
The “Collapse” of the International.

by Morris Hillquit

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The peculiar brand of Socialists who rejoice in Socialist mistakes, fatten on Socialist defeats, and are enthusiastic only when they can point out some alleged faults of the Socialist movement have lately been regaling themselves, their auditors and readers with the assertion that the Socialist International has utterly collapsed in the face of the world war.

Incidentally there has been so much loose thinking and talking about “internationalism” and “nationalism” that it may not be out of place to attempt a sober definition of the terms, and an analytical forecast of the fate of international Socialism after the war.

What is generally termed the SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL stands for a complexity of ideas and institutions, whose main elements may be summarized under the following heads:

1. The identity of aims and methods of the Socialist parties of all countries.

2. The practical cooperation of the Socialists and organized workers of all nations in their everyday political and economic struggles.

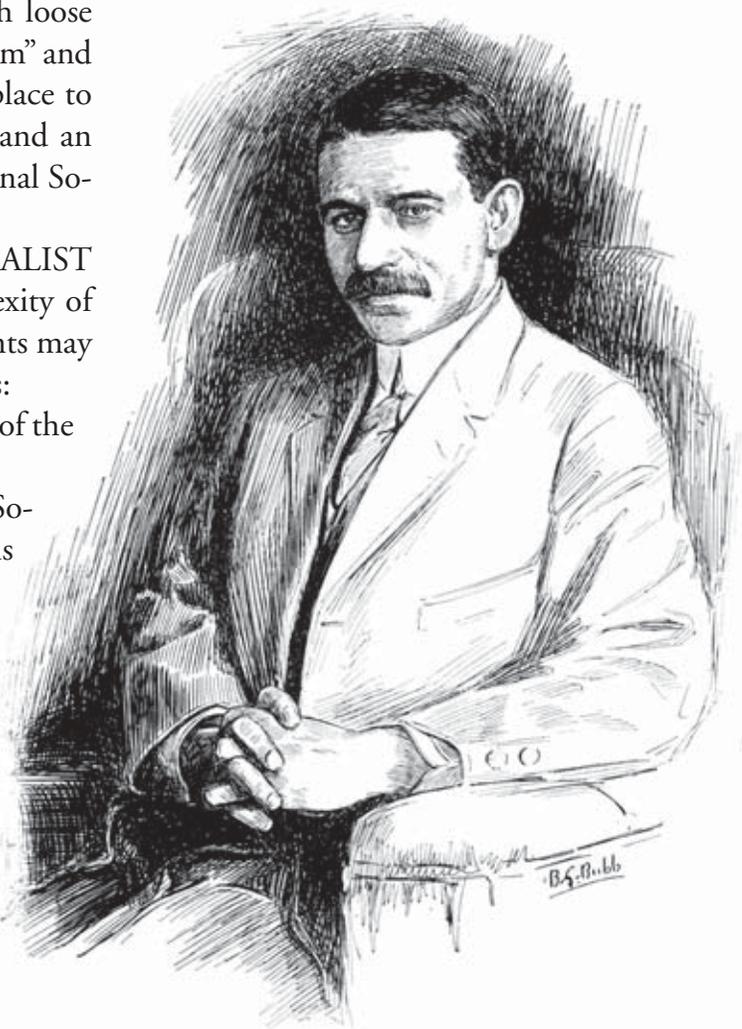
3. Their common faith in the eventual obliteration of national boundaries, their common ideal of a free federation of nations.

4. The concrete international organization of the Socialist movement represented by the International Socialist Bureau with headquarters in Brussels (now temporarily transferred to The Hague) and

by periodical International Socialist conventions.

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None of these features is likely to be seriously impaired as a result of the war. The Socialist program must remain international in character, because it will continue to voice the same general



demands all over the world, after the war as before the war — the abolition of private ownership in the social instruments of wealth production and the reorganization of the industries on the basis of collective ownership and democratic administration. The Socialist policies and methods of action must likewise remain international, for they always will be rooted in the economic and political struggles of the working classes.

The practical international cooperation of the organized workers of Europe has always found a stronger application in their economic struggles than in their politics. This may be readily accounted for. Political activity is by its nature circumscribed by the boundaries of the autonomous political unit, the country. The restricted spheres of international politics, diplomacy and wars, are as a rule wholly withdrawn from the control of the people. The situation is radically different in the field of modern economics. The principle industries of our time have assumed international proportions, not merely in their general character, but in actual organization and practical operation. The great banking and industrial interests of the modern countries are closely allied in ownership. The modern market is a world market. Capitalism has long broken down all national barriers and the moneyed interests have consolidated their beloved fatherlands into one great international business pool. International capital has in turn created an international labor market. In modern production the workers of all countries are pitted against one another almost in the same manner as the workers of different sections of the same country, and the competition between the workers of all nations is largely intensified by the constant streams of migratory labor. The organized worker engaged in an advanced industry begins to find it difficult to maintain labor standards on a national scale. Ordinary wisdom and economic foresight impel him to organize internationally as well as nationally. It is thus by no means a mere accident that the last 20 years have witnessed the

birth and growth of numerous international labor unions.

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The war will not check the growing internationalism of either capital or labor. Rather will it stimulate and accelerate the developments of both. The very substance of the war is the revolt of international capitalism against national boundaries and restrictions. Whatever the general economic effects of the war may be, it will almost certainly result in greater international liberty of motion for industrial capital.

The International of capital will force a union of the shattered International of labor, and as the former grows the bonds between the latter will develop even greater cohesion and integrity.

The international growth of economic interests will usher in the federation of national and the brotherhood of man more speedily and effectively than a million eloquent but abstract sermons on the subject. The great modern nations were not pieced together from the scores of insignificant sovereignties through a suddenly awakened national patriotism but because of the centralization of the growing industries and their demands for larger elbow room and markets. The national territories and governments of Europe are in turn becoming too narrow for the new international phase of industrial development, and just as sure as the numerous European principalities, dukedoms, and kingdoms of the middle of the last century gave way to the modern unified nations, so will the latter make room within a short period of time to some working form of a federation of European nations. The international ideal of Socialism will thus gain an ever stronger material foundation, and for this reason, an ever growing concrete expression.

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The soul of the Socialist International is thus bound to emerge from the ashes of the war strengthened and purified. Will the form survive?

This is neither very certain nor very material. Unquestionably the wholly abnormal position in which the Socialists of Europe find themselves in this fratricidal war is apt to cause some personal irritation and bitterness among them. So far the Socialists engaged in the war have shown a most remarkable spirit of mutual understanding and forbearance. It is impossible to predict what situation may be produced if the war should continue much longer. The sense of irritation may become acute, and on the other hand a new turn of the war may alienate the Socialists from their governments and bring them together in common opposition to the continuance of the war.

That the latter course is the more probable one seems to be indicated by an unbroken chain of recent events. Since the outbreak of the war joint conferences have been held between the Socialists of Italy and Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries and Holland, the Socialists of the Allied countries, and recently also between the Socialists of Germany and Austria. What is more significant still is the fact that the Socialist women

of Europe have succeeded in bringing together in joint conference representatives of practically all important European countries, including those engaged on both sides of the war, and that the conference was thoroughly harmonious and unanimous in thought and acts.

At all of these conferences tentative peace programs were adopted, and it is a fact full of hope and promise that all such programs are similar in spirit and substance.

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The International Socialist Bureau is rapidly reestablishing relations with the Socialist parties of all affiliated countries, and it is quite likely that a meeting of the full bureau will prove feasible within a short time. In the peace negotiations to come the Socialists of Europe will again present a solid front.

Whether the Socialist International will maintain or change its form of organization after the war is at this time still uncertain. It is also quite immaterial. The Socialist movement as such has overcome many great trials. It will survive the war. It is bound to retain its inherent international character. International Socialism is imperishable.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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