
Why Hillquit Will Not Attend Copenhagen Conference: Only Four Neutral Countries Will Attend International Gathering [event of Jan. 1, 1915]

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NEW YORK, January 2 [1915].— Pointing out the great task that confronts the Socialist movement of America and making clear the evidence that the time is not yet ripe for an International Socialist Congress, Morris Hillquit yesterday made public his report to the National Executive Committee, in which Hillquit declined to attend the proposed congress on January 17 in Copenhagen.

Hillquit also makes public his letter to the same effect addressed to Theodore Stauning of Copenhagen, who is in charge of arrangements for the proposed congress. It is clear from Hillquit's letters that the congress, if it is actually held, cannot, under the circumstances, be a real congress, but will be no more than a gathering of delegates representing three or four nations.

Following is Hillquit's letter to the National Executive Committee:

New York, December 28, 1914.

To the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party.

Comrades:—

The information which I have recently obtained in connection with the proposed International Socialist Conference, scheduled to be held in Copenhagen on January 17 [1915], is of such a nature that I strongly question the expediency of American participation in it.

The conference as originally planned, or at least as understood on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, was to include representatives of all Socialist parties in the neutral countries affiliated with the International Socialist Bureau, i.e. Bulgaria, Denmark, Holland, Italy, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States.

It appears, however, that the Socialists of Bulgaria and Romania have either not been invited, or have declined to accept the invitation. The Socialist Party of Spain was requested to participate in the conference, but has deemed it inadvisable to accept the invitation.

The Socialists of Italy and Switzerland had held a joint conference in the early days of the war and agreed upon a common program of action. It was hoped that they would join their comrades in the northern countries in the effort to secure a more representative and authoritative expression of neutral Socialist opinion. Within the last few weeks, however, several statements have appeared in the Socialist press of Germany and Switzerland which seemed to indicate that neither the Italian or the Swiss Socialists intended to take part in the Copenhagen conference.

In an effort to ascertain the exact situation I cabled to Comrade Stauning of Copenhagen, who has charge of the conference arrangements, inquiring which countries had agreed to the conference. The cable was sent on December 18, and on the next day I received a reply to the effect that the only countries to be represented outside of the United States were Switzerland, Holland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.

Immediately thereafter the *New York Volkszeitung* cabled to Comrade Hermann Greulich, the veteran leader of the Socialist movement of Switzerland, for information about the intentions of the Swiss Socialists and received the categorical reply that Switzerland would not take part in the conference.

Thus the much-hoped-for international conference has dwindled down to a meeting of the Socialists of the three Scandinavian countries with the participation of the neighboring Holland.

That changes the entire aspect of the situation. The voice of a general council of the Socialists of the neutral countries might be expected to carry considerable weight with their comrades on both sides of the conflict; to influence their mutual feelings during the war and to aid them in the formation of a uniform program in connection with the future negotiations of their respective countries. A purely local conference, such as the Copenhagen assembly will unfortunately be, can hardly be expected to have such an effect. Moreover, the four countries which will be represented at Copenhagen have certain specific local and sectional

interests, which are not shared by the other neutral countries, and I am inclined to believe that the United States would be out of place in such a conference. The neutrality of the countries of Europe is not so absolute as that of the United States. Owing to their geographic position, commercial interests, and racial ties, most European countries are somewhat biased in favor of one or the other of the belligerent forces, and before the war is over some of them may be drawn into the active conflict. The very fact that even the Socialists of all the neutral countries refuse to meet in common conference at this time indicates that the feeling among the neutral nations is somewhat strained. America alone has no interest in the war except in its speedy termination, and American Socialists above all others must studiously avoid even the slightest appearance of bias or discrimination among their unfortunate comrades in Europe. This war will end sometime, and when it ends somebody will have to initiate the work of reconstructing the shattered international of the workers. This great task will logically fall to the Socialists of America, the Socialists of the most important and most concerned nation. I fear that this mission, the largest that will ever come to our movement, may be jeopardized by the participation in a somewhat one-sided conference, and therefore, [have] concluded not to go to Copenhagen.¹

I attach copy of a letter to Comrade Stauning in explanation of my position.

Fraternally submitted,

Morris Hillquit.

¹ The idea of a conference of the socialists of the neutral nations seems to have been American in origin, emerging already in September 1914. Although Socialist Party International Secretary Morris Hillquit declined to participate, the Copenhagen Conference of Jan. 17, 1915 nevertheless did go on as scheduled, with the Socialist parties of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands joined by a representative of the General Jewish Labor Bund. As predicted by Hillquit, the small size of the gathering eliminated any chance of its decisions having lasting impact.

Letter to Theodore Stauning.

New York, December 28, 1914.

Mr. Theodore Stauning,
Romersgade, 22, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Dear Comrade Stauning:—

The enclosed letter to the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party of the United States will explain our absence from the Copenhagen conference.

While I believe that under the existing circumstances my participation in your conference would serve no useful purpose, I deeply appreciate in common with all American Socialists, the lofty motives which have animated the comrades of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Holland in calling this meeting. The Socialists of the United States sincerely hope that your conference will prove fruitful for the cause of European peace and international Socialism, and wish you success in your deliberations.

If your conference will succeed in bringing about a more general gathering of Socialists of the different countries, whether it be a congress or informal conference and whether it include the belligerent nations or be limited to the parties in the neutral countries, the Socialist Party of the United States will be glad to take part in it.

With fraternal greetings,

Sincerely yours,

Morris Hillquit.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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