
Correspondence between William L. Patterson, Communist Candidate for Mayor of New York City and Morris Hillquit, Socialist Candidate for Mayor of New York City, Late September 1932

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The following correspondence between Morris Hillquit, Socialist candidate for Mayor, and the Communist nominee for the office is self-explanatory. True to usual Communist tactics, the Fosterite May-orality nominee grasped the opportunity to vituperate, and like all Communists eagerly takes everything he reads in the Capitalist press as gospel while garbling and falsifying a quotation from *The New leader* by taking it from its context and making it appear to mean precisely the opposite of its actual meaning.

As a typical piece of Communist tactics the letter is a gem and is worth preserving, together with the reply of Morris Hillquit.

On a letterhead reading "United Front Communist Election Campaign Committee," and giving the address of Communist Party headquarters, William L. Patterson writes:

Patterson's Letter [Sept. 28, 1932].

Mr. Morris Hillquit,
Dear Sir:

As Communist candidate for Mayor of New York City, I challenge you who have been nominated for the same office by the Socialist Party, to debate with me on a date previous to the November 8th election on the issues of unemployment relief and specifically the Negro question.

My fellow Negro workers are undergoing extreme suffering in this crisis. Sixty percent of the workers in Harlem are unemployed. The rate of infant mortality in Harlem is four times greater than in any other district. In

the matter of relief, the Negroes in New York City as elsewhere are viciously discriminated against.

Yet, since your nomination by the Socialist Party as its candidate for Mayor of New York City you have failed to make any protest against such shameful conditions. Among the ten planks adopted by the Socialist Party of New York City in its municipal convention on September 15, at which you were nominated, nothing whatsoever is said of the conditions of the Negro workers in New York City. Nor have you deemed it necessary to state what you would do, in event of being elected, to ameliorate the suffering of the Negro or white workers.

That you yourself lack confidence in the Socialist Party being able to change present conditions in New York City is attested by your statement published in a New York morning daily on September 17, 1932, shortly after your nomination, in which you stated: "A Socialist regime in New York would not mean any great outward change in the government..."

Together with other Socialist leaders you are in favor of segregating and Jim-crowding Negro workers. In *The New Leader*, a weekly controlled by your group (sic.), published in New York City, the following appeared on June 21, 1930:

"Almost all Southerners believe in segregating the Negro and deprive him of the social and political rights that whites enjoy. The southern Socialists must adjust their tactics to this state of affairs. It is certain that there never will be a thriving Socialist movement in the South, unless it is conducted *in Southern style*." (Emphasis mine.)

By your failure to object to this statement in *The New Leader*, you are openly on the side of those who support Jim-crowism, lynch-terror, brutal exploitation, and oppression of the Negro people.

The interview published in a New York morning daily on September 17, 1932, describes you as living in luxury. Yet thousands of workers for whose rights you claim to be fighting are dying of hunger. Your millionaire's mode of life, Mr. Hillquit, makes you the logical champion of the bosses who also live in luxury, but not of the workers for whom you are separated by barriers of wealth, and whose sufferings in the present crisis you can no more understand than can Herbert Hoover and other capitalist politicians.

The same interview quoted you as stating that if the Socialist Party gained favor it would degenerate.

Mr. Hillquit, the Socialist Party has already degenerated and is rotten to the core with opportunism and greed for power at the expense of the workers.

Your failure to accept my challenge will mean only the following: a confession on your part that you are hostile to the workers and especially to the Negro workers; that in office you would use your power to break down the workers' struggles against the capitalist class, and that you fa-

vor a perpetuation of Jim-crowism, lynching, and brutal exploitation of the Negro people.

Very truly yours,

William L. Patterson.

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Hillquit's Reply.

Mr. William L. Patterson,
Dear Sir:

I have your letter of September 28th, challenging me to debate with you on unemployment relief and "specifically on the Negro question."

The Socialist Party has adopted a comprehensive program for unemployment relief for all New York workers — Negroes, Jews, Italians, Irish, and American alike. To us, Negroes are just workers and human beings. Any seeming discrimination in their favor would be as offensive to self-respecting Negroes as discrimination against them.

Your attitude on the Negro question strikes me as neither Socialistic nor Communistic. It is purely nationalistic.

You charge me with favoring segregation of Negro workers and in support of the charge you purport to quote a passage from The New Leader of June 21, 1930.

Your quotation is garbled. It consists of two disjointed passages from a report on the condition of the Socialist movement in Virginia. The writer mentions as "one of the most difficult problems to solve" the fact that "almost all Southerners believe in segregating the Negro and depriving him of the social and political rights that whites enjoy." The statement clearly refers to the non-Socialists in the South and is made not by way of approval but condemnation.

The report concludes with the assertion that "the Socialists of Virginia are good Socialists as well as Southerners and can be trusted to solve the intricate problems involved. They will be worthy of the best Socialist traditions."

The traditions of the Socialist Party are expressed in its platforms, constitutions, and resolutions. They represent a consistent attitude of determined opposition to all forms of segregation within the Party and outside of it.

If you have not read the full article from which you purport to quote, you are a trifle careless in making charges. If you have, your sense of truthfulness is somewhat deficient.

You taunt me with my “millionaire’s mode of life” and conclude that I am separated from the workers by “barriers of wealth.” Of course, you know nothing about my mode of life or reputed wealth. You base your inferences solely on the inferences fo a reporter for a capitalist paper. This is as unfair as it is irrelevant.

I do not happen to live in riotous luxury and am in much closer touch with the working masses than the coterie of parlor Communist intellectuals and Wall Street proletarians who have recently bestowed their apostolic blessings upon your party.

But why divert issues of principle to stupid and sterile personal attacks?

You volunteer the information that I am “openly on the side of those who support Jim-crowism, lynch terror, brutal exploitation, and oppression of the Negro people” and that the Socialist Party is “rotten to the core with opportunism and greed for power at the expense of the workers.”

From the mild tone of your observations I infer that you are a novice in the Communist movement and have not yet fully mastered the picturesque vocabulary of Communist invective. If your letter is a sample of the quality and methods of your discussion, it would be cruel to inflict a public debate with you on the working class of New York, already so sorely tired and terribly weakened by three years of heavy depression.

Yours very truly,

Morris Hillquit.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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