

February 18, 1930

Frank J. Manning,
Nat. Sec. Y.P.S.L.,
2653 Washington B'v'd , Chicago

Dear Comrade Manning:-

This much belated reply to your letter of January 15th is sent with apologies for my tardiness.

I did not comply with your request that I call on Mr. W.B. Baker, at 239 Auburn Avenue, because I saw at once that a person at such an address must be a Negro. I heard later, from Comrade Edith Washburn, who did call on him, that my surmise was correct.

When Mrs. Washburn made her report about Baker, there was quite a discussion in the Local on the subject of organizing the Negroes into the Socialist Party. The two Washburns, who are from the north, were in favour of inaugurating a campaign among them at once. The discussion was spirited, if not heated; at the end, a vote showed that the Comrades Washburn stood alone.

The sense of the meeting seemed to be about like this; it is entirely proper that the Negroes be organized into the Socialist Party; it must be done, and some day, it will be done. But, in the present state of sentiment in the south on the negro question, and in view of the violent prejudice existing against the very name of socialism, any steps taken by the Party in such a direction would be extremely disastrous to the further spread of influence of the So. Party among the white population of this section. Our Local, the only one in the state, is tiny, with only a handful of dues-paying members. It would be suicidal for us to begin work, officially, among the Negroes. If we were strong and live and growing, with a powerful organization in the state and thousands of members in this city, we could start propaganda among the Negroes without prejudice to ourselves; but, under conditions as they are, we had best leave Negro organization severely alone.

An argument used by the Washburns was that Communism would gain headway among the Negroes, if we did not get there first., Perhaps it will; unfortunately, it is only too likely that such will be the case. The emotional appeal of both Communism and Socialism will sweep the Negroes like wild-fire. But White Supremacy is still vital in this part of the world. Should the Negroes go socialist in large numbers and put up Negro candidates in the elections, the S. P. will become a "Nigger Party" in the south, on this subject, still solid, and there will be no white people in its ranks. Should they go Communist, it is but too probable that scenes of violence and terror would mark the suppression of this much feared menace.

It was finally agreed by the Local that if any comrades desired to teach or preach the principles of socialism among the Negroes, ~~xxx~~ as private individuals, their efforts would be appreciated; but that this is not the moment for official action looking toward organization.

I would much like to have this letter shown to Clarence Senior; it will ~~ix~~ supplement a report of the Local's action which Mrs. Washburn, as Secretary, was requested to send to the National Office.

Fraternally yours,

Mary Raoul Millis.

Copied, March 18, 1930

MRM