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# Socialist Neutrality.

by Morris Hillquit

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In the face of the all-consuming European conflagration the American Socialists should remain neutral and, as much as possible, rational. If any country of the world is called upon to maintain an even balance in its sympathies for the unfortunate nations of the old continent in this hour of their general madness of destruction, it is the United States, largely made up of the offshoots of all of the fighting nations. If any people can afford to take a sober and dispassionate view of the European catastrophe, it is the people of this country, about 4,000 miles removed from the fields of battle; and if any section of our people should be free from hysteria in its attitude toward the war, it is the Socialists, who pride themselves on the possession of a sober social philosophy and an unfailing key for the interpretation of the great world phenomena of

our time.

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American Socialists should not take sides with the Allies as against the Germans. The assertion that the forces of the Allied armies are waging a war of democracy against militarism is a hollow catchphrase devoid of true sense and substance. The governments of France and England are not fighting for the liberation of the German people from the yoke of their reactionary and militaristic government. If they will be victorious, they will not force the abdication of the Hohenzollern dynasty and the establishment of a democratic republic in Germany. The militaristic imperialism of Germany can be superseded by a regime



of peaceful democracy only through the action of the German people themselves, and principally through the struggles of the German Socialists and organized workers. Just as the working class as a whole must accomplish its own economic emancipation, just so must the people of each country conquer its own political rights and freedoms. No nation in history has ever obtained true liberty as the forced gift of a foreign power.

Besides it will not do to speak glibly about France and England and conveniently and complacently forget about Russia. Russia is the most unrepresentable but by no means the least important member of the Allied family. In the final settlement of the European score, it will have as much to say as England or France. And when we speak of Russia, we do not mean the Russian people, who were never consulted, but that most hideous and perfidious of all European forces, the reactionary, absolutistic, militaristic, and brutal government of the Tsar. Whatever the cause of human progress and civilization may gain through a punishment of Prussian militarism, it will lose a hundredfold through a victory of Russian despotism.

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Nor should American Socialists favor the German side of this war as against that of the Allies. The claim that the German sword has been drawn in the interests of "culture" is just as false and hypocritical as the contention that the Allies are fighting for democracy. Whatever culture Germany possesses was painfully developed by her people in times of peace and is now being ruthlessly destroyed by her government through its brutal exploits on land, in the air, and at sea. A victory of German arms will not enhance the "culture" of Germany nor contribute to the spread of culture in the vanquished countries. If anything was required to demonstrate the hollowness of the patriotic German pretenses, it was supplied by her recent alliance in this war — with Turkey. Russia as the apostle

of European democracy and Turkey as the guardian of European culture, such are the absurdities of the conflicting ideological claims of the contending sides.

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The ghastly carnage in Europe has no redeeming features. It is not a war for democracy, culture, or progress. It is not a fight for sentiments or ideals. It is a cold-blooded butchery for advantages and power, and let us not forget it — advantages and power for the ruling classes of the warring nations. For while the people of the warring countries are fighting this war, and perhaps have to fight it to save their skins, they have been drawn into it through the ambitions, intrigues, and quarrels of their masters, who will take all of the benefits of the victory, whichever side prevails. A decisive victory of either side is likely to foster a spirit of military overbearing and pseudo-patriotic exultation on the part of the victorious countries, lasting resentment and increased military activity on the part of the defeated nations, and a general condition of pan-European irritation with a tendency to another, perhaps more pernicious war.

From the true Socialist viewpoint the most satisfactory solution of the great sanguinary conflict of the nations lies in a draw, a cessation of hostilities from sheer exhaustion without determining anything. Only in that case, only if it will become apparent to all the world that the heavy rivers of human blood have flown for nothing; that hundreds of thousands of human lives have been extinguished in vain; that millions of homes have been ruined to no purpose; that the gruesome dance of death had drawn all nations into its ghastly circle leaving nothing but a trail of suffering, tears, and desolation — only then will this war remain forever accursed in the memory of men, only then will it lead the people of all nations to revolt against any repetition of the frightful experience and to revolt against the capitalist system which leads to such paroxysms of human madness.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

*Graphic of the burial of French cavalryman from International Socialist Review, January 1915.*

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