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Clearing the Decks

MORRIS HILLQUIT has emerged from his long retirement with an article in *The Call* for May 21st, entitled, "The Socialist Task and Outlook". Because of his position in the Party, this article must not be taken as the expression of an individual. It is published in *The Call* in just the manner that the pronouncements of James M. Beck are published in *The Times*. It may be regarded as a semi-official declaration, formulated after consultation with Party "leaders" of all shades of opinion, of the position—or lack of position—of the element which still controls the Party machinery.

Careful reading of this document impresses one immediately with the power of the Left Wing agitation in the Party, and its profound roots in the revolutionary feeling of the rank and file. Morris Hillquit is a clever politician; he knows how to gauge the temper of the Party membership, as he has demonstrated at St. Louis and elsewhere. His legal training and his experience in Party affairs fit him better than anyone else to lead the Centre, into whose hands the Right Wing is willing to deliver its power, now that it is unable to maintain itself before the wrath of the rank and file.

We had expected something better from Comrade Hillquit. The document runs away from all important questions; it endeavors to create the impression of dissatisfaction with the behavior of the Party, while it carefully avoids any specific statements; it formulates no definite position; it censors Socialist parliamentarism in one phrase and defends it in the next, forgetting to call attention to the actions of our Congressional representative and lesser parliamentarians; it makes provision for a change of front as pressure is applied, a truly opportunistic position. Now as ever, Hillquit is attempting to carry water on both shoulders; he flirts with the revolutionary sentiment that is now dominant in the movement; he coquettes with Proletarian Dictatorship in Russia and Hungary, while spurning it nearer home; he implies a mild reproof to the majority Socialists of Germany; he mentions the St. Louis platform and immediately sheers away, fearful of this test if applied to the "leaders" of the Party.

Unlike many of our local "Socialist" spokesmen, Comrade Hillquit admits that the Second International broke down before the supreme test of the war. But it was not the Socialist movements that were at fault, "It was the economic organization of the European workers, and the pressure of their immediate economic interests (as understood by them) that broke the solidarity of the Socialist International," says Comrade Hillquit. "It was not parliamentarism which was primarily responsible for the mischief." He goes on to speak of "excessive parliamentarism," but "on the whole the Socialists in Parliament expressed the sentiments of their constituents pretty faithfully."

This in other words is Meyer London's justification for his acts in Congress. "I was not elected by a purely Socialist vote, and I must obey the wishes of my constituents," said London in effect when he was questioned. According to the Communist Manifesto the Socialists "are, on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement." But now we learn that the economic organizations, which are organized primarily to safeguard the wage status of the workers, are responsible for the breakdown of the revolutionary movement.

If Comrade Hillquit's line of argument is correct, how does it explain the continuous flirtation which the Socialist Party, of which he is an executive officer, carried on with the A. F. of L. until Gompers made it impossible? The economic organizations in Europe broke down in 1914. During the two years following the A. F. of L. flirtation continued, and the Socialist Party made no attempt to point out the necessity for "one working-class union."

Comrade Hillquit says, "The first task of the post-war Socialist International must, therefore, be to organize and reorganize all grades and strata of labor on broad class lines, not only nationally, but

internationally. Not as trade unions, nor even as mere industrial unions, but as one working-class union."

But how is this to be done? According to Comrade Hillquit's own statement "the organized labor movement . . . was a movement for the benefit of the better-situated strata of labor—the skilled workers." In other words, the "economic causes"

Call for a National Conference of the Left Wing

Call for a National Conference of the Left Wing of the American Socialist Party, issued by Local Boston, (Louis C. Fraina, Secretary); Local Cleveland, (C. E. Ruthenberg, Secretary); and the Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party of New York City, (Maximilian Cohen, Secretary).

The international situation and the crisis in the American Socialist Party; the sabotage the party bureaucracy has practised on the emergency national convention; the N. E. C. aligning our party with the social-patriots at Berne, with the Congress of the Great Betrayal; the necessity of reconstructing our policy in accord with revolutionary events,—all this, and more, makes it necessary that the revolutionary forces in the Socialist Party get together for counsel and action.

• This call is therefore issued, for the holding of a National Conference of the Left Wing of the American Socialist Party, to discuss:

1.—The crisis in the party, and action thereon; the conquest of the party for the party, for revolutionary Socialism.

2.—The New International; ways and means to prevent the party aligning itself with the "International" of the social-patriots, of the Ebert-Scheidemann gangsters, and the wavering centre; affiliation with the Bolshevik-Spartan Communist International alone.

3.—The formulation of a declaration of principles and purposes of a national scope of the Left Wing of the American Socialist Party.

4.—Forming some sort of a national council or bureau of the Left Wing for propaganda, securing of information and spreading information.

5.—To express and draw together the revolutionary forces in the party; to consider other means of furthering the cause of revolutionary Socialism.

This call is issued to locals of the Socialist Party, branches and Left Wing groups within the party. The test of admission, provisionally, will be acceptance of the Manifesto of the Left Wing of the Socialist Party of Greater New York.

Left Wing locals are invited to send delegates officially. Where a local officially refuses to participate, branches or minority groups in the party accepting the principles of the Left Wing should send delegates.

Representation—one delegate for every 500 members. No local or group should send more than four delegates. Locals or minority groups with less than 500 members are entitled to one delegate.

The conference will be held starting Saturday, June 21, in New York City. Each delegate will be taxed \$25 for a central fund, out of which will be paid the expenses of all delegates.

Left Wing Locals and Branches, act! Send communications to Maximilian Cohen, 43 West 29th St., New York City.

of the collapse of the Second International were, "the economic organization of the European workers, and the pressure of their immediate economic interests (as understood by them)".

What guarantee is there in the whole vague program outlined in Comrade Hillquit's letter—summed up in the phrase "Socialist propaganda"—which leads us to believe that the skilled workers are going to forget their "immediate economic interests"?

That there is a fundamental difference of principle between the Left Wing and the dominant "moderate Socialism" which controls the Party, is nowhere more clearly indicated than by Comrade Hillquit's phrase, "In countries which have passed, or are passing, to a régime of Communist or Socialist government . . ." This is a recognition of a distinction between the two; this is an implied differentiation between two forms of the Cooperative Commonwealth, which we do not admit.

What is the nature of this distinction? The following quotation indicates Comrade Hillquit's conception of it:

"Shall the socialization of industries and national life be attempted by one master stroke, or shall it be carried out gradually and slowly? Shall the working class immediately assume the sole direction of the government as a working-class govern-

ment, or shall it share governmental power and responsibilities with the capitalist class, at least, 'during the period of transition'?"

So far as we know, no Socialist leader advocates "the socialization of industries and national life—by a master stroke". Lenin has carefully pointed out that this socialization, on the contrary, must be carried out "gradually". But this is beside the point. The question at issue is *not* socialization of industry, but the *class* under whose rule this socialization shall be carried out. In this respect the final question is pertinent: "Shall the working class immediately assume the sole direction of the government as a working-class government, or shall it share governmental power and responsibilities with the capitalist class, at least, 'during the period of the transition'?"

To this question there is but one answer for a scientific Socialist. In the words of Marx (Gotha Program) "This corresponds to a political transition-period, during which the government cannot be anything else but the dictatorship of the proletariat."

It is true that Comrade Hillquit declares that the Socialist International must support the dictatorship of the proletariat in all countries in which the working class seizes the power; but he still further emphasizes his doubt of this course of action, and implies a serious criticism of Bolshevik and Spartacist tactics, when he says:

"Whether we approve or disapprove of all the methods by which such proletarian government has gained or is exercising its power is beside the question."

The Socialists of the world must *not* support intervention in Russia, or actively oppose "that government" (the Soviet Government) "in the face of its life-and-death struggle with international capitalism and imperialism." The same with Hungary. But he does not say that we must support the Soviet Governments of Russia and Hungary—which is our Left Wing position.

In countries like Germany, however, "in which the struggle for mastery lies between two divisions of the Socialist movement, one class-conscious and the other opportunist, one radical and the other temporizing," we must support the class-conscious, radical movement. But in America, where the same struggle over principles and tactics is going on in the ranks of the Socialist movement, we must support the opportunists and the temporizers!

Comrade Hillquit admits the necessity for the Third International, but he is by no means specific as to the reasons. He admits that the Second International is broken, but the inference is that he would put together the pieces and give it a new name. He repudiates Berne, half-heartedly, and he also repudiates Moscow, as not having advanced "the process of reorganization of the Socialist movement of the world." He continues, "The task of organizing the Third International is still before us. It must be accomplished on the basis of principles and conduct, not on that of personal likes and dislikes. It is the common task of all international Socialists." If this is Comrade Hillquit's position, why did he not oppose the National Executive Committee's acceptance of Berne? Why did he wait until Berne had discredited itself even in the eyes of Liberals, until it had shown itself as an offshoot of the conference taking place in Paris?

He carefully refrains from stating what he considers should be "the basis of principles and conduct" for the Third International. Yet it is just this that is dividing the Socialist movement the world over. Does Comrade Hillquit think the acceptance of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat should be one of the requisites for admission to the Third International, and if so, will it be sufficient to accept it abroad and accept the principle of "sharing governmental power and responsibilities with the capitalist class, 'during the period of transition'" at home?

When Comrade Hillquit uses the term "international" to qualify "Socialists," does he mean it as a synonym for "Revolutionary"? Would he exclude Scheidemann and Ebert from the Third International? If so, would not he then exclude all other "Socialists" whose acts during the war were dictated by the same opportunism as actuated these

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