
Hillquit Excommunicates the Soviet

by Max Eastman

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Some people think that Morris Hillquit is a great intellectual leader, others think he is a great politician, but he seems to me to have missed fire in both these capacities in his recent manifesto calling for a new Yellow International. He issued his manifesto on September 23rd [1920], and that was just 14 days after the famous old conservative French newspaper, *L'Humanité*, the stronghold of yellow socialism for years, turned loose upon its astonished readers column after column of pure communist propaganda. In the issue of September 9th, Marcel Cachin and L.D. Frossard, who had been sent to Moscow for the purpose of "treating" with the Bolshevik leaders, published in *L'Humanité* the 9 "conditions of affiliation" which they had brought back with them, and declared that they accepted them without serious alteration, and that they would henceforward lead the struggle for the adoption of those principles by the French party. And they took pains to state that they would do this "in complete accord" with that little group of Socialists and Syndicalists of the extreme Left, gathered together originally, as I remember, by Comrade Pericat, the "Committee of the Third International." To those who understand the significance of things this news is almost as important as the recent events in Italy.

There could hardly have been a less appropriate time, from the standpoint at least of international politics, to come out with an attack on the "dictatorship" of the Third International, not replying to those 9 conditions of affiliation, but ignoring them altogether. And there could hardly be a less favorable moment to launch the call for the "new 2-1/2 International" than the moment when *L'Humanité* — the heart of the French party — had abandoned it.

However, since Morris Hillquit will undoubtedly be one of the chief founders of that International

— and perhaps the only one left by the time he gets around to it — we are compelled to read his manifesto with critical attention. Are its statements of fact reliable? Are its arguments valid? Does he succeed in making a case against the Third International from the standpoint of sincere Socialism?

Invective.

In my opinion he makes a case against them upon one single point only — he successfully accuses them of calling him bad names. There is no doubt that the Communists have chosen the method of polemics, rather than of dispassionate demonstration, in compelling the Socialists of the world to take their stand for or against the process of revolution as they conceive it. In this they seem to me to have acted unwisely, but when I reflect that in a good many of the countries of Europe the "Socialists" whom they denounce have been shooting them down on the streets, I cannot say there is anything unnatural in the tone of their voice. At present I am satisfied to demonstrate very quietly — as I am going to — that Hillquit's arguments are fallacious and his statements of fact unreliable. But if he were coming after me with a machine gun, I should probably agree with Zinoviev that he is a "traitor" and "agent of the bourgeoisie." At any rate, it is not the tone of its voice or its choice of epithets which will determine any intelligent man's decision about the Third International. As Marcel Cachin himself says:

We ought not to confound the truculent word of accusation with the serious and profound truth which their criticism contains. At bottom they tell us that in order to enter the Third International it is necessary to fulfill one condition and one only — to break vigorously with the policy of collaboration, to act as Socialists, to prepare the coming

revolution. The rest is a question of form.”

While agreeing that the Communist invective — at least as directed toward “Centrists” — is not the best political policy, I cannot refrain from adding that there is a good deal of poetic justice in it. It gives me a certain aesthetic pleasure to see Morris Hillquit in a state of indignation because Zinoviev has “excommunicated” him from the Third International as a traitor and an agent of the bourgeoisie; and it will give the same pleasure to about 60,000 others who were “excommunicated” from the America Socialist Party by Morris Hillquit’s minority machine as traitors and agents of anarchy, for the simple reason that they advocated the Third International. It may be bad politics, but it is excellent dramatics. And any word of objection which Morris Hillquit utters against the Left Wing on the ground of its use of epithets can be turned with equal force against himself and practically all of his colleagues of the Right and Center.

Novelty?

There is no use pretending that this split in the Socialist parties is new, or that the absolute mutual intolerance of the two groups is new. It has always been exactly the same — on the one hand revolutionary Marxians, on the other reformists and diluters of Marxian theory. They have always known their views to be incompatible. They have always been ready to tear each other’s eyes out. They have always called each other “anarchists” on the one hand, and “agents of the bourgeoisie” on the other. The Russian Revolution did not alter this fact in the very least. What the Russian Revolution did was to give each of these groups a chance to show what it could do for Socialism. The reformist group failed miserably, and the revolutionary group succeeded gloriously. And for that reason the revolutionary group, from being a pitiable academic minority which the reformists could ignore or condescend to smile at, has become a majority in a great many of the Socialist organizations of the world, and is rapidly becoming a majority in them all. The position of the two groups is reversed, but their opinion of each other is exactly what it was 5 years ago, when we of the Marxian group in this country used to publish a little inconspicuous and continually perishing, but terribly

conscientious, magazine called *The New Review*.

Morris Hillquit’s manifesto is an attempt to prevent our group from becoming the majority in this country and sweeping his group into the position of negligibility which we formerly occupied. And it is very astute of him to attempt to do this by asserting that our doctrines are “new,” that they “emanate from Moscow,” that they are “narrowly national,” that they are a “glorified version” of Bolshevik “mistakes and shortcomings,” that they are an attempt to submit the working class movement of the world to a “dictatorship of Russian Communism.” All these statements are in my opinion absolutely false, and yet in calling them astute I do not really mean to call them insincere. I doubt if he ever read *The New Review*, except as a comic paper. I doubt if he ever realized that the IWW was a body of grown-up men and women lead by serious and intelligent experts in revolutionary theory, several of them more erudite than he is, if not so clever. I believe that his sarcastic surprise at this relentless and didactic laying down of the law to him and his crowd by the new International is perfectly genuine. He thinks that it “emanates from Moscow.” But almost every word of it might be a quotation from anti-Hillquit editorials in *The New Review*. The actual truth about this matter is that the present Communist program differs so little from the Left Wing Marxian position, as expounded even before the war by such people as Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, Lenin — or for a concrete instance by Pannekoek in his debates with Kautsky in 1912 — that one can only be astonished at the boldness and practicality of their imagination. Only because he did not take such writing seriously in the past, and study them, does Hillquit find himself surprised at the “newness” of the Communist position. Anyone who did take them seriously in the past and study them, could not fail to be surprised at the opposite fact — namely, that the actual experience of a successful revolution has added so little in the way of general principles to the body of revolutionary science.

Soviets.

The one new and distinctly Russian contribution to the Marxian theory is the name and idea of soviets. These institutions played the dominating role in the Russian Revolutions both of 1905 and 1917,

and they determined the form of the first proletarian state. It is not an unnatural assumption that similar institutions will play a leading role in other revolutions and other proletarian states. Just as parliaments and ministries, or parliaments and presidents, have been the universal expression of the victory of the bourgeoisie over the feudal regime, so soviets and commissars, or some modification of the same, may very likely be a universal expression of the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie. At least the fact that soviets have been successful in one revolution is not an argument against their revolutionary value. Hillquit will have to agree, I think, that the burden of proof rests on him. Let us see how he acquits himself of it.

When the Bolshevik Party unfolded its active agitation after the February revolution [he says] they demanded the immediate convocation of a Constituent Assembly on the basis of unrestricted franchise. The Soviets were already in full swing, but the Bolsheviks secured a strong minority representation in the Assembly, while the Socialist Revolutionaries were in the majority. But between the election and the meeting of the Assembly the Bolsheviks had succeeded in capturing the Soviets and the government machinery of the country. *It was then and then only* that they coined the slogan "All power to the Soviets," and discovered that the Soviets were the only logical instrument of proletarian rule. (My italics.)

That is an absolutely false account of what happened. And anyone could find it out in a half hour's reading of almost any account of the Russian Revolution. But I am going to leave all secondhand accounts aside. Hillquit will find in a copy of the *Izvestiia* of June 19, 1917 (new style) a speech of Lenin made on June 17th to the first All-Russian Congress of the Soviets. It was Lenin's first great public speech after he returned to Russia, and it was a speech anticipating and supporting the Bolshevik resolution subsequently to be introduced by Lunacharsky demanding that the governmental authority be transferred to the Soviets.

"There is no other course for these institutions," he said. "They cannot go backward or stand still. They can only exist by going forward."

And, as though he anticipated the very argument which Hillquitists were going to make against the Soviets in future time, he added:

"They are a type of state which was not *invented by Russians*, but *produced by revolution*."

That was on June 17, 1917, and Lenin's speech was followed on the same day by a speech to the con-

trary effect by the Premier of the existing government, Kerensky. In the *Izvestiia* of June 22nd [1917], Hillquit will find the Bolshevik resolution introduced by Lunacharsky, the concluding sentence of which reads as follows:

Having ascertained, therefore, the complete breakdown of the policy of agreement with the capitalists, the Convention finds that the only solution is the transfer of all governmental authority into the hands of an All-Russian Soviet of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasants' Deputies.

And if Hillquit wants to know exactly how far the Bolsheviks had at that time succeeded in "capturing the Soviets," he will find in the same paper a report of the voting on these two resolutions, the one advocated by Kerensky and the one advocated by Lenin:

543 votes for the Menshevik Resolution.
126 votes for the Bolshevik Resolution.
52 not voting.
65 delegates absent.

And if he will read the *Pravda* for June 29th [1917] and the *Izvestiia* for July 3rd, he will find that in the demonstration of July 1st organized by the same convention, the Bolshevik minority carried in its line of march the slogan, "All power to the Soviets!"

It seems worthwhile to me to establish this matter in detail, because Hillquit is surrounded for many minds with an atmosphere of scientific authority which he has done little in recent years to merit. There could hardly be a more inexcusable, or a more important, misstatement of easily ascertainable facts than he has made here.

But I confess that his reasoning seems even less reliable to me than his facts. I cannot imagine a prettier example of the fallacy of "argument in a circle" than the one which Hillquit presents in these words:

Let us assume [he says] the reverse of the situation, i.e. that on the day of the opening of the Constituent Assembly the Bolsheviks had found themselves in the majority of that body, while the Soviets were in control of the non-Bolshevik Socialist parties. Would the theoreticians of Moscow Communism still insist upon the "dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of Soviet power," and would they have dispersed their own Constituent Assembly? If I may venture a guess I should say that in the hypothetical but not impossible situation outlined, the body to be dispersed would have been the Soviets, and the revolutionary formula now preached to the world would have been "the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of a Constituent Assembly."

In other words, “let us assume that the Soviets had *not* proved to be the proper organs of revolution, would the Bolsheviks still insist that they are?” Of course they would not. The whole point of the matter was that the Soviets *did* prove to be the proper organs of revolution, and the fact that the Bolsheviks believed they would, and that Lenin prophesied it *on the general grounds of revolutionary theory* long before only adds to the rigor of the concrete proof.

There is, of course, a legitimate question about the universal value or necessity of exactly that form of organization called Soviets, and if one is in a simple state of mind about the matter, it needs only to be simply state. It does not require any circulatory arguments or misrepresentations of history to prove it. When Hillquit says that “If at the time of the first outbreak of the Revolution of 1917 there had been in Russia a strong and unified Socialist Party and a powerful countrywide organization of labor unions, the chances are that one, or, more likely, both of them, would have taken charge of the situation” — he suggests something whose possibility nobody can deny. The value or necessity of forming Soviets under such circumstances seems now to be in process of experimental determination in Italy. And it is no doubt because of this fact — and because the leaders of the Third International are absolutely devoid of that bigotry and narrow nationalism which Hillquit imputes to them — that they have ceased to stress the demand for the organization of Soviets. Neither in the 9 conditions of affiliation which their Executive Committee presented to the French Socialists, nor in the 21 conditions which their recent Congress [2nd: July 19-Aug. 7, 1920] adopted for the presentation to the Centrist parties in general, do they make any mention of that Russian word, or any of its equivalents in other languages. They do, on the other hand, expressly state that the Executive Committee of the Communist International must in all its decisions take account of the “varied conditions under which the workers of different countries are compelled to struggle.”

The Communist International is centralized, it is disciplinary, it is “the International of Action”; but it is farther from dogmatic thinking and sectarian emotion than any other Socialist body that ever ex-

isted.

II.

It seems, then, that Hillquit has not only attacked the demands of the new International very ignorantly and with false logic, but he has attacked them where they no longer exist. He has based his entire argument against the Third International upon a brief statement in a letter written over a year ago, and signed only by Zinoviev, the chairman of the Executive Committee. It seems a little strange that he should have done this 2 weeks after the 9 “conditions of affiliation” were published in Paris, and relayed to the newspapers of this country — the *New York Times*, at least — by cable. These 9 points were the Socialist news of the day. It is difficult not to be a little impatient at Hillquit’s rushing into print just while we were waiting for an accurate copy of them, with this overwhelming attack upon the Third International based upon a brief and wholly outdated statement of its Executive Secretary.

It strains our patience still more when we notice that Zinoviev himself declared in his own statement that what he was saying applied only to “the present moment.” This is what he said:

The general unifying program is at the present moment the recognition of the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of Soviet power.... The so-called Center is, in spite of its protestation, an *objectively* anti-socialist tendency, because it cannot and does not wish to lead the struggle for the Soviet power of the proletariat. †

Hillquit says that this is “the sole specification of offense which, as far as I know, the chairman of the Moscow International has ever vouchsafed in his indictment against the ‘Centrists.’” And here I must remark again that for a leader of socialism and one of the prospective founders of a new International, Morris Hillquit’s knowledge does not extend very far. Has he never read, or heard of, the reply of the Executive Committee of the Third International to the proposal of the German Independent Socialists to join with them in forming that new International? It is the crucial document in the whole matter upon which Hillquit is presuming to deliver an opinion. It is dated Moscow, February 5, 1920. It is signed by Zinoviev as

†- I put the word “objectively” in italics because I think the careful truthfulness implied in its use is so apt a refutation of Hillquit’s assertion that Zinoviev is “bombastic.” He is anything but that. [—M.E.]

President of the Executive Committee. It bears every mark of his personal style. It contains not 1, but 11 “specifications of offense,” or, in his own words, “Capital Faults,” of the leaders of the German Independent Socialists and “the Centrist Parties in General.” And after reciting these 11 points, which constitute a record, sometimes of perfidy, sometimes of stupidity, sometimes of vacillation, but never of clear speech and action by these leaders in *their own countries*, it proceeds to draw up 5 more counts in an indictment of their *international attitude*. It is so devastating and yet so true a document that if Hillquit really has not read it, I can only congratulate him.

I will not quote the parts which characterize his own position, but since he declares that the “Independent Socialists of Germany rallied wholeheartedly to the defense of the Soviet government,” and that “the Moscow International expressed their appreciation of this manifestation of International Socialist solidarity by publicly denouncing them as renegades and traitors,” I will quote a few sentences of its indictment of some of the leaders of the German Independent Socialists.

At the beginning of the revolution these Centrists formed a coalition government with the declared traitors of the working class — the Scheidemanns — they sanctioned the shameful expulsion of the Berlin Ambassador of the Russian proletariat, and sustained the policy of the rupture of diplomatic relations with the Soviet power. The chiefs of the Right of the Independents have from the beginning of the German Revolution advocated an orientation towards the Entente, and have opposed with all their power the alliance of Germany with Soviet Russia....

Their literary representatives who published their writings in the same edition with bourgeois pacifist “democrats” and the avowed servants of the bourse and bank, could find not better activity than to spread the dirty scandals of Russian and other counterrevolutionaries against the Russian Revolution. A calumny as completely absurd and dishonest as the so-called “Socialization of Women” in Russia, which was invented by the generals and the spies of the Entente, finds a place in the book of Kautsky. The latest work of this writer, *Terrorism and Communism*, appears in the same edition with the collection of falsified documents discovered in America about the corruption of the Bolsheviks by the German general staff. These examples suffice to characterize the physiognomy of a series of leaders of the Right of the German Independent Socialists.

That is a specimen of the “manifestation of International socialist Solidarity” by Hillquit’s friends, the German Independent Socialists of the Right.

And what manifestations by Hillquit himself, or by any official, or any leader of the American Socialist Party, except Eugene Debs? Not one single unqualified word or gesture. Only the demand that our government should stop waging war on them, that our government should recognize theirs — the demand of every intelligent bourgeois liberal in the United States. Only that — and always accompanying it an assurance to the American public that “we are not as they,” “we do not believe in their methods,” “we are a different kind of socialist” — an assurance which only finds a complete culmination in this kind of manifesto itself.

Morris Hillquit, why do you try at the same time to boast of your “solidarity” with the Communists of Russia, and to expound with convincing lucidity your absolute want of solidarity with them? Why not be as straightforward as Victor Berger, who is against them, and always has been against them, and always has candidly said so? Do you not know as well as the does that there has always been this split in the ranks of those who call themselves socialists? Do you not know that not only the same doctrines, but in several cases, the same individuals whom you and he “excommunicated” from the Socialist Party in America, with your notorious Section 6, are now in Moscow helping to excommunicate you from the Third International? ...

I should like to go on to say that Hillquit not only missed the real issue of the 9 and the 21 points, and the reply to the German Independents, but in devoting himself to Zinoviev’s letter, he also dodged Zinoviev and centered his attack for the most part upon something which he read into that letter, and which is not there at all — namely, the idea that we have in all countries reached the point of overt action for the “immediate realization” of Soviet governments.... But I am cut off at this point by our new boss — the high cost of paper. And I shall have to omit, or at least postpone, what I was going to say under the title “Hillquit Absorbs the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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