

"Brief For The Socialist Assemblymen".

COMMENT on the Socialist defense at Albany has heretofore proceeded on the basis of the oral statements made before the Judiciary Committee by those who represented the Socialist Party as lawyers and witnesses. The lawyers included Morris Hillquit and Seymour Stedman, two of the foremost spokesmen of the Socialist Party since its organization in 1901. Hillquit also appeared as the star expert witness on the subject of Socialism and the program of the American Socialist Party. Algeron Lee was also an expert witness; three of the Assemblymen themselves took the stand; the National Secretary of the Socialist Party also participated in the defense.

But with all this it might be said that the oral statements of any or all of these party spokesmen could not be held as declarations of the official policy of the Socialist Party. It would seem, however, that men like Hillquit, Stedman, Lee, Waldman and Branstetter ought to be good authorities on what their party stands for. But if there is any doubt about their ability to tell clearly as lawyers and witnesses what constitutes the party policy, that doubt can hardly exist when their statements are carefully set down in a printed brief which summarizes the defense as an entirety. The printed brief does not give an individual view or interpretation; it is a composite of the best that the Socialist Party had to offer in exposition of its principles.

During the entire defense at Albany the Socialists took the attitude that the hearing was a farce; that expulsion was a foregone conclusion. It was their deliberate object to use this opportunity to proclaim the tenets of Socialism, regardless of the inutility of the defense for the retention of the five vacated assembly seats.

As a general proposition a party could not be held accountable for an interpretation of its principles by any member or official in a criminal trial or investigation. But when representatives of the party are deliberately selected as expert exponents of the party position, that brings us much nearer to a case of party responsibility for the defense. Lawyers are hired to win cases and it is natural to expect them to stretch every margin of interpretation in favor of their theories of legal conformity. But experts on Socialism must be taken to be concerned only with winning an exact understanding of Socialism.

Another special aspect of this trial is that while most Socialist and Communist defendants and witnesses are without experience in the difficult process of stating principles under questions and cross-examination, this could hardly be said of a veteran lawyer and debater like Morris Hillquit. Moreover, the printed argument is signed by six lawyers, four of whom are Socialist Party members

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and one of whom calls himself a Socialist, though not a party member at present. To say that this summary of the defense is not true to the Socialist Party principles it at once to condemn that party as absolutely irresponsible.

As might be inferred, the foregoing comment is in response to the claim of the present pathetic "Left Wing" of the Socialist Party that the Albany defense is not binding upon the Socialist Party. These "Left Wingers" repudiate this defense, but they do not repudiate the Socialist Party. They repudiate Berger also, but they protest that he represents Bergerism, not Socialism. In other words, whatever is done in the name of the Socialist Party by its duly accredited representatives in the courts, in Congress, in city councils, in the party conventions and by the party executive committee, the Socialist Party is still immaculate.

This "Left Wing" is a miserable joke because it is under the delusion that it can escape the inherent treacheries of the Socialist Party by a proper incantation of revolutionary phrases. Does it not demand affiliation with the Communist International? Why does it matter if this is conditioned upon the Communist International itself first becoming something in the image of the American Socialist Party?

The test of last September is conclusive so far as the membership of the party at that time is concerned. Any Socialist who remained with the decadent party after three-fourths of its members repudiated it as a hopeless instrument of the revolutionary class struggle only deceives himself when he tries to gloss over the whole matter with a few phrases of revolutionary sentimentalism. Behind the breakup of the Socialist Party was the clear demarcation of Left and Right which has gone through the century of history of the Socialist movement. This was no playing with phrases; this was a worldwide repudiation of counter-revolutionary Socialism, of that Socialism which stands ready to defend "democratic institutions" even against the on-sweeping militant proletariat.

These farcical "Left Wingers" cannot understand why their party should be classed by the Communists with the German Social-Democrats. In Berlin the Socialist fight for "democracy" is carried on with machine guns and by assassination; in Albany the fight for "democracy" is made with phrases. That is all the difference, and it is no difference at all because the Socialist phrases used at Albany are pregnant with the promise of future action — and that is why so many eminently safe and sane believers in "democracy" are upholding the rights of the Socialist Assemblymen.

"But why not class us with the German Independents?" these Socialists ask. Because the German Independents have no distinct classification except as they act from day to day. In the midst of civil war there can be only two choices of action, the third alternative being inaction. When the Independents fight for soviet power they are Communists, but when they actively or passively sustain the Ebert-Bauer "democracy" they are opponents of the proletarian revolution.

Every member of the Socialist Party is bound by the defense at Albany unless he takes some step to establish the fact that this is a misrepresentation of his party. If the "Left Wingers" of the Socialist Party could conceivably prove themselves as at least good Centrists by disposing of every official responsible for this defense; if they could establish the precise difference between Bergerism and Socialism and eliminate the former from the party (this difference being very much of a mystery to us); if they could finally get the party to act in the way that might suit them, what sort of party would it be? Truth of the matter is these "Left Wingers" differ from Berger only in the degree of miserable hypocrisy, in which respect they are by far the worst sinners, because they attempt to cover up their essential reactionism in an obscurity which only emphasizes their cowardliness and their scabbing on the revolutionary movement.

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A few extracts from the Albany brief will serve to keep fresh in our memories the Socialist confession of faith:

"There is no reason in law or morals why the Socialist Party should not admit aliens to membership. It is not the first political party in America to realize that immigrants are potential voters."

And then, to make sure that nobody will suspect that the interest in the alien goes beyond the vote to his common action as a worker with other workers, it is emphasized that the party constitution has recently been amended by referendum to require immediate naturalization of all its members. So that the Socialist conception of "political action" by the workers is even narrower than ever before in the party history.

"The idea of a general strike for political purposes is one that the Socialist Party of the United States has consistently rejected. The argument has been that if the number of workers in a parliamentary country who are determined to the point of striking for political reform is strong enough to entertain the notion of a general strike, it is strong enough to cast its vote for the reform and effectuate it by political means.