
The Socialist Party Apostle Speaks.

by Nicholas I. Hourwich.

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After a long period of silence the “apostle” of the American Socialist Party, Morris Hillquit, has again spoken. His declaration appeared in the *New York Call* (September 22nd [1919]), under the somewhat solemn and hollow title: “We are all Socialists.” This declaration was reprinted in the *Chicago Socialist* and no doubt in other of the Socialist Party papers.

Like all apostles, Morris Hillquit appears on the stage and pronounces judgments only under the most extraordinary circumstances. His preceding public statement in the press appeared a few months ago just before the national organization of the Left Wing, preceding any formal break with the Right Wing. This statement was freely credited at that time with being the effective appeal “to clear the party decks” of non-conformist and insurgent elements.† It was the text read and discussed by the old National Executive Committee at the meeting when they began the expulsion of more than half the party membership. Now the reason for breaking his vow of silence (since his illness can hardly be considered as the only reason for a silence like that of the grave which Hillquit has maintained lately, especially after the fact of convalescence

for the purpose of the former press statement) — the reason is undoubtedly the consummation of the split of the Socialist Party into three separate parties, and especially the formation of the Communist Party.

So ruthless were his followers in carrying out his order to “clear the decks” that Hillquit now takes an unexpectedly conciliatory attitude, quite different from that in his previous declaration, even finding it necessary to reprimand his zealous followers in fatherly fashion for their “infraction of Socialist ethics and decency” in making vicious attacks against the Left Wing in the capitalist press.

Hillquit misses the point that these attacks by the leaders of the Socialist Party in the bourgeois press upon the Left Wing were not an accidental mistake, but an inevitable outcome of the whole social-reformist position of the parties of the Second International, the American Socialist Party included. Parliamentary first, and above all, one of the many small screws in the bourgeois parliamentary machine, striving to acquire a position of larger importance, the American Socialist Party, like its European sisters, values its reputation for ability and “respectability” in the eyes of

†- The Hillquit article of which Hourwich writes, “The Socialist Task and Outlook,” was published in large type on the back cover of the New York SP daily on May 21, 1919. In it Hillquit argued for a clean and amicable break between the Socialist Party regulars and the insurgent “Left Wing” elements (conveniently sidestepping the issue of the illegally invalidated party elections which the Left Wing had swept). The last lines of the article — “Better a hundred times to have two numerically small socialist organizations, each homogeneous and harmonious within itself, than to have one big party torn by dissensions and squabbles, an impotent colossus on feet of clay. The time for action is near. Let us clear the decks.” — was widely interpreted by both sides in the conflict and by historians ever since as a call for a party purge, a “clearing of the decks of the party of alien elements” rather than the actual metaphor intended, the battleship of the socialist movement “clearing its decks” of impediments in preparation for battle with capitalism. Both factions of the Socialist Party were spoiling for a fight and Hillquit’s measured tone and prescription for an amicable split were ignored. Hillquit’s second moderating article in *The Call*, written after the purge and split had taken place, seemed to be duplicitous to Hourwich and others of the “Left Wing,” who saw in Hillquit the chief puppeteer behind the actions of National Executive Secretary Adolph Germer and the SP regulars at the 1919 Chicago Emergency Convention. In reality, Hillquit was in convalescence for tuberculosis at Saranac Lake, NY, during and after the convention and correspondence in his papers indicates that he was informed of Chicago events *post facto*. Hillquit’s measured tone and attempt to detoxify the factional environment in his two public articles was intellectually consistent, regardless of whether or not one believes it was a practical possibility. —T.D.

bourgeois political public opinion above everything else. It needs this reputation for the support by one or another of the competing capitalist political parties of the reforms which it introduces. In its ambition to secure for itself this reputation, the American Socialist Party would not have mercy on its own “father,” and, of course, would not be ceremonious with some “mad” Left Wing....

It should be remembered that, in its substance, just this ambition to prove to bourgeois public opinion its “ability” and “respectability” — its lack of sympathy for all sorts of “wild” ideas and “crazy dreams” — was to a great extent responsible for the governmental activity of Ebert, Scheidemann, and Noske (ambition to make a good showing before the Allies and in that way to “save” Germany). This motive explains the zealous work of the Milwaukee “Socialist” district attorney, and many others of the same noble company. Even the late Plekhanov, who was a giant in comparison with the Socialist nonentities who are now barking at the “Left Wingers” in the American press, could not refrain from appearances in the bourgeois press with accusations against the “Blanquists.” This has been done, is being done, and, we do not doubt for one moment, will yet be done in spite of all admonitions, by the social-opportunists and the social-reformists of all lands.

The rest of the Hillquit document harmonizes with the part already analyzed. There is much sentimental lamenting which does not conform with the role of a political leader on the theme “We are all Socialists,” and the protestation that “the division was not brought about by differences on vital questions of principles”; that those differences which do exist “arose

only over disputes on methods and tactics.” (And in the previous statement Hillquit recommended a division of the party into its two fundamentally inconsistent elements, so that each could carry on its work to suit itself! ... This differentiating between differences of “principles” and of “tactics,” by the way, discloses the misunderstanding of the fundamental logical and vital connection between the two. This is another illustration of the wretchedness of political thought of this celebrated “leader of the American Socialists” who was bragged about as a god — in circles where least of all it might be expected.

In conclusion, to characterize this document, let us quote in full the following profound sentence: “Our newly bathed ‘Communists’ have not ceased to be Socialists even though in a moment of destructive enthusiasm they have chosen to discard the name that stands for so much in the history of the modern world.... The bulk of their following is still good Socialist material and when the hour of the real Socialist fight strikes in this country we may find them again in our ranks.”

In this quotation — every word is a *chef d’oeuvre!* — Take, for instance, the paternal patting on the back of the American Communists, and with them the entire Communist International, this is, if not innocent naivete, then the height of political impertinence. And about the renaming of the Socialist into the Communist International! How many pens were spoiled upon this. Such a Titan of revolutionary thought as Lenin devoted a series of articles to this subject, pointing out the necessity and the scientific reason for such change of name. But this, according to Morris Hillquit, is nothing but an act of “destructive enthusiasts”! ...

***Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport. Ellipses appear in the original.
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