
Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, August 16–23, 1938

Second League of Nations World Youth Congress

Extracts from: Youth Demands a Peaceful World
Report of the Second World Youth Congress
Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, United States of America
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“A Generation United”

More than 600 delegates and observers representing youth organizations in 54 countries and 18 international organizations debated and made plans from August 16–23 at Vassar College. During that week, Poughkeepsie, New York, became a center of world attention. All the way round the globe, news wires carried stories of this 2nd World Youth Congress where a generation of young people stood together, convinced that a better and a peaceful world is both necessary and possible.

From the time that the delegates arrived, through the Reception Meeting in New York City at the Randall's Island Municipal Stadium on August 15th, up the Hudson to the Vassar campus, and until the last official word was spoken just after noon on August 23rd, all types of reporters – representing wire services, radio networks, newsreel companies, magazines and photo agencies – tried to describe this demonstration of youth’s desire and determination for peace and international justice. Hundreds of flashes, stories and pictures were sent out by these reporters, giving almost as many different impressions of the Congress.

Here we can present only a few of the facts and publish the Reports which resulted from the discussions. The reader will have to imagine the setting for this indescribable experience.

With wars in progress, with serious threats of new wars impending, a World Congress of young people representing all races and religious convictions, many political tendencies, met and – in a remarkable spirit of good neighborliness – planned international activities to meet current economic and political crises. Many adults scoffed at this “incorrigible optimism” and “starry-eyed idealism.” But somehow none of the delegates seemed to mind. All were agreed that optimism and – especially – idealism were much-needed attributes in a hard-boiled world where violence and lawbreaking are allowed to continue unhindered.
Most widely publicized was the Vassar Peace Pact, a concise statement of the delegates' attitudes on the subject of international conduct but more important to the youth organizations collaborating in the Congress are the reports of the four Commissions. There, detailed suggestions for concrete activities will be found – activities to improve life for young people in terms of economics, politics and philosophy.

These reports, formulated after several days of intense discussion, indicate the wide range of interest of our generation. Equally, they prove to the world that youth is seriously concerned with basic solutions to our everyday problems – problems which are universal, affecting youth of all nations, all races, all creed.

Unfortunately, not every nation was represented at the Congress. The governments of Italy and Germany did not allow youth organizations in those countries to accept the invitation to participate. Germans and Italians who were present came therefore as representatives of international organizations. Japanese participated as delegates from the World Y.W.C.A. and as observers from the Japanese Student Christian Association.

Messages were received from World Youth Congress Committees and youth organizations in Albania, Egypt, Nigeria, Switzerland, and the U.S.S.R., saying that practical obstacles made it impossible for delegates to be there, but that they were with the Congress in spirit and wished to continue collaboration.

Greetings were also received from hundreds of adult peace organizations, trade unions and religious bodies, as well as from prime ministers, foreign ministers and prominent citizens throughout the world. These statesmen hailed the efforts of youth being made through the World Youth Congress and urged young people to take an even more active part in formulating a world opinion favoring an orderly world community.

To Geneva, two years ago, delegates were sent from 36 countries. The Vassar Congress marked a significant growth. Not only were more countries represented, but each delegate came as an official spokesman for an organization. Particularly important to the United States were the large delegations from the Latin American nations. Equal in importance was the splendid representation from the colonial countries. For the first time in the history of international youth and student meetings, European domination was impossible.

As far as can be determined, this Congress was more inclusive than any international meeting ever held. Its success in bringing together youth of so many backgrounds – for intelligent discussions of the most vital issues of the day – is unchallenged.

Its concrete results will be measured by the growth of each National Committee and the degree to which organizations carry out the suggestions contained in the Reports which follow.