
Letter to Morris Hillquit at Saranac Lake, NY from Adolph Germer in Chicago, † June 2, 1919.

Document in the Morris Hillquit Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
Microfilm edition doc. no. 846.

Chicago, Ill., June 2, 1919.

Morris Hillquit
The Santanoni
Saranac Lake, NY

Dear Morris:—

My intention was to write you from day to day but the sessions lasted from morning until late at night and the several other incidental matters made it impossible to carry out my good intentions.

I need not say to you that this was the most interesting and exciting session of the committee that I ever attended. There was something doing all the time. From the very beginning it was clear that [Alfred] Wagenknecht and [Ludwig] Katterfeld had decided upon political jockeying by inserting cunning statements into the records. I am enclosing a copy of the minutes which will give you some idea of their tactics.‡



The Michigan charter was revoked on Saturday [May 24, 1919]. Monday morning [May 26] we received a telegram from Cleveland, signed by [Local Cuyahoga County Secretary C.E.] Ruthenberg, saying that a membership meeting had adopted a motion for referendum rescinding the

action of the committee. Someone got the wires busy between Chicago and Cleveland. The next day we receive a telegram from the State Secretary of Kentucky (a young fellow just elected) protesting against holding up the election.§ Since then, we have received telegrams from different places asking whether the reports are true that Michigan was expelled and that seven federations were suspended. These telegrams are so nearly uniform that it almost seems as if it was dictated

by one person.

The other evening I dropped into the Sherman House to send a telegram to the *New York*

†- Morris Hillquit, cast in the role of master puppeteer by various Communist historians of the 1919 SPA split, was convalescing at this time from a recurrence of tuberculosis at Saranac Lake in upstate New York. This post-facto update of the happenings of the May 24-30, 1919, plenum of the Socialist Party's National Executive Committee belies the assertion that he directed the expulsions and suspensions ensuing from that meeting. Sharing this view of his lack of complicity, Hillquit's biographer Norma Fain Pratt adds the additional detail that this letter from Germer was never even answered due to an attack of appendicitis and emergency surgery just when the expulsions took place. [Pratt, *Morris Hillquit: A Political History of An American Jewish Socialist*. (NY: Greenwood Press, 1979), pg. 144.]

‡- Not included in the microfilm edition of the Hillquit papers.

§- E.B. Austin, Jr., a founding member of the Communist Labor Party. Reference is to the 1919 election for officials of the Socialist Party, terminated by the outgoing NEC, ostensibly on the grounds of vote fraud.

Call and who did I see but friends Katterfeld and Wagenknecht. When they saw me their faces flushed like a beet. They paid for three telegrams they had sent and just went on. It appeared as if my sudden and unexpected presence interrupted their work and they slunk away as if someone had whipped them.

You will see by the minutes that on Tuesday, May 27th, the seven language federations were suspended. In addition to the activity that I discussed with you, they presented the enclosed letter.‡ If the committee had no case, these translators furnished one. I have been inquiring as to who wrote this letter and the best information I can get is that it was [Russian Federation Translator-Secretary Alexander] Stoklitsky. Since the committee met I had a private talk with the Translator-Secretary of the South Slavic Federation [George Selakovich] and I concluded from what he said that he regretted having become involved in this controversy. Stoklitsky, I think is the extreme “genius,” with [Joseph] Stilson, the Lithuanian Translation as his chief councilor. The others, I believe, were drawn into it without fully realizing what the result would be. Stoklitsky will sometimes talk more than is good for him and while I was jesting with him the other day he ventured the information that they were going to make an appeal to all our locals and branches to join them and leave the party. The suspended federations are going to establish their office at the local Russian headquarters. This I think was cunningly done so that Stoklitsky could have absolute control over them. The Propaganda and Or-

ganization Department was abolished and Wagenknecht left [home] for Cleveland last Saturday night. He made an earnest inquiry for the list of locals and branches that he had been using in his work but which I took possession of the first day the committee was in session [May 24]. He was accustomed to coming in the office anywhere between 10 and 12 o'clock and staying until 1 and 2 o'clock in the morning. The night watchman had orders to keep an eye on him and of course he, (the night watchman) not liking Wagenknecht a bit, didn't leave the room as long as Wagenknecht was there.

This morning I received a joint telegram from [NEC member George] Roewer and others saying that the Massachusetts State Convention had adopted the Left Wing Manifesto and endorsed all its activities. Sixty-eight delegates representing approximately 3,000 members withdrew and reorganized. I have wired the State Secretary for official confirmation and just as soon as I get this I will submit the facts to the committee for immediate action.

I think from now on I can let you hear from me more frequently.

With best wishes, I remain

Fraternally yours,

Adolph Germer,
Executive Secretary.

AG:EL.

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