
Excerpt of a Letter from Victor L. Berger in Milwaukee to Morris Hillquit at Saranac Lake, NY, August 20, 1919.

Copy in the Morris Hillquit Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.
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Morris Hillquit, Esq.
Lake Saranac, NY

My dear Morris:—

* * *

As for the condition of the Socialist Party, that is bad just at present. And it is our own fault. We have always played too much with the revolutionary phrase. In this game of would-be radical phrases, the one who can play the game the hardest will naturally win. And the emptier the barrel the louder the sound.

I am sick and tired of the business. If there is to be a revolution some day, I and my crowd will surely be there.

But that continuous threat of a “revolution” reminds me of a man who is continuously brandishing a revolver which is not loaded.

Russia was a beaten country — on the military and economic field. The first line of Russia’s military forces were either dead or prisoners. The second line of about six million men was honey-combed with propaganda. The socialists absolutely controlled the labor unions — and the landless, starved, and hungry peasants had no other place to go than to the Bolsheviki.

None of these conditions prevail in America. On the contrary — the war seems to have strengthened capitalism, reaction, and *treason* within the *working class*.

Moreover, phrases which appeal to the Eu-

ropean workers mean nothing in America.

And the difference between communism and socialism never has been well defined in our party. Our party is Marxian, of course, and Karl Marx, who later in life deprecated communism as utopian, really started out as a communist. The Communist Manifesto, crude and impossibilistic as it is, will forever remain the Bible of the communists and the bane of the Marxian socialists.

Personally, let me tell you that I shall never become a communist but remain a socialist — a Social-Democrat, if you please. I consider communism possible only in a very primitive and backward civilization — and for that reason it may be successful in Russia for a while. Communism will never succeed in America, England, or Germany, however. Even in Russia our friend Lenin had to modify his original program to such an extent that it can hardly be recognized — it is surely not communistic any longer, in the sense of the teachings of the communists.

But I do not intend to force my own opinions on anybody. I do not believe in any “dictatorship” — not even in my own dictatorship.

Those who believe in communism, not in socialism, should be kind enough to start an organization of their own, which, by the way, the consistent fellows among them have already done.

And I also wish the Bolsheviki in Russia “good luck” and God speed and I shall fight like a tiger against any interference in Russian affairs — but while we can learn from them — accept some

Soviet ideas and little guild socialism from there — we cannot transfer Russia to America.

And as to the Moscow International, which is to be made up of Bolsheviks, Spartacans, and Hungarian communists, I would not become a delegate to that convention if the election was tendered to me unanimously and on a “gold platter” as the saying is. It is true that Lenin was a member of the Second International — but so were a number of anarchists members of the First and of the Second International, as we all know.

I am not satisfied at all with the outcome of the meeting in Berne, however. The Berne meeting was cowed by the war patriots and completely dominated by English Laborites — most of whom are “weak sisters” and dull. The Berne aggregation was just as impossibly reactionary as the Spartacans were crazy revolutionary. The hope of the world is in intelligent action, not in violent insanity.

What the outcome of our convention in Chicago will be, I don't know and don't care — because Wisconsin is in a good position to go it alone for awhile, and to for a new *center* for *crystallization*.

Wisconsin is pretty solid in spite of the continuous agitation of Ferguson (recte: Feigelsohn), Ball, Lloyd, and others who came to Milwaukee often and also affected a sort of an organization of the Left Wing. In Milwaukee, however, the shifty left devil pleaded for “unity” — and claimed

that the election of men like Berger and Hillquit would bring about a “split.”

With this slogan the “Lefty Louis” [Fraina] agitated for mons, even published the Left Wing slate in *The Leader* and visited every branch. But the Left “got left.” It did not destroy the solidarity of our party in the slightest. If necessity should require — we may have to kick out some fellows after the convention. They cannot belong to two parties, of course. And since our party is overwhelmingly socialist and not communist, that can be done without trouble.

Under all circumstances, we are sure to hold over 95 percent of our membership in Wisconsin, which now is greater than it ever was in our history. And we will insist that the constitution of the national party be changed in such a way as to give us more freedom of action in the future, both as to giving and *accepting endorsements* and as to making *arrangements* with other *organizations* so long as the *integrity* of our *organization* is made *secure*.

* * *

Hoping that your health will soon improve sufficiently so as to enable you to take part in our movement again — I am, with best regards to Mrs. Hillquit,

Yours fraternally,

Victor L. Berger

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