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# Clear the Decks!

## An Editorial in *The Revolutionary Age*, May 31, 1919.

by Louis C. Fraina

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The controversy on principles and tactics in the Socialist Party is coming to a head. It is coming to a head through the revolutionary upsurge of the membership and the decision of the moderate officials and counterrevolutionary bureaucracy in the party deciding to split the party in order to retain control.

Instead of meeting argument with argument, and facts with facts, the moderate petty bourgeois “socialists” in the party are answering the revolt of the membership with expulsions and with acts that throttle the will of the membership.

Branch after branch of Local New York, affiliated with the Left Wing, has been expelled; and now the National Executive Committee, in session in Chicago, expels the whole Socialist Party of the state of Michigan, with threats of other expulsions. This, clearly, is partly a criminal attempt to steal votes from Left Wing candidates, in order that the moderates may be “elected.” It is, moreover, a desperate attempt to “isolate” the fires of revolutionary socialism, lest they burn away all the fires of the moderates.

Nor are these actions isolated. They are proceeding upon a definite theory, formulated by that master strategist of the moderates, Morris Hillquit. In an article in the *New York Call* of May 21, “The Socialist Task and Outlook,” Hillquit presents his attitude. The article is, on the one hand, a cleverly camouflaged plea for moderate socialism disguised as “radical;” and, on the other, a declaration of open war against the Left Wing. Hillquit insinuatingly adopts the “language” of the revolutionary socialist; but every statement has a reservation — a sinister maneuver to mobilize indefinite revolutionary sentiment in the party for the moderate representatives who are now speaking for — and misrepresenting — the party. The whole perfor-

mance, its subterfuge and “centrist” tendency, is exposed in the fact that, while he rejects the Berne International, Hillquit equally rejects the Communist International organized at Moscow, with which the real elements of revolutionary socialism are now affiliating.

We shall, in a series of editorial articles, analyze the tendency of Hillquit’s declaration. Let us now consider his declaration of war against the Left Wing.

Hillquit characterizes as “unfortunate” the controversy in the party; he does not deny “the sound revolutionary impulse which animates the rank and file” of the Left Wing, but is against their tactics, and concludes:

“It seems perfectly clear that, so long as this movement persists in the party, the latter’s activity will be wholly taken up by mutual quarrels and recriminations. Neither “wing” will have any time for the propaganda of socialism. There is, as far as I can see, but one remedy. It would be futile to preach reconciliation and union where antagonism runs so high. Let the comrades on both sides do the next best thing. Let them separate, honestly, freely, and without rancor. Let each side organize and work in its own way, and make such contribution to the socialist movement in America as it can. Better a hundred times to have two numerically small socialist organizations, each homogenous 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.”

The Left Wing has depended upon propaganda. It has tried to formulate the revolutionary sentiments of the membership, to articulate their aspirations, to educate the members into a consistent and constructive proletarian class conception of socialism. It has tried to affiliate the Socialist Party with the international revolution, with our comrades in Russia, Germany, and Hungary, with the new Communist International, the heir of the revolutionary First Interna-

tional, betrayed and castrated by the “socialism” of Morris Hillquit and the 2nd International.

The moderates in the party have not met facts with facts and arguments with arguments. They have consistently refused to discuss the theory involved in the controversy between the Right and the Left, they have flouted the intelligence of the membership; and now, still dodging the fundamental issue in dispute, they resort to the brute force of expulsions and the indecency of stealing votes, in order to wreak their reactionary will upon the party. They stigmatized the Left Wing as a secessionist movement, as working to split the party; but now, realizing that the Left Wing is conquering the party for revolutionary socialism, for the Bolshevik-Spartacan International, the moderates are adopting the policy they malignantly ascribed to the Left Wing — split the party!

Every revolutionary socialist in the party is perfectly willing that the moderates should secede; let them secede and affiliate with the Labor Party, the radical trade union policy of which is their policy. But this is not the intention of Hillquit, Lee, Germer & Co. On the contrary, they wish to retain control of the party, even if it is necessary to expel the bulk of the membership. They want to erect a Chinese wall between the Left Wing and the party members — they want to imprison us, in much the same way as capitalism imprisoned the agitator. They want to retain control of the party press and party organization; they are adopting the same tactics that the Ebert-Scheidemann “socialists” pursued against the minority in the party — adopting the policy of expulsion and denunciation. They are social-gangsters and traitors to socialism.

Why are these tactics necessary? If the majority of the membership is for moderate socialism, why are the moderates disqualifying members from voting, stealing ballots in order to pile up a moderate “majority”? It is because they recognize that the majority is against them now, and if not now, will be against them in a few months. Nothing can crush the revolutionary upsurge in the Socialist Party! So the moderates adopt the tactics of brute force, of a desperate minority bent upon rule or ruin.

Clear the decks? Yes!

Revolutionary socialism in the party accepts the challenge. If in a minority, we are not afraid to organized a new party; we are not afraid to act precisely as the Bolsheviks and the Spartacans did: American socialism shall be represented in the Communist International, it shall respond to the Bolshevik-Spartacan call for solidarity and action! Our comrades call — answer!

You cannot mix laborism and petty bourgeois “socialism” with revolutionary socialism. You cannot betray socialism and yet claim to represent the proletarian revolution.

Clear the decks! Clear them — Clean.

But this clearing of the decks must be done by the membership. It must not be done by a few bureaucrats, acting as gangsters and betraying socialism. We accept the challenge, but we refuse either to secede or be expelled from the party by Hillquit, Germer, Stedman & Co. We refuse to allow the reactionary NEC to sabotage the referendum vote. We refuse to allow the NEC to anticipate the action of the Emergency National Convention of the party. The membership referendum and the National Convention are the supreme expression of the party: the NEC cannot sabotage these in order to retain control for that “socialism” which means a betrayal of socialism. Let the moderates — the betrayers of socialism — organize a new party or join the Labor Party.

We refuse to turn over the Socialist Party to the moderates. We shall not abandon the struggle to revolutionize the party, for the bulk of the membership is overwhelmingly revolutionary. We shall reorganize the party, we shall crush the moderates and the criers after the dead, we shall make the party worthy of membership in that Communist International of the Bolsheviks and the Spartacans, of the Socialist Party of Italy, of revolutionary socialism in all lands. We shall conquer the party for revolutionary socialism.

Clear the decks!

The slogan of the moderates is: Split the Party for Moderate, Petty Bourgeois Socialism!

The slogan of the Left Wing is: Conquer the Party for Revolutionary Socialism, for the Communist International!

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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