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

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 weaken 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 an 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-
ingston to arrange for passports; that he had seen Coun-
selor 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 op-
posed 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 notwith-
standing that Hillquit had written to Secretary Lan-
sing referring to the publication of the statement of
this group and offering, as the member of the Ameri-
can International Socialist Bureau to submit all corre-
spondence, documents, and facts from which this gov-
ernment could easily ascertain the real character of the
Stockholm Conference.

Could Not Present Case.

The Department of State did not afford Hill-
quit 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 Con-
ference was a pro-German affair intended to promote
a separate peace. When asked by Hillquit why no op-
portunity 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 Ger-
many 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 com-
mon with the Socialists of all countries he favored a
speedy universal peace substantially along the lines out-
lined 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 though
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 Ameri-
can citizens from talking peace abroad, while it allowed
them to talk it at home.

Denies Freedom of Seats.

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 re-
signal to allow Socialists of America to attend an inter-
national conference.

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