
The Question of War:

Letter to the Editor of *The New York Call*, March 25, 1917

by J.G. Phelps Stokes, Charles Edward Russell,
William English Walling, W.J. Ghent,
Upton Sinclair, et al.

Published in *The New York Call*, v. 10, no. 83 (March 24, 1917), pg. 6.

Editor of *The Call*:

We, the undersigned, being Socialists and strongly opposed to the attitude of the Socialist Party with reference to war and national defense, desire to express our opposition publicly and to invite other Socialists who may feel as we do to communicate with us.

We feel that the present opposition of the Socialist Party to national defense is contrary to the interests of democracy and contrary to the hitherto accepted views of the International Socialist movement.

Morris Hillquit, the American representative to the International Socialist Bureau, expressed the correct Socialist position in January 1915, when he wrote publicly: "The Socialists realize that it would be futile and foolish to preach complete disarmament to any nation while its neighbors and rivals are armed. They frankly acknowledge that under existing conditions each nation must be prepared to defend its integrity and independence against the rest of the world, and must maintain a strong military organization for that purpose," and then added, "the Socialist ideal of military organization is the popular militia, and, as a measure of transition, they advocate the progressive reduction of the period of service, coupled with an extension of general military training."

So, also, Meyer London, the Socialist Congressman, correctly expressed the Socialist view when, a year later, he told the Congress of the United States that "the Socialist movement of everywhere recognizes the right of a nation to defend itself."

We feel that the present contrary attitude of the Socialist Party of this country in this regard is unsound from the standpoint of Socialist theory and a betrayal of democracy, and we believe that there are many in the party who, like ourselves, do not wish to be identified with that false position.

We are for peace, but not at any cost, and believe that the sacrifice of integrity and of general public and private self-respect is too high a price to pay for it. We abhor bloodshed, but see clearly that blood had better be shed than saved by cowardice to decay in bondage. As sincere lovers of peace, we cannot be content with the nominal preservation of its mere form. We do not confuse peace with the preservation of individual lives, for to do so usually involves intolerable egotistic materialism, setting at naught the ultimate ideal of sacrifice for the cause of liberty.

We are anti-militarists and fear both professional and volunteer class armies, and believe that people who educate and govern themselves should be prepared to defend themselves against all who

would interfere with their rights to liberty and self-government.

Despite the present limitations of the franchise, we are as a nation politically free, but we perceive that our continued independence is contingent upon our capacity for national defense and upon our willingness to use that capacity. One cannot keep peace longer than one's neighbors will permit. We could sacrifice peace rather than submit to invasion of such liberties as we already have, imperfect though they may be.

But, although as a nation we are politically free, yet we are but a part of a social world, and as such we are glad that the isolation of our country is past. The former position of the United States as the hermit of the western hemisphere is no longer tenable. Our country belongs to a family of nations, and must assume its share of responsibility for the maintenance of just international relations. Each nation is to a degree its brother's keeper. If a nation runs amuck, it must be overcome by the superior force of united action.

A nation should neither sidestep its responsibilities to save itself some present suffering, nor

bask behind bulwarks raised and defended by others.

To refuse to resist international crime is to be unworthy of the name of Socialist. It is our present duty to the cause of Internationalism to support our government in any sacrifice it requires in defense of those principles of international law and order which are essential alike to Socialism and to civilization.

*J.G. Phelps Stokes,
Charles Edward Russell,
Walter E. Kreusi,
William English Walling,
Charlotte Kimball Kreusi,
Robert W. Bruere,
Leroy Scott,
William L. Stoddard,
Charlotte Perkins Gilman,
W.J. Ghent,
Upton Sinclair.*

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.