
A Dastardly Attack:

Unsigned Editorial in the *Milwaukee Leader*, May 17, 1917.

Published in the *Milwaukee Leader*, v. 6, no. 137 (May 17, 1917), pg. 4.

The censorship of war news in the Espionage Bill was stricken out. The big capitalist newspapers would not stand for it.

An infinitely more dangerous and dastardly attempt against freedom and democracy, however, was put into the bill on motion of Senator P.O. Husting of Wisconsin. That is:

“Authority for the post office department to censor mails and exclude mail matter deemed seditious, anarchistic, or treasonable and making its mailing punishable under heavy penalties.”

As *The Congressional Record* of May 11 [1917] proves, Mr. Husting had this provision put in — at the instigation of A.M. Simons and W.R. Gaylord.

Letters of these two war patriots to Husting, and also their letters and interviews that had been printed in the *Milwaukee Journal*, were read in the Senate. In all of these letters and articles they claim that the resolutions adopted by the [Socialist Party] convention in St. Louis [April 7-14, 1917] were treasonable and seditious and demand special legislation. Simons and Gaylord pretend that they intend to prevent some mysterious uprising against the United States.

Mr. Gaylord also claims that he had overheard Victor Berger and Emil Seidel on the train coming back from St. Louis say that they feared “resistance” on the part of “fanatics.”

We do not know, of course, what Gaylord, who seems bent to play the “informer,” tried to overhear on the train. He was sitting alone a few seats ahead of the other delegates. But he surely could overhear nothing that these two men would be afraid or ashamed to say anywhere, or — that could be twisted even by a “secret agent” of the government to contain anything “treasonable” without doing violence to the English

language.

The facts as to the new American “exception” law are these:

Mr. W.R. Gaylord in a letter to Husting asked for “discreet use of authority for the prevention of general circulation of this pernicious propaganda” — meaning the Socialist propaganda against war. And Mr. A.M. Simons in a postscript said that he had read Gaylord’s letter, “agreed with it,” and “joined in the hope that some action may be taken to prevent violence.”

Nothing like their scheme was ever proposed in any European country by Socialists, radicals, liberals, conservatives, or even plain, honest men. Nothing like that had ever been proposed by any reputable capitalist paper in this country. It means a special law against Socialist and trade union propaganda, which “may be deemed seditious or treasonable.”

And the proclamation adopted in St. Louis contains no treason to the United States. The Socialist Party in no country has ever preached violent resistance to our knowledge.

And surely the Socialist Party in the United States never stood for it. And of all Socialist spokesmen, editors, and leaders in this country, Victor Berger was the one who always took a sane and moderate position — always took a pronounced stand against rumpus and riot of any kind. Victor Berger was, therefore, always denounced as an “opportunist” and as a “conservative” by men of Simons’ type in the Socialist movement.

But at the same time Victor Berger never denied, of course, that he was a revolutionary Socialist — revolutionary meaning a political and economic revolution based on modern social science.

And the fact that Victor Berger and the over-

whelming majority of the party still retain the international standpoint of Social Democracy held in every civilized country of the world — to discourage all wars unless a country is actually invaded — is now made the pretense of charging the Socialist Party of America with pro-Germanism. The same charge is made against the Socialists of England, France, Russia, Holland, Sweden, etc., by the governments at war. While in Germany, at the same time, the Socialists are being accused “of helping the Allies.”

In this special case the attack is made by jealous and disgruntled office-seekers and fellows who pose as “great writers.” One is an individual who knows little or nothing beyond a few shopworn Socialist phrases, but who, nevertheless, believes he ought to have a meal ticket from the Socialist Party for life because he has written a “book” that had to be withdrawn by the publisher as not containing truths or facts. And these are the “great men” that accuse Berger, Hillquit, Lee, and all those who adhere to the international principles of the Socialist Party of being guilty of treason against the capitalist government.

We do not know whether the Socialists and the labor press are aware of the fearful danger that is contained in the provision added to this bill in the Senate. This law makes the Postmaster General, or rather his subordinates — post office inspectors and secret service men — the sole judges whether a publication is anarchistic, treasonable, or seditious, and gives them the power of life and death over the Socialist press. To most post office inspectors all Socialism is anarchistic,

seditious, and treasonable. Consequently, not a single Socialist book — nor any trade union pamphlets or trade union papers or circulars which the postal department might consider syndicalistic under certain circumstances — could be sent through the mails without the sender committing a crime and risking the heaviest penalties.

This law has only passed the Senate and needs the concurrence of the House of Representatives, but it must be defeated by all means. Truly such a law was never heard of even in Russia in the days of the Tsar.

The Socialist manifesto against the war that was adopted in St. Louis contains nothing but what has been said a thousand times in all Socialist books and publications on the same subject during the last 60 years.

The Socialist and labor press of this country must be aroused to the danger that is confronting it. Under the pretext of fighting for an alleged democracy in Europe, we are just on the point of losing all democracy at home.

If the new provision should become a law, a sentence like the one just penned — about losing our democracy while fighting in Europe — might in the future be considered treasonable and seditious.

Every liberty-loving man in the country and every reader of a Socialist or a progressive paper should at once send a letter or a card to the Congressman, protesting against this infamous provision.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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