

St. Louis and After

In our last issue we called attention to the change of heart and the change of front with respect to the war on the part of Mr. Hillquit and that part of the Socialist Party which follows his leadership. This change has since been accentuated in an open letter to Mr. William Hard, published by Mr. Hillquit in the "New Republic" of December 1st and the New York "Call" of December 5th. In this letter Mr. Hillquit completely repudiates the doctrine of the St. Louis Resolution—or what was thought to be the doctrine of the St. Louis Resolution—that our opposition to war is a matter of principle. According to the new dispensation, the Socialist Party's opposition to American participation in the war is not at all a question of principle in the sense of opposition to all wars, or to all capitalist or ruling class wars, but a question of expediency, based, among other things, upon our judgment as to the condition of the war-map. To the question put to him by Mr. William Hard whether, if he had been a member of Congress, he would have voted in favor of America's declaration of war against Germany, Mr. Hillquit makes the following answer:

"If I had believed that our participation would shorten the duration of the world-war and force a better, more democratic and more durable peace, I should have favored the measure, regardless of the cost and sacrifices of America. My opposition to our entry into the war was based upon the conviction that it would prolong the disastrous conflict without compensating gains to humanity."

We do not care at this time to discuss the meaning of this new position as a matter of principle. But we want to point out some of its consequences. Assuming that Mr. Hillquit correctly represents the present position of the Socialist Party, then every Socialist is necessarily free to take such an attitude toward the war as he chooses without offending against any party principle. For the whole question is taken out of the domain of principle and put upon the plane of expediency and

private judgment. Mr. Hillquit thought that our entry into the war "would prolong the conflict *without compensating gains to humanity*," and he therefore opposed the war. But Frank Bohn, for instance, thought that American participation would shorten the conflict. And John Spargo may have thought that even though it might prolong the conflict, it would bring "compensating gains to humanity" in the shape of a "more democratic and more durable peace," which Mr. Hillquit recognizes as a good ground for *voting* in favor of war.

Whether or not America's entry into the war would prolong the conflict or shorten it is clearly a matter upon which people might differ without offending against any Socialist principle. Frank Bohn may not be as good a military expert as Morris Hillquit, but he is clearly entitled to his own opinion in the matter. Bohn might well say to Hillquit: "Your assertion that America's entry into the war will prolong the conflict is obviously based on the assumption that as matters now stand Germany has the upper hand and if let alone will soon force her opponents to lay down their arms. For if the Allies were having the upper hand any accession to their strength would naturally *speed* the decision in their favor, thereby shortening the war. Also, if there was a stalemate which neither side could break, any accession of power on either side would shorten the war by giving one side the preponderance, thereby preventing the war from continuing indefinitely in fruitless attempts by both sides to break the balance. Now, I don't agree with you in your estimate of the situation. I believe that the Allies are winning, or at least holding their own. America's entry into the war will therefore necessarily have the effect of shortening the war."

And Spargo could say to Hillquit:

"As Bohn has already pointed out, your assertion that American participation will prolong the conflict is based on the assumption that Germany has now the winning hand. I am rather inclined to agree with you. But that is so much more reason why we Socialists ought to be in favor of America's entry into the war. You say yourself that had you believed that our