
Hillquit, Berger, and Lee Can't Sail: State Department Bars Party from Sending Delegates to Stockholm Conference

Unsigned report in the *New York Call*, v. 10, no. 144 (May 23, 1917), pp. 1-2.

WASHINGTON, May 23 [1917].— Passports will be refused Americans attempting to attend the International Socialist Conference at Stockholm, the State Department announced today.

“The United States will issue no passports to persons intending to take part in the conference,” said Secretary [Robert] Lansing, “and our representatives abroad have been so notified.”

Explaining the department's decision, the Secretary added: “The general policy of the United States for more than a century has been that private individuals should not take part in any matter pertaining to international questions in which this country is involved. It has been more than a policy — almost a doctrine.”

The State Department further warned that if any American should succeed in getting to Stockholm, despite lack of a passport, or that if any American now abroad should attend the conference he might be held liable on his return to prosecution under the Logan Law. This measure, coming down from nearly a century ago, provides fine or imprisonment, or both, for any individual American who attempts to deal with foreign governments on matters which should be handled through the State Department.

Today's announcement bars the departure of Morris Hillquit, Victor Berger, and Algernon Lee, selected by the American Socialist organization to represent it at the Stockholm Conference. Other American Socialist who had stated their intention of attending the conference also must be good and stay at home.

The State Department's objection to the conference, as “explained” in the capital, is that “proof has been received that the movement is but disguised German propaganda and that its underlying object is to force pressure on certain of the weaker nations to wean

them away from their allegiance to the Allies and lead them to close a separate peace.”

Special efforts were to be made in the case of Russia, according to information reaching here. The German delegates to the conference, instead of being the radical Socialists they purported to be, are in reality quasi-governmental officials, it is stated.

Logan Law Cited.

The refusal of the government to grant passports to the delegates of the Socialist Party of America to enable them to attend the International Socialist Conference at Stockholm, the date of which was moved forward to enable the American delegates to be present when the conference opened, was of such an arbitrary nature that *The Call* asked Morris Hillquit, who had been in Washington, if he could throw any light on the situation.

His attention was called to the fact that the Logan Law, passed in 1779, imposed a fine and imprisonment upon a citizen of the United States who conferred or negotiated with a representative of an enemy government.

That the conference at Stockholm was a conference of peoples of the various countries of Europe. How delegates from this country could be prevented from taking part, under the Logan Law, in this conference was impossible of explanation, except as a excuse for a use of arbitrary power such as no administration heretofore in the history of the United States has exercised.

Found Officials Opposed.

Hillquit told *The Call* that he had been in Wash-

ington to arrange for passports; that he had seen Counsellor Polk of the State Department, and also Lansing; that he had been led to believe from his talks with them that the passports would be issued. He stated, however, that he found both officials very much opposed to the Socialist International Conference. That it seems the articles and libels of [Charles Edward] Russell, [William English] Walling, and others were fully credited by the administration. This notwithstanding that Hillquit had written to Secretary Lansing referring to the publication of the statement of this group and offering, as the member of the American International Socialist Bureau to submit all correspondence, documents, and facts from which this government could easily ascertain the real character of the Stockholm Conference.

Could Not Present Case.

The Department of State did not afford Hillquit the opportunity to present the true state of the case.

When Hillquit saw Counsellor Polk last Friday [May 18, 1917], this official frankly stated that he had definitely made up his mind that the Stockholm Conference was a pro-German affair intended to promote a separate peace. When asked by Hillquit why no opportunity had been given him to present facts that would prove the contrary, Polk made no reply.

In order to make sure that his position would not be misrepresented, Hillquit submitted a written statement to the following effect:

That the international conference at Stockholm was not called, nor initiated, by the Socialists of Germany nor by any pro-German interests, but that it was called by the International Socialist Bureau, which was composed of Socialists of all countries, including Allied countries, the Central Powers, and the neutral countries.

For Universal Peace.

That the object of the conference was not to promote a separate peace, but a universal peace, on

terms which would safeguard a universal peace for the future and a universal democracy. That another object was to reestablish the International of Socialists of the different countries.

That his own attitude was positive opposition to a separate peace, or to a peace more in the interests of the Central Powers than the Allies. That in common with the Socialists of all countries he favored a speedy universal peace substantially along the lines outlined by President Wilson before the Senate, and which program had been endorsed by the socialist of France, Italy, Russia, and Austria.

When asked to state specifically what he thought of the action of the government in refusing passports, Hillquit said he regretted it, because it was puerile, arbitrary, and shortsighted. That it was puerile because it showed a credulity and gullibility that one would not expect from statesmen. That the government had swallowed what was literally a ghost story without showing any attempt to discriminate between fact and fiction.

That it was arbitrary because it prevented American citizens from talking peace abroad, while it allowed them to talk it at home.

Denies Freedom of Seas.

That it deliberately denied the freedom of the seas to citizens who wished to travel abroad to help bring peace, while it had been insisting upon the right to travel the seas.

That the action was very shortsighted, because of its effects on the various countries of Europe, and particularly on Russia. That 50 percent of the people and government of Russia were Socialists, and that they would not fail to understand the reason for this refusal to allow Socialists of America to attend an international conference.

That this government had sent a special commission to Russia to assure its people of our friendship and that the refusal of passports to American Socialists could not conduce to a warm reception by the Russian people of this commission.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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