

BEYOND OCTOBER 21:**From Protest to Power**

The April 15 mobilization was at once the greatest success of the official peace movement and definitive evidence of its political bankruptcy. The series of demonstrations leading up to the April 15th affair not only had no effect on government policy, but the escalation of the war appears to have coincided with each demonstration. The complete ineffectiveness of the April 15th march and the cynical indifference of the Johnson administration to anti-war sentiment has engendered a hysterical hatred of the "power structure" and a sense of frustration among the most active sections of the anti-war movement. Isaac Deutscher caught the problem exactly when he said that he'd exchange the whole huge April 15th mobilization for just one dock strike.

Mass Action—Not Kamikazes

There is widespread sentiment to make the demonstrations more aggressive, dramatic and personally involving. The result has been a turn toward self-sacrifice and personal heroics in direct physical confrontations with the "war machine." The notion that the sheer strength of will of its opponents can end the war has its logical culmination in the hippies' project to "raise the Pentagon." Except for satisfying masochistic demonstrators and sadistic cops, nothing is gained from such "confrontations." Whether the demonstrators fight back or not, under these circumstances the odds are all on the side of the cops. Such direct action is as ineffectual as large, orderly demonstrations, and more expensive to the movement in terms of bruised bodies, jail sentences and money.

Personal sacrifice can never substitute for a mass movement, and it is necessary to understand this in developing a perspective for the anti-war movement. This does not mean reverting to the simple pacifist humanitarianism of the official peace movement in order to get middle-class liberals on the picket lines. What it does mean is tapping the fundamental discontent and conflicts in American society; the black ghetto uprisings and rash of militant strikes indicate the depth and explosiveness of this discontent. Some of this discontent is with the war itself, or things related to the war, such as the inflation eating into real wages. But all of it stems from the fundamentally oppressive character of American capitalism, of which the slaughter of the rebellious Vietnamese

peasantry is simply the most dramatic external manifestation.

You WILL Go

Closely related to the tendency of anti-war radicals to think in terms of personal assaults on the "system" is the draft-resistance campaign, which has become the principal organizing focus of the student anti-war movement. Far from resisting the war, the voluntary purging of radicals from the army strengthens the ideological purity and political reliability of the army. The government still seeks to screen radicals out of the service. Radicals, rather than going off to prison or Canada, would be far more effective educating their fellow soldiers. The Americans who suffer most from the war are the soldiers in Vietnam, and as the war grows longer and bloodier, discontent among G.I.s and its effect on prosecuting the war could be very great indeed.

Perhaps even more important is the effect of student draft avoidance, particularly the frenzied scrambling after 2-S deferments, which are available only to the intellectually or financially privileged, on the attitude of working-class draftees. The majority of draftees are vaguely disquieted about the war and disgruntled about being drafted during a shooting war, where they could get killed. But they accept the draft as a fact of life, and the idea of refusing to go is completely alien to their whole mode of thinking. They view the "we won't go" movement as motivated by physical cowardice, holier-than-thou moralism and a desire on the part of spoiled college kids to avoid the harshness of army life. The anti-war movement will never break out of the campuses and coffee-houses, and reach the masses, unless young radicals share the common experiences of all working-class youth, in serving a few years in the army. Only by such measures can the debilitating and potentially dangerous, isolation of bohemian intellectuals from the mass of the working class, so characteristic of the American left be overcome.

For Anti-War Strike Actions

The widespread feeling that the continual repetition of big marches is ineffectual and demoralizing is correct. However kamikaze tactics are not the answer. It is necessary for the anti-war movement to achieve the maximum social power it can

muster in protests. To this end, the Spartacist League advocates concretely building for a one-day general strike in factories, offices, ghetto neighborhoods and schools as the next national mobilization. Given the existing strength of the anti-war movement, and proper organizing, such a mobilization could bring out huge numbers of workers and students, and have a severe effect on whole segments of the economy. Even on this modest scale, such a demonstration would put the "fear of god" into the government, because it would mean the anti-war movement had gone far beyond accepted forms of protest and attacked the very foundations of American capitalism—production. Such a strike would be infinitely more effective than this endless series of marches whether or not decorated by the bloodied heads of martyrs.

Toward Conscious Class Struggle

Apart from being a more effective form of protest, the proposed general strike would enable the anti-war movement to widen its base among forces other than political activists and particularly to strengthen organized anti-war sentiment among workers. It would be an excellent way for anti-war trade unionists to organize among their fellow workers and inject the war question into trade union politics. Since the trade union bureaucracy would certainly oppose it, the fight over the proposed strike would reinforce the increasing rank and file discontent in the unions. In fact, in many places, the strike would not only be around anti-war demands, but economic issues as well. It would then be a protest of general social discontent, and would help lay the basis for

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a mass revolutionary socialist party.

Protest or Power

To the extent that most anti-war activists think in terms of politics, they mean running "peace-conscience" candidates, whose sole activity consists of about six weeks of electioneering. This type of discontinuous and one-sided activity can never build an effective movement. In fact, it is seen as a gesture of protest and nothing more. However, the fundamental weakness of this type of peace candidate is not organizational inefficiency, but political. The general social program of most of these candidates—the type of program King or Spock would run on—is not substantially different from the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, who, for purely opportunistic reasons, are unwilling to oppose Johnson. The official leadership of the anti-war movement reinforces the hegemony of the Democratic Party, purged of the personal noxiousness and "aggressiveness of Johnson. King or Spock would simply be a tryout for Robert Kennedy in '72.

Even on the question of the war itself, a

program which implicitly supports American capitalism is self-defeating. The Vietnamese war is not unique. It is simply the largest in a series of colonial wars that the U.S. and all other imperialist powers have been fighting for the past century and will continue to fight until capitalism is overthrown in its main centers. In brief, the U.S. is in Vietnam to suppress a peasant revolution which challenges the dominance of U.S. business in Asia. It is futile to oppose the intervention in Vietnam while supporting the economic system which generates that intervention and the ideology that legitimatizes it.

Toward a Labor Party

Moreover, a political movement built solely around the war is incapable of unifying the various forces of discontent within American society. On the contrary, the necessary support given to the suppression of the American working class by establishment "doves"—Wayne Morse is a leading Congressional advocate of government strike-breaking while the liberal establishment, including King, unanimously supported the bloody suppression of the ghetto risings—is a major obstacle to

building a mass anti-war movement. Only such a revolutionary Labor Party, projecting a long-term struggle in the interest of the working masses, represents the kind of qualitative political change needed to create a serious break with the traditional parties and counter the political apathy of most workers. With the widespread discontent over the war, the rising militancy and restiveness in the labor movement, and the explosiveness of the black ghettos, the prospect for initiating such a party is better now than at any time in the last twenty years.

The anti-war movement can force Johnson to withdraw U.S. troops only if he is more afraid of it than of the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution. No demonstration, however effective and militant, can do this. Only a movement capable of taking state power can. The anti-war movement has no future except as a force for building a party of revolutionary change.

The Vietnamese War has opened many people's eyes to the horrors and injustices inherent in the mainstream of American politics. Nothing short of a fundamental change in the class axis of that politics will eliminate these injustices.