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# 20,000 Socialists Cheer Hillquit's Peace Demand at Madison Square: Party Gets Whirlwind Start for Campaign [event of Sept. 23, 1917]

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“We want peace.”

At the magic words 20,000 working men and women rose in their places in Madison Square Garden yesterday afternoon [Sept. 23, 1917]. For five minutes the shouting, whistling, and stamping of feet beat in roars upon the scarlet-decked platform from which the demand had come. Then the turmoil wound up in a storm of hand-clapping.

The very soul of the Socialist Party's municipal campaign had

been reached, and had responded. It was the party's ratification meeting.

Morris Hillquit, candidate for Mayor of New York, was speaking. He had been unable to begin for a quarter of an hour because of the welcome given him. Described by previous speakers as the leader in a campaign which transcended local and national boundaries, and bore



an international significance, Hillquit stood, bowing and vainly beckoning for silence, while the fast audience enjoyed itself, him, and a rapidly growing sense of irresistible power to the fullest extent.

Hillquit's program of municipal administration to which the Socialist Party is pledged, of feeding, clothing, educating the children, ending the organized assault upon the workers' pocketbooks by the food, transportation, fuel, lighting, and other brands of entrenched pirates, had been cheered. But it was the demand for peace that set the audience beside itself with enthusiasm.

"Peace! Peace! Peace!" boomed and reverberated through the auditorium.

### **All Workers Want Peace.**

"In this great process of regeneration," said Hillquit, "we, the workers and Socialists of America, must and will play our part. For, notwithstanding the protestations of all our self-styled 'patriots' in our press and on our public platforms, the people of America, alike with the people of the whole world, want peace.

"The Socialist Party is the only party that has the courage to voice this demand, this hope, this desire. As the spokesman of the great working class that is being bled to death in this war, we are opposed to war, to killing off the flower of our young manhood. We are opposed to the straining of our resources in pursuit of an unintelligible, un-understandable, bewildering kind of 'democracy' — a democracy that has the support of those classes who have robbed and despoiled the American people — a democracy which begins with suppressing our liberty of press and speech and assemblage, and in stifling of legitimate criticism at home.

"We say to the powers that be, to the ruing classes: 'Not war, dear bread, and terrorism at home, but Socialism and social justice can make the world safe for democracy.'"

Before noon elevated and subway trains began running into the 28th Street Stations filled with Socialists from all parts of the city, and leaving nearly empty. There were delegates from Westchester County, towns in New Jersey as far away as Newark, suburbs in Long Island and from rural districts of Staten Island.

At 1:00 o'clock the garden was half filled, and thereafter the police formed a line of those seeking free admission to insure that the

holders of reserved seats would all gain admission. At a quarter to 2 all remaining reserved tickets had been sold at the box office. Finally, 2,000 persons were turned away.

Inside, a hard-working corps of 500 volunteer ushers handled the enormous crowd with efficiency and dispatch. The people found themselves seated with amazing rapidity, although to most the garden is unexplored and strange territory.

### **Platform Draped in Red.**

The platform was draped in red bunting. Overhead hung a big sounding-board device, especially installed for the meeting. Decorating every part of the hall were policemen, special officers attached to the garden, and plainclothesmen. Federal Assistant District Attorney Content was present with a large squad of operatives. They were woe-fully unemployed. Throughout the entire meeting, which began at 2:50, and until the garden was clear, at about 5:30, perfect order reigned. There was not the slightest chance for would-be trouble makers.

Circles 6, Manhattan and 1, Bronx of the Young People's Socialist League were the life of the meeting. They came early, sat in compact sections, and cheered, yelled, sang, clapped, from beginning to end. Every speaker got his welcome from the enthusiastic youngsters. Besides, they had their favorite, August Claessens, who has turned out more field workers for Socialism than any other man in the American movement, and between speeches they yelled for him.

### **No Band Helped Cheering.**

There was no band. None was needed. It is usually only once a year that the Socialists of New York foregather in Madison Square Garden, and they realize what the occasion demands. Yesterday there was more than the usual amount of energy to expend in applause. Behind them the Socialists of New York have a year of unprecedented growth — 100 percent increase in membership.

Behind them, also, they have a city demanding peace, despairing of gaining expression for their wish in the capitalist press, flocking to the Socialist banner. New faces in the party were seen everywhere — old line Republicans and Democrats who have overturned or had overturned for them all their former political beliefs and were now

linked up with the Socialist Party, for peace and the cooperative commonwealth.

In size and enthusiasm, it was the largest strictly political meeting ever held in the city at the outset of a municipal campaign.

### **Hillquit Constantly Applauded.**

Broken every few sentences by prolonged applause, Hillquit's speech, in part, was as follows:

"I am proud to have been chosen to lead in this fight. For, if all signs do not deceive, the Socialist campaign of this city and this year will remain a memorable milestone in the annals of the struggles between the advancing forces of labor and progress and the destructive powers of reaction and oppression.

"In opening a political campaign it is customary for the candidate who has been honored by his party to head the ticket to define the issues in the electoral contest.

"As between the leading old parties the task is often difficult, because their main aims and 'issues' can rarely be told apart. As between the Socialist Party and all other parties the task is no less difficult, because there is so little ground for comparison between them.

"There is a worldwide chasm between the social philosophy and political aims of Socialism and those of the old parties. The politics of the dominant political parties revolve around property and property rights. They are rooted in the conception that the world exists for business and profits and that the men and women in it are only cogs in the industrial machine. Socialist politics, on the other hand, are concerned with life and liberty and are inspired by the conviction that the earth and the fullness thereof are for people, and that all wealth and industries are for the happiness and well-being of the human race.

"Our present municipal campaign presents the same radical cleavage. To the forces of fusion, as well as to the Democratic Party, the city of New York is nothing but a vast business corporation, the mayor is its manager, the city council is its board of directors.

### **Deals with Human Beings.**

"To us Socialists the city is primarily a mass of 6,000,000 human beings, men, women, and children, and the main task of the city government is to ensure to them the greatest possible

measure of health, comfort, and happiness, of civil liberty and social justice.

“Under all previous administrations, Republican, Democratic, or Fusion, the public schools of the city have always been run on the principle of economy first. School buildings have been insufficient and inadequate, classrooms overcrowded, teachers overworked, and the physical, mental, and moral needs of the children neglected, in order to keep down the taxes of the possessing classes.

“Socialism realizes that the proper education and bringing up of the children is one of the main tasks of a modern municipality. A Socialist administration would provide New York with ample schools for all children of school age and with a sufficient staff of competent teachers to give each child adequate individual attention. It would feed and cloth all needy children, give them medical care and play and sunshine; build them up physically and mentally, and rear a generation of vigorous, intelligent, and independent men and women regardless of the tender feelings of the taxpayers.

“All former administrations have expended large portions of the municipal revenue upon improving and beautifying the sections of the city inhabited by the rich, while the streets and alleys of the poor have remained ugly and filthy and lined with dark, crowded, and disease-breeding tenements. A Socialist administration would give its first care to the dwellings of the poor. It would construct attractive and sanitary buildings with proper provisions for light, air, and privacy and let them to the workers at accessible rents.

### **No Effort to Curb Prices.**

“None of the administrations of this city has ever had, has seriously attempted to curb the evil of the mad increase of the cost of living, which is bringing the pinch of hunger into every worker’s household.

“A Socialist administration would organize the tremendous purchasing power of the city to secure for its inhabitants all foods and other necessaries direct from the producer on the most favorable terms, eliminating the usurious profits of jobbers, dealers, and middlemen.

“Under all municipal governments of the past the streets and highways of the city, with franchises worth empires, have been handed over to groups of freebooters, who have turned the transportation service of this great city into a source of fabulous profits and into an instrument of exploitation and maltreatment of

the public and unspeakable oppression of their workers. A Socialist administration would reclaim its highways from the highwaymen and take over the transportation service and all other municipal service industries to operate them for the convenience and comfort of the public with humane and liberal treatment of the workers engaged in them.

“This is one of the great differences between the Socialist Party and all other parties. And there is another fundamental difference between us and the others. To our opponents the electoral campaign in the city of New York is an object in itself and entirely unrelated to the problems of the country and the world.

“To us this campaign is only a part of the great worldwide struggle of Socialism for the complete enfranchisement of all men and women, the struggle to deliver the race from the last political despot and the last industrial parasite, the irrepressible, irresistible struggle for human freedom and social justice.

“I want to remind you, and to remind the citizens of the city, that on election day you will decide, not merely the fate of your municipality, but also the fate of one-half of New York state’s population.

“You will decide whether your sisters and mothers, whether the womanhood of the state is to remain disfranchised, political inferiors, or whether the age-long wrong committed against women will be righted and women enfranchised.

“During the last three years, the longest and heaviest in the history of mankind, the loud and persistent cry of the toilers of the world for life and freedom and happiness was drowned in the deafening roar of millions of rifles, guns, and cannon. All movements for social progress and human betterment were halted by a mad frenzy of ruin and destruction; the international solidarity of labor was engulfed in the senseless and bestial international slaughter.

### **Disasters Caused by Capitalism.**

“It was the capitalist system of industrial and commercial rivalry, the system of exploitation, hatred, and intrigue, the capitalist system with its kaisers on the throne, in the factory and counting-house in all lands, that plunged the world into the unspeakable disaster. It is the Socialist movement based on the rule of the people, the Socialist movement synonymous with true absolute democracy, industrial as well as political, that alone can save the world.

“Already the millions of Russian workers and peasants have with one mighty blow shattered the chains of despotism and op-

pression which had been cutting into their flesh for many centuries and have declared their unshakable determination to secure and maintain liberty and peace under Socialist leadership.

### **Victory is Assured.**

“Amid the convulsions of war, the pangs of starvation, and the intrigues of the powers of reaction, the new-born Russian republic is daily struggling for its life. But Russian democracy will emerge victorious and triumphant from all its trials. The Russian people have had a taste of true freedom and no power on earth can wrench from them the priceless possession.

“The workers and Socialists of Germany also are beginning to show distinct signs of revolt against their kaiser and their junkers, their war lords and their money lords. They begin to realize that they have been deceived and betrayed and led to wanton slaughter. They demand peace and the abandonment of all plans of world domination and conquest. Through war or through peace the triumph of Germany democracy is only a question of a short time. The murderous Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs are doomed to share the fate of the bloodthirsty Romanovs.

The people of France and Austria, of Italy and Hungary, are weary of the war and incensed against their masters who plunged them into the war. The people of all nations want peace, and Socialism alone can give them peace with a guarantee of permanence.

“Capitalism has forced war upon the whole world, including the Socialists. The Socialists will bring peace to the whole world, including the capitalists.

“In this great historical process of world regeneration the Socialists of America must and will play their part. For, contrary to all protestations of self-styled patriots in our public press and platforms, the people of the United States, like the people of Europe, want peace, and of all political parties, the Socialist Party alone has the courage to voice their desire and their demand openly, vigorously, and defiantly.

“We are for peace. We are unalterably opposed to the killing of our manhood and the draining of our resources in a bewildering pursuit of an incomprehensible ‘democracy,’ a pursuit for democracy which has the support of the men and classes who have habitually robbed and despoiled the people of America; a pursuit of democracy which begins by suppressing the freedom of speech and press and public assemblage, and by stifling legitimate political criticism.

## **Socialism Brings Freedom.**

“Not warfare and terrorism, but Socialism and social justice will make the world safe for democracy.

“And herein lies the unusual significance of our present campaign. The municipal election in this city will be the only great political contest in the United States since our entry in the war. It will offer the first real opportunity to the greatest community in the country to express its sentiments on war and peace. The verdict of the citizens of New York will be eagerly awaited by the people of the country. Aye! I may say, without exaggeration, by the people of the whole world. That verdict will be expressed in the number of votes cast for the Socialist ticket. It will be pregnant with consequence for our country. Every vote cast for Socialism in this election will weigh heavily in the balance, for it will be a vote not only for the workers and the people, for right and liberty, but, also, an emphatic vote for democracy and for peace.”

## **Hillquit's Stand Endorsed.**

Hillquit was not alone in his powerful plea for Socialism. Frank A. Sieverman, Socialist candidate for Controller; Edward F. Cassidy, candidate for President of the Board of Aldermen; Jacob Panken, candidate for Judge in the Second Municipal Court; and Seymour Stedman of Chicago, general counsel for the Socialist Party, were the other speakers. Charles W. Ervin, Managing Editor of *The Call*, presided.

Ervin declared the Socialist Party was the only one in America “which has kept the faith proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence.”

“In keeping this faith it has brought down upon itself and its members the fiercest abuse from the spokesmen of the capitalist class, which preys upon the workers. This abuse, in the days to come, will be reckoned the greatest honor ever paid to a political party in this country.

“For the people's wrath is rising to greater heights every day. There are signs that point to the greatest triumph of the people that the world has ever seen. There never has been a working class republic in this world, but the workers of America intend to establish one here in the United States.”

## **No Socialist Stigmatized.**

Cassidy, the first speaker, pointed out that in all the pro-Germanism and spy-hunting carried on by the federal government for the past two years no taint had fallen upon a single Socialist.

“Throughout the past two years,” he said, “the United States secret service has been scouring this country from coast to coast looking for pro-German spies. Throughout all this time, from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, from Canada to the gulf, they have not discovered one Socialist who has taken German money.”

“About a year ago the United States government conducted an investigation into the activities of certain trade unionists in this country, and as a result showed that a small group of trade unionists had taken German money. But when we look over this precious little bunch, we do not discover on Socialist union man among them.”

Loud applause greeted this statement. Cassidy continued:

“When the capitalist press, in an attempt to poison the mind of the people, say we are pro-German, they lie, and they know they lie.” (*Applause.*)

## **Stands for Democracy.**

“It is not because they think we are pro-German or pro-kaiser. The reason is that we are the only party in the country that stands up to make the world safe for a real democracy. We mean not only to crush the German militaristic autocracy, but all industrial autocracy as well. And then, and only then, will the world be safe for democracy.”

Seymour Stedman’s speech sparkled with epigrammatic expressions which drew instantaneous response in crackling applause. His clear, penetrating voice reached all parts of the garden, and he spoke at white heat, with concentrated power, under perfect control. He said in party:

“New York City needs a mayor who knows the needs of the people of New York. America needs a mayor for New York who

knows that New York is located in the United States and is not a suburb of London.

### **National Issues Involved.**

“In this election you are not deciding merely local issues. The national issue is focused in the city of New York. Your decision on election day will not be regarded as a declaration merely upon those whose issues which are most closely wound up in your daily life as municipal problems.

“All across the broad land of this country they are looking to this city, and they are expecting the liberal and intelligent working class here to register their conviction in favor of civilization, progress, liberty, and the actual living ideals of the American people.

“You cannot regard this as in any sense a local demonstration. You are fighting, not your local fight — you are fighting a national fight — aye, you are fighting an international fight.

“Tammany, in a death-bed repentance, has come out for public ownership. Tammany is trying to be a leopard and change its spots, but finds it is a tiger, and cannot change its stripes.

“We must arouse ourselves to a full conscientiousness of the purpose of the unbridled lawlessness and brutality of the class that has heretofore, without restraint, trustified and operated the great industries of this country, which have ruthlessly exploited the working class.

### **Capitalists Are Masters.**

“We must awaken ourselves to the fact that at this hour their hands are on the throttle and that the government is the instrument, and while it transforms their industries from private to governmental institutions, the capitalist class purposes to be the masters of the state.

“Their purpose is to make the industrial state their state, controlled by them and for them, submissive to their interests, thereby preserving themselves upon the dizzy heights of power to which they have ascended, and securing unto themselves their immense wealth. To accomplish this it will be necessary to clamp down upon the working people an industrial feudalism, a feudalism of iron and steel, wire and rock.

“The pages of the past do not record a single instance of a class in power supinely descending its lofty eminence into the folds of the people and mingling in a common brotherhood. A few days ago our lords did not disguise their glee over the prospect of a Russian general reestablishing an autocracy with the tsar’s

brother on the throne. But these gentlemen chirped too quickly. Immediately the counter-revolution failed. And what was the result? The mahogany table friends of Samuel Gompers had him send a telegram (*laughter*) to Kerensky, congratulating him on his victory.

“But the quick rally of our influential newspapers to the cause of a bureaucratic Russian general shows to what side their sympathies incline. Plutocrats and bureaucrats are the same under the flag of every country.

### **Must Unite Forces.**

“It is a crying need for us to unite all the liberal forces to meet the danger ahead and the danger in our midst. Nothing should disunite us. Our nation is composed of many races and different religions. This behooves us to be broadminded and tolerant. The most perfidious and un-American wretches are those who would excite racial discord or religious animosities, for it is a motto of all tyrants to divide and conquer, and the confiding workers and poor of the world always have been the helpless victims of this method of assault.

“From the intelligent and alert people out on the plains, working on the farms and in the factories, and from a multitude of citizens and villages in the West, I bring your greetings. You will soon hear the voice of the Western farmer, who knows why and how he is reduced to tenancy, why farms are mortgaged and why high prices have not placed him among the nation’s war profiteers.

“The workers in the factory and the field must unite. They are both producers and this country’s producers must unite against this country’s parasites.

“Your comrades and friends in the West know your loyalty to the working people throughout this country, your loyalty to the working class in every country.... If devotion to the American ideals of freedom and liberty is patriotism, then we surrender to no man in these qualities, which make for the betterment of the human race.

“The intelligent people of New York will measure up to the lofty requirements of our stupendous task. The hour has come. It is low 12:00 for our kings of finance, lords of franchises, and the grand dukes of the trust.

“Morris Hillquit, your next mayor (*applause*), is not only your standard bearer. He is carrying the colors for the working class, the liberal and progressive forces throughout the country, for civil liberty, industrial democracy, for world civilization, for the interna-

tional triumph of labor, justice, and humanity — aye, for the boys in the trenches of every country, and for their destitute, pleading, and frantic mothers, fathers, and companions.

“We of the West bid you godspeed to victory.”

Frank A. Sieverman said:

“They may choke to death any number of Socialist publications. They may, in a strictly tsar-like and kaiser-like manner, ransack the private papers of Socialist Party members. They may even lay violent hands in this campaign on the party’s standard bearers. But there is one thing they cannot do. They cannot interfere with a referendum on peace on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

“Approximately 50 percent of the adult population of this country are not permitted to take any part in government affairs. Half of the human race in this country — and that the better half — is not permitted to participate in governmental affairs. Political democracy means nothing in the mouths of American capitalist spokesmen.”

A mere word would have been sufficient to cause every person in the auditorium to give the utmost limit of his or her means. But Jacob Panken, candidate for the “poor man’s court,” was selected to make the plea for the collection. Panken’s reception by the audience when he arose to speak rivaled that given Hillquit.

“As far as we are concerned,” he said, when he was finally able to get a hearing, “the issue in this campaign is not peace — it is war, war, war! — on capitalism.

“If you agree with me that the issue is war on capital by labor, we must fight it out, until the ultimate triumph of labor. Then give us the ammunition.”

Panken sat down, and scores of white clad, red sashed girls “went through” the audience, beginning with the platform, and not overlooking the speakers. Even the newspaper reporters at the press table contributed.

It took six hours to count the collection, which was composed for the greater part of nickels, dimes, quarters, and half dollars. It totaled \$917.88 [?].

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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