
Worse Than Treason:

Letter to the Editor of the *New York Call*, May 13, 1917

by A.M. Simons

Published in the *New York Call Magazine*, May 13, 1917, pg. 11.

Editor of the Forum:

Hillquit is right in saying that “there are some things baser than treason.” One of them was committed at St. Louis [Emergency Convention: April 7-14, 1917]. I shall explain just what. Neither he, nor anyone else, in the nearly 20 years that I have



been writing for the Socialist press, during which I have been involved in many controversies, can instance a single case of “reckless” or other “misrepresentation.” But more than once persons whose betrayal of Socialism I have exposed, and whom I have driven from positions where they could injure Socialism, have shrieked “misrepresentation,” and much stronger language.

Now, I ask Hillquit these questions: Did he not at the time he wrote that he could not detect any treason in the St. Louis resolutions [*NY Call Magazine*, May 6, 1917] know that the National Office had been notified that they were treasonable? Was it not because of this notification that the most dangerous phrases were omitted from *The American Socialist's* second printing of them? Was not this omission in order to protect the

National Executive Committee and the officials of the party, while leaving the membership unwarned? I ask these questions of him because the National Secretary [Adolph Germer] refuses to explain the omission. Are not these kind of tactics worse than treason?

It is time the membership knew what devil's work is afoot. Hillquit and Berger knew very well that the use of the phrase “mass movement” meant the use of violence. It has never meant anything else in Socialist writings. That phrase was deliberately inserted to incite the impossibilist, syndicalist, pacifist Socialist to violence in the interest of German imperialism. That phrase was inserted by men who opposed the use of the same words in an international congress. The words were opposed then, lest the German Socialists be outlawed. They are inserted now to outlaw American Socialists. These men were then working under the direction of that section of the German social democracy which has always been the faithful tool of German imperialism. That section was led by Scheidemann, who was successively kicked out by the Socialists of Holland, Bulgaria, and Italy in the early days of the war, when he went to those countries to induce them to enter the war. He is now, still as the agent of German imperialism, the chief figure in the German intrigue to betray the Russian revolutionists into the hands of German-directed black hundreds and tsardom. Hillquit and Berger served with Scheidemann at Copenhagen

[1907] and Hillquit at Stuttgart [1910]. Bot worked with him at St. Louis. Both are helping on his Russian intrigue today. There are some things baser than treason.

Hillquit came from the tyranny of Russia to enjoy that measure of democracy which my ancestors, in common with many others, shed their blood to establish here. Now he is using that liberty and democracy to assist the tyranny of Germany. There are some things worse than treason.

Will Hillquit deny that the adoption of that St. Louis resolution will render the possession of a membership card in the Socialist Party by an unnaturalized immigrant from Austria or Germany a crime punishable with internment? But he has been willing to sacrifice these comrades rather than tell them the truth about these resolutions. I do not agree with these German comrades on many things about the war. But I do not want them interned, at least not without becoming intentionally guilty of any crime.

I do not agree with the impossibilists with whom Berger and Hillquit made alliance at St. Louis. But I respect their sincere fanaticism and pacifism, and do not wish to send them in “mass movements” against the machine guns in order to further the intrigues of German imperialism. There are some things worse than treason.

This is a time for some plain talk. This is a real war in which we are engaged, and its immediately exciting cause is not the submarine barbarism, nor the rapacity of munitions manufacturers, nor yet the passion for democracy, although all of these have played a part. But, of hundreds of Americans with whom I have talked, fully 90 percent declare that they were converted to the

imperative necessity of war by the lying, intriguing activity of German-American propagandists. I can tell some things of this work within the Socialist Party that will not make nice reading for those who are responsible for scuttling of the Socialist Party. If any one of these wishes, I will tell them, and they will not be challenged as “misrepresentations” by those who are guilty.

There have been things worse than treason practiced within the Socialist Party. I do not propose that those who are responsible shall send innocent fanatics, whether “alien enemy” Socialists or foolish “impossibilists,” into danger of death and imprisonment, while carefully shielding themselves behind a tricky manipulation of party organs and machinery.

[James] O Neal challenges my statement that none of the signers will defend the worst portions of the St. Louis resolution. I notice he does not defend them. As to his reference to my ability as prophet in time of emergencies, he must wait many years to equal my “batting average” on that line, as recorded in my writings. This includes the first proposal in a party paper for unity in 1900, the first exposure of the old St. Louis local committee [local quorum], and a long list since then. All of these have brought the same sort of howling that is directed at me now. But there was never an equal crisis, never such contemptible tactics, and O Neal will live to wish that he had joined with me in warning sincere men like himself against the trickery and “baser than treason” that is being practiced.

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Edited by Tim Davenport.

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