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# Letter to Morris Hillquit at Saranac Lake, NY from Santeri Nuorteva in New York City, October 23, 1918. †

Document no. 809 in the Morris Hillquit Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (microfilm).

October 23rd, 1918.

Dear Comrade Hillquit:

I received your kind letter just as I had sent you a copy of my answer to [Oskari] Tokoi together with other documents and a letter outlining briefly my activities during the past three months. Your letter, written by yourself, and in itself an evidence of the fact that you are getting well, was to me just as great a pleasure as your kind words of appreciation.‡

As I said in my letter, the Tokoi incident created some disturbance among some of our Finnish comrades. Comrade [Frans Josef] Syrjälä, the managing

editor of *Raivaaja* [Fitchburg, MA], has always been quite antagonistic toward the Soviets. He is an honest Socialist and I value his friendship much, but he is one of those “old fashioned” Socialists who feel themselves quite uneasy when something happens which on the surface of it is not in strict accordance with the rules laid by Kautsky. He takes his theories too literally and it seems to him impossible that the evolution [*sic.*?] in Russia may take a course somewhat different from that in other countries.

There has been friction between us on this question all the time and Tokoi’s letter came to him as a godsend, badly attacked as he was by our two other papers [*Työmies, Toveri*] because of his antagonistic

†- This letter was written on the letterhead of the Finnish Information Bureau, located at 299 Broadway, Room 1812, in New York City. Santeri Nuorteva founded this proto-diplomatic agency on March 30, 1918, serving as the “Representative in the United States of the People’s Republic of Finland” until the democratically-elected Finnish revolutionary government was bloodily overthrown in a Right Wing military coup in May 1918. Nuorteva was born Alexander Nyberg of a Jewish mother and a Finnish-Swedish father in Viborg in 1881 and was a graduate of the University of Helsingfors. He was a Social Democratic member of the Finnish Diet from 1907-1910 (6 months of which he served in jail for publishing an article critical of the Tsar) but was forced to emigrate in 1911 due to his political views. Prior to his stint as the publicity officer and unrecognized diplomatic representative in America of revolutionary Finland, Nuorteva was active in the Finnish Federation of the Socialist Party of America. Nuorteva was a man of the center within the spectrum of Finnish Socialist politics — the translator of John Spargo’s 1913 anti-syndicalist work *Syndicalism, Industrial Unionism and Socialism* [*Syndikalismi, teollisuusunionismi ja sosialismi*, 1914, copy in the collection of the Oregon Historical Society] and a close personal friend of the Social Democratic Marxist Morris Hillquit, the two exchanging correspondence in English and Russian. On March 18, 1919 both Nuorteva and Hillquit were both employed by Ludwig Martens’ Russian Soviet Government Bureau in New York, with Nuorteva serving as Martens’ right hand man and Hillquit named Legal Director. Due to his poor health, Hillquit was unable to perform any tasks for the RSGB during its brief existence, with the actual legal tasks handled by the Acting Legal Director, Isaac Hourwich — father of old Communist Party of America factional leader Nicholas Hourwich. This tangle of interpersonal relationships no doubt contributed to the old CPA’s loathing of the Martens Bureau, which was perceived as a “centrist” institution in league with the old CPA’s hated rival, the Communist Labor Party of America. Later Nuorteva became embroiled in a dispute in the American Communist movement when he accused old CPA International Secretary Louis Fraina of being a spy for the Department of Justice. Nuorteva was forced to cease his charges after two investigations of his claims, the second of which was held by the Comintern in Moscow and resulted in Fraina’s complete exoneration. Nuorteva then worked in the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, heading the department for the Entente countries and Scandinavia in 1921, until he was himself denounced in a letter to the Cheka, which resulted in his arrest and jailing in 1922. Nuorteva was himself finally exonerated by the Politburo of the RKP(b) on September 28, 1922, going on to be an important government official in Soviet Karelia. Nuorteva died of natural causes on April 9, 1929, in Leningrad.

‡- Hillquit suffered from tuberculosis, which eventually killed him in October 1933 at the age of 63.

attitude to the Soviets. I am sure, however, that alone would not have been sufficient to determine his course in this matter if there had not been another motive. *Raivaaja* was threatened with suspension of second class mailing privileges. This, in addition to his general fear that my activities in the interest of the Russian revolution would incite the authorities into a prosecution of Finns in America and thus damage the many institutions we have built up in the past 15 years, made up his mind to use the publication of Tokoi's letter with an indirect endorsement of it, and a refusal to publish my answer, as well as the general attitude of *Raivaaja* toward the Bolsheviki — as a means to make *Raivaaja* “good” in Washington and to preserve themselves. His attitude has brought the desired results — the case against *Raivaaja* by the Post Department has been dropped — at the cost of what promises, I do not know, but I am sure that Comrade [George] Roewer, who was their attorney, sometime will be able to tell you the full story. It also appears that they, in addition to everything else, had placed themselves on record in Washington in opposition to my work.

I am stating this without any bitterness at all — although it is clear that the course they took makes my work, which already was difficult enough, still more difficult, and I am afraid that their action in due time

may become very detrimental to themselves. I am satisfied to know, however, that all our other [Finnish] papers and our members in general do not share *Raivaaja's* position on the Russian question. *Raivaaja's* breakdown is to me a very interesting solution of the great riddle, just how and why the breakdown of internationalism in Germany and in many other countries was possible.

Do you think you will be able soon to come to New York? Or has your health improved so much that you could suffer a visit from me in the near future? I would like to come out there for a couple of days. I imagine the Adirondacks are worthwhile seeing in their autumn glory, and a couple of days at some hotel in your neighborhood would be quite a relaxation to me. Yet I would not impose upon your time and upon your strength if it is not possible without the slightest disturbance to you.

Sincerely yours,

Santeri Nuorteva.

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*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.*

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