

## Gompers and Hillquit

On February 8th, 1921, the Hillquit report urging the severance of all international Socialist relations was adopted by the Central Committee of Local New York.

On March the 8th, 1921, Gompers cabled to the International Federation of Trade Unions at Amsterdam announcing the severance of relations between the A. F. of L. and the international labor movement.

At a time when the imperialists of the world are more and more solidifying their ranks; at a time when the need for working-class unity was never greater than at present, American Labor and American Socialism are urged to eschew entangling alliances with Internationalism. American workers are called upon to sever affiliation with their European comrades who would lead the American movements to destruction.

The Russian comrades, the Hungarian comrades and the Italian comrades may be face to face with the power of Entente Imperialism and reaction, but Hillquit bids the Socialist Party turn its back on their struggles and "devote all of its strength and resources to build up on American soil a powerful organization of class-conscious revolutionary Socialism."

Gompers and Hillquit are both united on a policy of isolation; both believe it necessary and possible to erect a barrier separating America from the onward sweep of the social and economic forces let loose by the World War and the post-war period.

Gompers is faced with two internationals, the Yellow at Amsterdam and the Red at Moscow. He has never made any pretense at friendliness with the Soviet "savages". He has never flirted with Bolshevism. Neither will he swallow the Amsterdam International. Its militant pronouncements against the brutal murderers posing as the Hungarian Government, which has been engaged in a systematic campaign for the complete destruction of the working-class movement of Hungary, although signed by his friend Appleton, were too much for Gompers. He has "withdrawn" American Labor from such contaminating influences.

Hillquit is faced with three Internationals. The Second, the Third and the "would-be" or "two and a half." He will have none of the Second. A reading of the platform and principles he drew up for the May 1920 Convention of the Socialist Party would clearly indicate that that is where he really belongs. No European party still talks of bringing about Socialism after "political power has been achieved through the securing of a majority in Congress and in every State Legislature, and the winning of the principal executive and judicial offices." Only in the Second International can such phrases still be found. Hillquit even had a good word to say about the leaders of the Second International, long since repudiated by every Socialist. In describing the growth of Socialism in Europe, he pointed with pride to the fact that "in Sweden and in Czecho-Slovakia; in Germany and in Austria,

Socialists were largely in control of their governments."

At the same convention, Hillquit thundered against the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Soviet System. Two months later at the Geneva Congress of the Second International, J. H. Thomas, Vandervelde, Scheidemann and Huysmanns likewise thundered against "any form of Dictatorship." But the rank and file of the Socialist Party have long since buried the Second International, and so Hillquit will have none of it.

For a time the "would be" International at Vienna offered an avenue of escape. The N. E. C. at first indicated its intention of sending a delegate to the initial conference held at Berne in December 1920, but it refused in the end to be officially represented at the February conference at Vienna. It may be that the manifesto adopted by the Centrist parties meeting at Berne, influenced the decision of the N. E. C. In its manifesto we find the following declaration on the dictatorship:

"The dictatorship, i. e., the application of all the means of state power of the Proletariat when it has become the ruling class, to counter the resistance which the bourgeoisie may offer to the realization of Socialism, is a transitional phase in the evolution from the capitalist class state to the Socialist Commonwealth. . . . If however during the period of the decisive struggle for power, democracy is destroyed by the intensity of the class antagonism, then the workers must assume dictatorship through proletarian class organization."

This definite approval of the necessity of a dictatorship in addition to the opposition within the party, perhaps influenced the party officials to stay away from Vienna.

In Hillquit's report to the Central Committee repudiating all affiliation with any International and especially the Third, a number of reasons for this decision are given which we will attempt to analyze:

1. "The Socialist Party has repeatedly and constantly declared its readiness to affiliate with the Communist International, with only such reservations as were imperatively imposed by existing conditions," it declares. The report failed to mention that these reservations include every principle upon which the Communist International is based, but to Hillquit this means "repeatedly and constantly declaring readiness to affiliate."

2. Affiliation with the Communist International would mean changing the name of the party to "Communist Party," which we are led to infer is something very dangerous or terrible, thereby giving implied sanction to the treatment by the government of members of the existing Communist Parties. The report fails to point out that even the Government has not gone so far as to consider the name "Communist" as in itself illegal, but that the clause in the Communist Party program calling for armed insurrection was the excuse given by the government for its policy of terrorism,—an excuse which was repudiated in the decision of Federal Judge Anderson.

3. "It would have to subscribe publicly to a program committing it to illegal activity." This is

probably based upon Point III. of the 21 points which declares:

"The Class Struggle in almost every country of Europe and America is entering the phase of civil war. Under such conditions the Communists can have no confidence in bourgeois laws. They should create everywhere a parallel illegal apparatus, which at the decisive moment should do its duty by the party, and in every way possible assist the revolution. In every country where, in consequence of material law or of other exceptional laws, the Communists are unable to carry on their work lawfully, a combination of lawful and unlawful work is absolutely necessary."

We are to assume from this objection that Hillquit would not have us continue our propaganda if the carrying on of Socialist propaganda was made illegal or was forbidden by the law. Should the law forbid Socialist propaganda, we should evidently, according to Hillquit, then and there cease all efforts at spreading the message of Socialism. Point III. requires that where, because of martial law or of other exceptional laws, the Communists are unable to carry on their work lawfully, then a combination of lawful and unlawful work is necessary. That, according to Hillquit, means subscribing to a policy of illegal activity. This is one of the half truths that are worse than untruths. Surely, Comrade Hillquit would not be in favor of ceasing all Socialist propaganda merely because the ruling class forbade it. No party ever did and no Socialist Party worthy of the name ever will. The capitalist class carries on its struggle against the workers by legal and illegal means at all times, not hesitating even at suspending the Constitution when necessary. Comrade Hillquit however, would have the worker entertain so great a respect for the laws of property, that he would forbid them from waging any sort of struggle which was not strictly legal.

The Spanish Socialist Party recently addressed a number of questions to the Executive Committee of the Third International relating to the question of illegal organizations within the party. The answer of the Executive Committee published in *Le Populaire*, January 25th, 1921, is worth while quoting at this point.

"The reason for the existence of the illegal organization consists in the necessity of giving to the party at all times and under all conditions the possibility of remaining in existence, independent of the policies of the government and of the whim of the government officials, and to have ready at hand the means for giving a systematic revolutionary direction to all of its activities."

"The illegal organization is a sort of liason organization. It is subordinate, as all other activities of the party are, to the Central Committee of the Party. The numerical proportion between legal and illegal organizations depends upon political conditions. If there is no interference with political liberty, the illegal organization will be reduced in importance, but if reaction rules, the Central Committee itself will doubtless be forced to undertake secret activities. In any case, that part of the party which works illegally, will not constitute an independent organization."

4. The report opposes the 21 points because it calls for systematic propaganda in the Army, and it leaves it to be inferred that to engage in propaganda in the army would help to bring about the destruction of the Socialist Movement. The report does not oppose propaganda in the Army as such. It does not take the position that propaganda in the Army is wrong, but it does assume that to declare ourselves in favor of propaganda in the army would be fatal.

It is interesting at this point to recall that at the 1904 convention of the Socialist Party, a motion was introduced by a delegate named Reynolds of India urging that we authorize and direct the N. E. C. to take action for the "concentrating of specialized, determined propaganda for Socialism among the privates of the army and the militia over the entire country and its Colonies." The motion however was not adopted. (Proceedings of National Convention 1904, p. 277.)

The same resolution came up again at the 1908 Convention, and Spargo reporting for the Resolution Committee said that the 1904 resolution on the Army and Navy was brought up again, and he presented the following resolution:

"The Convention recommends that the N. E. C. consider the question of instituting a special propaganda among the privates of army, navy, and the state militia."

This resolution was carried. (From proceedings of National Convention 1908, p. 178).

In other words, the need of carrying on systematic propaganda in the Army is by no means new. Neither has the notion emanated from the brain of Zinoviev. All parties have at all times realized the necessity for carrying on such propaganda. In 1917, during the mayoralty campaign special efforts were made in New York City to bring the message of Socialism to the newly drafted soliders at Camp Upton. Hillquit himself attempted to go out and talk to the "boys" although the military authorities interfered.

It is true that the American standing army is not a conscript army as are all European armies. None of us have any illusions as to the character of the make-up of the American army, but nevertheless, efforts should be made to reach them, as well as all other Americans.

5. Hillquit objects to submitting every platform and declaration of principles for approval to the Communist International and to submit to its decisions on all questions of party policy and party tactics. He fails to point out that Point 15 clearly advises that a program should be drawn up in conformity with the special conditions of every country, as well as in accordance with the resolutions of the International: that Point 16 states that in the adoption of binding resolutions, the International is bound to consider the variety of conditions under which the different parties have to work and struggle. Hillquit's idea of an International is still the Second International, an International which contents itself with talk and passing compromise resolutions and then leaves each party to do as it pleases. That is the kind of International Hillquit advises the Socialist movement to wait for. The workers