

Thomas G. Alexander, 2003: *Utah: The Right Place*, page 264

This is an excerpt from a Utah history textbook. Disbarring an attorney means taking away their legal status so they cannot be an attorney anymore. [Changed for quicker reading.]

The IWW was unpopular in Utah because of its support of Joe Hill, a Swedish emigrant and travelling poet and songwriter. Hill's fortunes took a decided turn for the worse on January 12, 1914, when Salt Lake City police arrested him for the murder of grocer John G. Morrison and his son Arling. Arling had shot one of the robbers before his death, and the travelling poet had appeared at the office of Dr. Frank M. McHugh with a recent gunshot wound that he refused to explain publicly.

After Hill was convicted on indirect evidence, a flood of letters poured into Governor Spry's office from concerned citizens, the Swedish consul, and President Woodrow Wilson. They wanted Hill's sentence to be changed from death to just life in prison, but Spry refused to budge. On November 19, 1915, a firing squad executed Hill. In the bitter atmosphere of the trial and execution, Utah's courts disbarred Hill's attorney, O. N. Hilton, and the University of Utah fired Virginia Snow Stephen—both outspoken opponents of the death penalty—for their criticism of Utah's governor and judges. These penalties seem like major breaches of civil liberties.

Moreover, after the rage had subsided, labor historian Vernon Jensen learned in an interview with Dr. McHugh that Hill had privately confessed to the murders. In spite of a reward offered for information, McHugh, a Socialist who opposed capital punishment, did not volunteer the information because he feared that speaking up would lead to Hill's execution. Over time, McHugh became less reluctant to reveal what he knew, and the doctor's testimony seems to leave Hill's guilt obvious. Nevertheless, doubts still persist about the fairness of the trial in the emotionally-charged atmosphere.