, the cause of race equality, was furthered by the progressive stands taken by such movements as the Christian Youth Building a New World, and the American Youth Congress? It was. To our mind this in great measure is responsible for the fact that our heroic comrade, Angelo Herndon, has at last won his freedom.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank the many organizations of youth and the millions of people who by their efforts made this freedom possible. This victory must only stimulate us to greater efforts in forcing Congress to curtail the usurped power of the Supreme Court, and in getting it to adopt anti-lynch legislation which will forever destroy what is the shame of America—the brutal lynch law of the South.

Herndon as a means of improving our fight for complete political, economic and social equality for the Negro people of this country. Now is the time to press forward in order to better the lot of the sharecroppers, the Negro young workers and the Negro youth as a whole.

Yes, there is no question about it, unity pays!

What are some of the problems connected with further extending this collaboration among the organizations of youth? First of all, there is the fear that some individuals have of unity with the Communist youth. This was expressed the other day at the United Christian Youth Conference held in New York City. Mr. Dennison, the executive director of the Catholic Youth Organization, substituting name-calling for arguments, bitterly attacked the Communist youth and warned all Christian youth to refuse to participate in any united front activity with them. He accused us of deception and trickery. Of course, Mr. Dennison could not give a single example of this, for there are none to give.

RESPECT AND INTEGRITY

Why? Because in our efforts to build a united youth movement we have operated on the following principle: (1) Mutual respect toward the religious and political views of all youth; (2) Respect for the integrity of all organizations—agreement not to interfere in the internal affairs of any of these; (3) Honesty and frankness in all relations among organizations.

We are proud to say that, as a result of our efforts in this respect, no one who has had any relations with us can cast doubt as to our sincerity or integrity. We have attempted to the best of our ability to live up to all pledges and agreements made.

Of course, we do not wish to say that mistakes have not and are not being made by our League. Where these occur they flow from a hangover of the narrow views of the past, from a lack of confidence in other youth. Such errors on our part we are only too anxious to have pointed out to us. But as to our integrity that cannot be questioned.

There are others who, while they do not resort to red-baiting, do not agree to unity with the Communists because they think there is a contradiction between our desire to establish a Socialist society and our readiness to help improve conditions today. We can assure them that there is no such contradiction.

Certainly we stand for a Socialist society. We believe that humanity need not continue to suffer from repeated economic crises, from mass unemployment, poverty and war. These are the products of a society in which the means of production and wealth are owned not by those who labor, but by a small class of individuals—the capitalist class. These are the products of a society in which production is based on profit instead of use. If the people under the leadership of labor, turned the wealth of this nation into the common property of all, economic crises, unemployment, poverty and war would be memories of a dark past. Increased production would mean increased consumption. The great industries and rich natural resources of this country would provide opportunity and well-being for all.

We are for a Socialist society because we know that Socialism works. For close to twenty years the people of the Soviet Union have been erecting the edifice of this new world. That is why the Soviet Union is the only land with no unemployment, with constantly higher standards of living, with no economic crises and with unlimited opportunities for its youth. We shall continue to work for such a society—for a Socialist America and a Socialist world.

Continued Fight Against Oppression

Until such time as the majority of people become convinced of the need for a new social order, we can and must fight back every form of oppression and exploitation. We must do everything in our power to help improve the immediate lot of the youth and people of this country. We do not share the theory that the worse the conditions of the people become, the sooner will such a new society be established. We believe that the greater the strength of the labor movement, the greater the united movement of the youth, the more extensive the struggle for peace and civil rights, the sooner will the American people, of their own free will, on the basis of their own experiences, be convinced of the need for fundamental social change.

These people may disagree with us on this score. They may believe that all of the ills of present day society can be cured without recourse to fundamental change. But does this difference of opinion make it impossible for us to unite around immediate needs? We think not. None of us want war. None of us want fascism. All of us want security. For these things let us work. Now—Today! Time and experience will tell who was right as to ultimate goals.

Another form of question often met up with is: "Is not your present defense of democracy only a maneuver so as to defeat fascism?" Do you not also wish to destroy democracy for your own ends?

Let us answer this question. We have always defended the democratic rights of the people—the right to freedom of speech, press and assembly. We have always defended the rights of the Negro people. We have always defended the rights of labor.

Our criticism was always directed against the inadequacy of present day democracy, against its capitalist class character. We exposed and still expose the fact that under our present democracy, millions of Negroes in the South are disfranchised. We believed and still believe that as long as wealth and poverty exist side by side, so long is true democracy impossible. That is why we stand for Socialism, because only under a Socialist society can all the conditions for true democracy be established.

If at this moment we put forward as our main slogan the defense of democracy, it is because the limited democratic rights won by the masses after generations of struggle are ever threatened by the forces of reaction. The defense of these rights becomes therefore of paramount importance, if humanity is to



The Northeast and Northeast-South Dakota, Minnesota's and Vermont's delegates to the recent National Convention of the Young Communist League are shown as they marched into Madison Square Garden.

march forward to a greater democracy, a Socialist democracy.

Methods of force and violence were never used by us, they were always used against us and against the struggling masses. History shows that in every period of great stress the reactionaries were the ones to resort to force and violence against the people.

TO SOCIALISM

But while some criticize us because they think we do not stand for democracy, others in the name of Socialism criticize us for defending democracy. These latter people, mainly to be found in the ranks of the Young People's Socialist League, accuse us of giving up the class struggle by posing the question of democracy versus fascism. The trouble with these comrades is that they fail to see the woods for the trees. What class drives toward fascism, wants fascism? It is the class of economic royalists—the Hearsts, the DuPonts, the Morgans. What class leads the fight against fascism, against finance capital? It is the working class. Thus the struggle between democracy and fascism is itself the sharpest expression of the class struggle. In the words of Lenin: "Through democracy to Socialism!"

At this point it is necessary to say a few words about our general relations with the Young People's Socialist League. We are sorry to say that in the past year the relations between the Y.C.L. and Y.P.S.L. have not improved, but grown worse. We are sorry, because we consider the Socialist youth our closest brothers in the struggle and want to work with them to achieve our common objectives.

Why have our relations not improved? Because the leading comrades of the Y.P.S.L. have adopted a holier than thou attitude toward all other organizations and youth. Behind loud revolutionary phrases they are succeeding in isolating themselves from the broad progressive masses. They have mechanical formulas with which they think they can answer every and all questions. No "errors" can escape their keen scrutiny. They know exactly what's wrong in Spain, in France, and even in the Soviet Union. If only their policies were accepted, the war in Spain would be over tomorrow! The labor movement the world over would have nothing to worry about.

But these remarkable people with all their genius cannot explain why their own organization is rapidly falling apart. Two years ago they claimed 5,000 members. At the recent convention of the Socialist Party, they claimed but 1,900. I say claimed, because their actual dues payments are only a few hundred.

Why has this happened? Because the Y.P.S.L. took into its ranks a gang of professional disrupters, the Trotskyites. Ever since these elements entered the Y.P.S.L., they have, in the name of "Socialism," been wrecking and destroying. That is why they entered the Y.P.S.L. in the first place. They saw growing unity between the Socialist and Communist youth, as expressed in the student field, as expressed in the trade unions. To destroy this unity they entered the ranks of the Y.P.S.L. This has been their policy everywhere, in Spain, in France, in Belgium.

But what has happened in these other countries? The Trotskyites were soon discovered for what they really are. They were thrown out of the ranks of the Socialist and Communist youth. Let the comrades of the Y.P.S.L. especially give heed to the example of the heroic Socialist youth of Spain.

TROTSKYITE ENEMIES

The Trotskyites have proven themselves to be the enemies of not only the labor movement, but of all progressive mankind. In the Soviet Union they resort to assassination and wrecking. In Spain they attempt to overthrow the People's Front government, which is fighting for its very life against international fascism. In the United States, they compare the American Student Union to a company union and try to destroy the growing unity of the youth. They must be driven out of the labor and youth movements.

When the Young Socialists learn this lesson they will begin to grow in size and influence in unity with the Y.C.L. and the masses of youth.

We want unity with the Socialist youth and hope that before long we shall have it. Together, our two organizations can help educate the masses of youth in the great ideals of Socialism.

In recent months some significant developments have taken place in the ranks of the Catholic youth. In New England, a Catholic student conference decided to cooperate with

other organizations in the defense of peace. This is an important development. When one links this up with the recent events in Germany, with the anti-fascist position taken by the Catholics of Brussels; with the growing dissatisfaction of the Italian masses with the Spanish policy of Mussolini; with the fact that large numbers of Catholic youth have been drawn into the trade unions; we can say that the possibilities for working together with the Catholic youth and their organizations are improving from day to day.

It is because of these developments that reactionary leaders are attempting to incite the Catholic masses against the Communists and the labor and progressive movement. In Germany, the fascists also made their attacks upon the Communists and the labor movement, but today religious freedom has been destroyed and Catholic priests are serving terms in prisons and concentration camps. And according to latest press reports, 1,000 Catholic priests have been accused of sexual crimes. Imagine the mockery of it! The degenerate Hitler accusing others of immorality!

STRUGGLE FOR PEACE

Now for a few words pertaining to the struggle for peace.

The main concern of the young people of this nation, as well as of our League, is how to keep America out of war. This is what all American youth want, this is what we all want.

However, if we are to keep America out of war we must understand who at this historic moment threatens the peace of the world and how these threats affect the youth of this country. There can be no doubt but that peace today is being threatened by the fascist powers, in the first place by fascist Germany and Italy.

Of course, this does not mean that the other imperialist powers have become pacifist angels. But the fascist powers, because they face financial and economic ruin, base their whole program on foreign conquest, on that of capturing foreign territory and enslaving foreign people. This is the significance of the racial theories of Hitler. This is the significance of the rabid glorification of war on the part of Mussolini and Hitler.

There are many youth in this country who agree with us when we say that peace is threatened by fascist aggressors. But they say that does not concern this country. We are far away. Why should we be concerned with a possible war in Europe? Our job is to keep out of foreign entanglements.

NEUTRALITY POLICY

This is why large masses of people support the policy of so-called American neutrality. But this policy plays directly into the hands of the fascist aggressors. How? Let us take Spain as an example. Spain is invaded by Germany and Italy. The American government declares an embargo against the legally elected government of the Spanish people. Who benefits by this policy? The fascists of course. Germany and Italy are only encouraged to further aggressive acts. Thus this policy has nothing in common with real neutrality. It is in fact its very opposite.

Given a free hand the fascist powers pounce on one victim after another. First came Manchuria, then Ethiopia, now Spain. If they win in Spain is anyone fool enough to believe they will stop there? Next will come Czechoslovakia or some other country until Europe is engulfed in bloody war.

And will this policy keep America out of war? It will not. America is tied to Europe with a thousand financial threads. War in Europe will sooner or later involve the United States the same as it did in 1917. Let us remember that in the last world war our policy was also one of so-called isolation, of so-called neutrality.

There is only one sure way by which America can keep out of war. That is by keeping war out of the world. It is for this reason that we favor the closest cooperation of the United States with all democratic countries, with all nations interested in preserving and maintaining peace. We favor the independent organization and action of the working class and the people of this country to make the foreign policy of our government a positive peace policy. We favor the independent activity of the working class and the people to establish effective measures of collective security as a means of stopping all acts of fascist aggression wherever they may occur. This is how we believe the interests of peace can best be served.

dollar war budget of the United States government. We therefore favor the immediate reduction of this budget and the utilization of those funds for progressive social legislation. From all that we have stated above, it should be clear that our League in every instance is ready to defend democracy against fascism. We are doing this in relation to Spain, we shall also do so in case other democratic countries are attacked by the fascist aggressors.

What, then, is our policy toward the Oxford pledge? To us the Oxford Pledge symbolizes the desire of the young people of this country to stay out of war and their lack of confidence in the present foreign and domestic policy of the American government. To us the Oxford pledge is not a pacifist oath. If we in this country faced the same conditions as the young people of Spain, we would not hesitate for one moment in defending democracy against fascism to the last drop of our blood.

Our most important immediate task in the defense of peace is to insure the victory of democracy in Spain. If fascism is defeated in Spain, this will help to check their designs upon other people, it will help to preserve the peace of Europe and the world.

It is for this reason that we shall continue to help build the United Youth Committee for Aid to Spanish Democracy. We shall continue to hold mass meetings, organize collections and send every form of material aid to Spain. Good work has been developed for this end in many parts of the country these last months.

But I am certain that you, comrades, will agree with me when I say that we have not yet done our full share, we have not yet involved the millions of American youth in defense of Spain. We have also done entirely too little to develop mass protest against the present "neutrality" policy of the American government. Not a moment must be lost to make up for this weakness. The youth of Spain are sacrificing their lives not only for the freedom of their people, but for the preservation of world peace. Their fight is our fight.

Tasks in Extending Youth Unity

After tracing the development of the progressive youth movement and placing some of its problems before you, what are our immediate tasks in helping further to extend and solidify the growing youth unity?

First, we must help make the fourth American Youth Congress the most representative gathering of youth this country has ever witnessed. We would like to see every organization of youth represented at this Congress. Special efforts should be made to get representation especially from the Catholics and the farm youth organizations.

Second, we should help in making the youth peace poll conducted by the World Youth Congress Committee a huge success. Around the questions in this poll our League can do splendid educational work and help convince youth of the correctness of our position on collective security and Spain.

Third, more attention should be given to the establishment of city and community forms of collaboration. We should encourage all sorts of committees for united activity. Peace councils, committees for Spain, anti-crime projects, committees around local or state youth bills or the American Youth Act—these are the more prevalent of the local forms of collaboration that exist today.

While encouraging local committees on specific issues, we also favor the establishment of permanent city or community youth councils. Such councils or federations exist in a number of neighborhoods of New York and in many small towns. They help to bring together the organizations of youth in behalf of neighborhood facilities, such as youth centers; encourage them to pool their resources for athletic and other equipment; make it possible for them to defeat attempts of the Hearst press and the police to disband the independent clubs, and serve as general clearing houses that help youth arrive at a common understanding.

The unity of youth must be forged first of all in every community. For it is here that we meet up with the real problems of youth, the problem of unemployment, crime, crowded living conditions, fire-trap schools, malnutrition, low wages, etc. This means that every local group of our League, every branch and club, should establish friendly relations with all other youth organizations in the community. Have all of our branches done this today? You, comrades, can answer this question better than I. You know that in many places we have not established such friendly relations. Let every branch accept as a major task that of helping to establish collaboration among the organizations and youth in their community. If this is done, the united movement of youth will widen and deepen to the benefit of the young people of the entire country.

A few concluding remarks. I wish to take this opportunity to extend the thanks of the National Committee to the many comrades who helped organize and prepare this convention. Many of you have come under trying conditions—with little funds, but with great responsibilities. We have gathered to do work. Let us do so with a seriousness based upon a realization of the critical period in which we live. Let us do so in a spirit of due modesty.

In looking backward over the fifteen years of our existence, we have much to be proud of. We have consistently fought for the interests of the youth of this country. We have remained true to our great principle of internationalism, and have worked tirelessly to defeat reaction and war. In this work we have trained many leaders of the youth, many leaders of the labor movement, and its vanguard, the Communist Party.

In looking backward we honor the memory of those who gave their lives in the interests of the toiling masses. We especially remember our comrades James Ashford, Joe York, Harry Simms and Ronald Edwards. Above everything else, we pledge to aid the Spanish people—to fight side by side with the members of our League who are over there. Our hearts and minds are with them. We shall not rest until victory is won. And, comrades, it shall be won.