
On Stokes, Russell & Co.:

Letter to the Editor of the *New York Call*, March 27, 1917

by Morris Hillquit

Untitled editorial published in the *New York Call*, v. 10, no. 86 (March 27, 1917), pg. 6.

Editor of *The Call*:

The group of persons headed by J.G. Phelps Stokes and Charles Edward Russell, who recently published a declaration to the effect that it is the duty of American Socialists to support the government in its present war policy, have done me the unexpected honor of quoting me in support of their position.



In declining the unmerited honor, I wish to remind our good friends, most of whom are professional writers, that the practice of fragmentary quotations, of “tearing the text from the context,” is a measure of ruthless warfare which cannot be justified, even by excess of patriotic zeal.

The quotations in question are as follows: “The Socialists realize that it would be futile and foolish to preach complete disarmament to any nation while its neighbors and rivals are armed. They frankly acknowledge that under existing conditions each nation must be prepared to defend its integrity and independence against the rest of the world, and must maintain a strong military organization for that purpose,” and “the Socialist ideal of military organization is the popu-

lar militia, and, as a measure of transition, they advocate the progressive reduction of the period of service, coupled with an extension of general military training.”

The quotations are taken from a magazine article published in January 1915, and dealing with the accepted views of European Socialists before the war. The specific passages are explanatory of the plans in the international Socialist anti-war program, which called for concerted and progressive disarmament and favored a militia of the people in preference to a standing professional army.

These views, undoubtedly held by the bulk of European Socialists before the war, are not of the slightest help to the apologists of war in America at this time.

The United States is not surrounded by “armed neighbors and rivals,” but by two immense and perfectly well-meaning oceans, a peaceful English colony, and a weak republic. The question before the American people today is not one of progressive as against complete disarmament, but, one of increase of armament; not one of changing an existing large army based on compulsory service into an army of the people organized on democratic principles, but one of creating a new and large standing army recruited by compulsory enlistment. The purpose of the Socialists of Europe before the war was to gradually

diminish and ultimately abolish an established and deep-rooted system of militarism. The task to which our pro-war American Socialists are volunteering their support is one of building up a new system of militarism, where practically none has heretofore existed.

The crushing and disastrous war, furthermore, has taught many of our European Comrades a new lesson. The probabilities are that upon its resuscitation the Socialist International will never again temporize with the moloch of militarism, but insist upon immediate and complete disarmament, and upon the abolition of all military organizations, including the so-called popular militia.

Can our American "internationalists" of the new brand learn nothing from the lessons of history?

Morris Hillquit.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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