

G.I. VOICE

Number 2-3



May 1969.

For a G.I.-Worker Alliance

GIs AND THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

The National GI-civilian Easter "Actions" occur at a time when there is an enormous upsurge of antiwar and antimilitary hostility within the Armed Forces, and a severe slump in the civilian antiwar movement. GI upsurge and civilian slump were both "demonstrated" at the Washington D. C. "Counter Inaugural" where a stimulating workshop on GI organizing was mixed in with fifty other workshops on such topics as renaissance music and was followed by a "Mass March" (composed of that "mass" which varies inversely with the number of marches) and a dull rally. The "Counter Inaugural" was the death rattle of the antiwar movement and no Easter "Action" will perform the miracle of resurrection for it. Putting GIs at the head will not make the tail of peace marches grow longer. Instead, cashing in on the fresh energy of GI dissent and stale sentimentality of "Bring Our Boys Home" banner waving will only prolong the death agony of the antiwar movement for one or two parade spasms.

The significance of GI antiwar sentiment has forced itself upon the Left. However, the Left courts GIs with the slogans, tactics and programs of the antiwar movement. These programs divide the antiwar movement into two hostile camps, the adventurists and the pacifist-liberals. The most infamous of the thrill seekers is YAWF (Youth Against War & Fascism) and their GI newspaper, The Bond, who have carried their "confront the cops" banner into the Army as "confront the brass". Time spent in the stockade replaces time spent in the city hospital as the measure of revolutionary machismo-masochism. The Bond advocates the formation of a soldier's union, which is, in itself, commendable. At the same time The Bond pretends that a union already exists, the American Serviceman's Union (ASU). However, as many GIs discover after performing one of The Bond's trumpeted tricks and getting six months bad time Bondage, the ASU is no more than a membership card. Though The Bond was the first regular GI newspaper, being more interested in rabble-rousing than political struggle and too cynical to give up the "youth appeal" of confrontation-heroics, YAWF advocates draft resistance rather than disciplined political work in the Army. Whether in civvies or in uniform, for YAWF it's out of the struggle and into the slams.

Opposite to audacious YAWF and leader of the old softies within the antiwar movement stands the SWP (Socialist Workers Party) and their youth group the YSA (Young Socialist Alliance). SWP's antiwar program as stated in their recent report on the antiwar movement (The Militant 14 March): "on Easter week there will be mass demonstrations in the streets against the war in Vietnam. These demonstrations, like those preceding, and those that follow will be the focal point of our activities against the war." They plan "reinspiring and rebuilding the entire antiwar movement by calling attention to the new component, the antiwar G.I." Since four years of mass demonstrations have not ended the war, SWP plans "protracted" demonstrations. Just as Johnson played upon the sentimentality of "supporting our boys in Vietnam" every time the working class grew restless from sacrificing life and toil for an endless war, so the SWP will play the "Bring our boys home" blues whenever radicals appear restless from endless demonstrations. The SWP, like the brass, plans to put the GIs up front of their respective "actions", the brass for rebuilding a dying colonialism in Vietnam, the SWP for rebuilding a dying antiwar movement at home.

GIs UNITED

In contrast to GI "Actions" within the antiwar movement, SWP-YSA supports and defends model GI antiwar activity within the Army, often carried out by their own members. SWP-YSA emphasizes (as does GI Voice) that while a GI must obey every legal order, he does not give up his political rights when he puts on a uniform, and that these rights, particularly when they mean the right to present a socialist critique of the Vietnam War and the American military are rights which must be fought for and defended against repression by the brass.

Currently, the most important defense work being conducted by SWP-YSA is their defense of a group of GIs at Ft. Jackson called GIs United Against the War in Vietnam. GIs United petitioned the brass for the use of military facilities to hold open discussions on the war, racism and the harassment of radical and socialist GIs at Ft. Jackson. Haunted by the spectre of GIs United developing into a soldiers' union, the brass refused the petition since "The Army does not recognize any collective bargaining unit representing members of the Armed Forces." More recently, after GIs United had held a large, informal discussion of the Vietnam War, the brass railroaded eight members into the stockades on such framed up charges as "disobeying a lawful order", "disrespect to a superior officer" and "breach of peace".

The important lesson to learn from the struggles of GIs United is that by staying within the confines of military "justice" and never disobeying legal orders at the same time that GIs United carried on a relentless battle to defend their rights to present grievances and antiwar and antimilitary positions, when the brass cracked down it was the brass who had to "breach the peace", it was the brass who "failed to obey lawful orders", it was the brass who brought "disrespect" upon themselves. When radical and socialist GIs, like the members of GIs United carry their views into the Army without disobeying legal orders, the brass' repression which previously appeared to the ordinary GI as something petty and personal, now reveals its inimical political reality.

"FREE SPEECH FOR GIs"

Under the slogan "Free Speech for GIs", SWP-YSA has conducted their defense work for GIs and groups like GIs United as if antiwar activity within the Army was like the civil rights movement in the South or the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley. However, Presidio should make clear the fundamental difference between a sit-in at Joe's Diner in Atlanta or Sproul Plaza and a sit-in in the stockade. Traditional civil rights defense work consists of law suits, press releases and pressure group tactics (letters, telegrams, petitions, etc.) and appeals to the bourgeois courts, the liberal capitalist press and politicians. Such defense work can only be successful when there is a split within the ruling class (e. g. between northern liberals and conservative Dixiecrats). In the case of Presidio, the whimper went up from the liberal politicians and press only when the sentences were so horrendous as to strip away the threadbare robes of military "justice" leaving naked the arbitrary and unlimited machinery for repression that the brass controls. The prudish liberals who exhorted the brass to cover their ass and use "restraint" in smashing disobedience in the Army, were the liberals (e. g. the "Kennedy Establishment") that called for a "graduated response" or "restraint" in smashing the Vietnamese Revolution.

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The timid indignation of liberals is never surprising since their social position and interests are dependent on a mass standing army as are the flag-hearted super-hawk "Brigadier General" Thurmond's. If disobedience or even "legal" antiwar activity threaten the political reliability of the army, the ruling class will unite, the liberals will turn a deaf ear to the irate telegrams and petitions generated by civil liberties defense work while GI resistance is ruthlessly decimated. Neither the Presidio sit-in nor GIs United constituted such a threat. Instead, they provided an opportunity for the brass to wheel out their machinery of repression as a show of strength. Civil liberties defense work "forced" the brass to temporarily and partially withdraw this machinery into their arsenals. The prisons, the guns, stand ever ready to smash GI dissent as long as this arsenal of repression is controlled by the brass. While every split, contradiction and weakness in the ruling class should be exploited to the utmost, unless defense work is coupled with political and class demands that the arsenal of repression be removed from the hands of the brass, the illusion that the Army is reformable is fostered. These illusions will shatter as soon as GI dissent deepens and intensifies, as soon as it constitutes a threat. However, it is the responsibility of socialists to be in advance of the event and arm antiwar GIs with awareness of the tasks and difficulties ahead, not with the liability of surprise.

FOR GI-WORKER ALLIANCE

In organizing defense and support for GI antiwar struggles SWP-YSA has called for "GI-Civilian Alliances". However, not all "civilians" (which includes war-profiteers like the Rockefeller Five, their bank guards-in-chief Nixon and FT-EM Laird) are allies. SWP-YSA has refused to call attention to that section of the civilian population, due to its numerical and organized strength and its enormous war-extracted sacrifices, which will prove the most steadfast ally in the fight against the war; the workers. The SWP-YSA refusal corresponds to their attempt to hook the upsurge of GI antiwar struggles to the mummified "civilian" antiwar movement rather than to the militant upsurge of labor struggles directed against war wages, war taxes, war inflation, and war speedup. The parallel militant upsurge among workers and GIs is not surprising since the overwhelming majority of EM are working-class and when the troops come home it is the factories (or to their working-class families in boxes and as invalids) that they return.

SWP-YSA's refusal to go into the trade unions to win organized labor support for the immediate withdrawal of all American troops from Vietnam and all other occupied countries and win support for the right of GIs to present antiwar positions within the Army, contradict the lessons they draw from the "Bring The Troops Home" movement at the end of W. W. II. Though GIs and workers were war-weary, the bosses were, as always, war-profit and war-promotion hungry, and anxious to send a massive U. S. army into China to turn the civil war into the American version of the Opium War. Massive "Bring Us Home" demonstrations and agitation by the GIs matched by trade union support temporarily smashed U. S. imperialist ambitions and the troops were brought home.

SWP-YSA's chasing after liberal-pacifists both in the antiwar movement and its defense work has served to raise a cloud of dust rather than political consciousness about the class nature of the U. S. Army. G. I. Voice believes that the orientation of the antiwar movement should be toward the working class, agitating for unions to take antiwar positions and call for an antiwar general strike. GI defense work should make a direct appeal to organized labor to rally to the support of victimized antiwar GIs and groups like GIs United. Within the Army GIs must be told (as they will soon find out) that their most steadfast and strongest ally is the labor movement of which they are a part, not the Federal courts (where judges are appointed by "your" commander-in-chief that sends you to die and kill for the brass' fun and the bosses' profit) or "your" congressmen (chosen by the bosses' twin whores, the Republican and Democratic parties).

The class nature of the U. S. Army is revealed in both its composition and the use to which it is put. While the Army is composed overwhelmingly of workers and supported at their expense (as both workers and GIs discovered this past April 15) if it is used for the repression of the working class as a whole through strike breaking, demonstration busting and smashing ghetto rebellions at home, and waging imperialist wars and smashing worker-peasant movements abroad. In addition, the Army, like the society it defends, reeks of racism. The Black and Puerto Rican GIs are the first to get hit with a special, the last to get a promotion and they do a far more than proportional share of the fighting in Vietnam. While it is the duty of every radical GI to fight relentlessly against the special oppression of GIs that belong to minority groups, it is also his duty to point out that there is no special solution for the oppressed minorities aside from a united organization of the oppressed majority, the working class. The radical GI must fight against any "special solution" which might set GIs or workers one against the other or disunite them.

Such a "special solution" was proposed by Joe Miles, one of the founders of GIs United, as "the right of blacks, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and all oppressed national minorities to the right of self-determination in this country". The political meaning of self-determination is the right to form a separate political unit with a geographic and economic base, and with separate courts, congress, army, postage stamps, etc. The Vietnamese have such a geographic and economic base. For them national self-determination means kicking out the U. S. invaders and running their own country. Likewise, self-determination might be a progressive demand for Puerto Rico. However, for the Blacks and Puerto Ricans in this country have no separate economic and geographic base. Blacks and Puerto Ricans are deeply integrated in the U. S. economy (e. g. 25% of all steel workers are Black, 15% of all truck drivers, 10% of all factory workers and 8.8% of the active services.) Self-determination for oppressed minorities in this country can only divide and weaken the labor movement's struggle against a common enemy.

OUR DEMANDS

We demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all American troops from Vietnam and all other occupied countries.

We demand an end to racism in the Services. We recognize that the root causes of racism are economic and inherent in American society.

We demand the end to the use of GIs as strikebreakers and political police, and as occupation troops in civil disorders.

We demand full constitutional rights for GIs - that there be no separation of civil rights between civilian and military, and that GIs be fully entitled to due process of law.

We support the right of GIs to form organizations, such as a Serviceman's Union, to win the above demands.

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Number 2-3	May 1969