

Introduction

The struggle against U.S. imperialist aggression in IndoChina remains a central task of the American left. Popular opposition to continuing the war has never before been as widespread and as deep. This opposition has acted as a constraint on the ability of the Nixon administration to enlarge and magnify the conflict, although recent events provide a somber reminder of the limited effectiveness of popular opinion as a factor in determining government action.

Paradoxically, the growth of anti-war sentiment has not led to the growth and development of the organized anti-war movement. Rather that movement is in a state of disarray and demoralization, drifting aimlessly between a set of stale protest tactics, at one time useful but becoming increasingly ineffective, and various gimmicky "programs which lack the substance on which to build serious mass political work.

It seems most likely that the massive anti-war sentiment will be funneled into electoral support for whatever candidate the Democratic Party chooses to nominate. And the left, as in 1964 and 1968, will have again demonstrated its inability to build a movement challenging capitalism at its roots.

This likely failure, despite favorable conditions, requires discussion, debate and analysis. Without this we remain trapped by our old errors and habits, unable to overcome our weaknesses and move ahead. This article is an attempt of the SOUJOURNER TRUTH ORGANIZATION to initiate and to contribute to such & discussion.

Situation in IndoChina

We do not intend to give a detailed analysis of the political-military situation in IndoChina, but it is clear to everyone that the U.S. is in deep trouble. The recent offensive of the NLP has clearly exposed the fatal weakness of the Nixon strategy of Vietnamization. That strategy was to base U.S. military power in IndoChina on a combination of massive use of puppet and mercenary ground

troops, supported by the maximum utilization of U.S. airpower and technological resources. The weakness is that mercenary puppet troops are both incapable and unwilling to undertake sustained combat against the well organized and committed forces of the national liberation movements. The U.S. technology, particularly in the air war, while causing great hardship to the patriotic forces, is not militarily decisive.

Under the circumstances there appear to be three options open to Washington: 1) Withdraw U.S. military forces from IndoChina conceding hegemony to the national liberation forces; 2) Pull back military forces from South Vietnam into Thailand as a tactical retreat, using whatever diplomatic leverage the U.S. has with China and the U.S.S.R. to maintain a continuing involvement in IndoChina; 3) Attempt to maintain a foothold in South Vietnam, either through the use of massive airpower up to the use of tactical nuclear weapons, or through the re-introduction of U.S. ground troops — or both.

While the strategic aim of the left within the anti-war movement must be to force the government to take the first position, we do not believe that the U.S. ruling class can be forced to concede a defeat of that magnitude in the near future.

Nixon's recent actions, of course, are an initial step towards the third course, and, if they were free to exercise their choice, this course would clearly be the choice of most of the military and government chiefs. However, we believe that as the blockade and stepped up bombing of North Vietnam fail to achieve their military goals, some variant of position two is the most likely response. To further pursue three would arouse bitter opposition both domestically and abroad in an election year.

If Washington does finally choose a tactical retreat, it will be a victory for the Vietnamese liberation struggle and the U.S. anti-war movement. But it must be made clear to the people in this country that such a tactical retreat does not mean withdrawal from IndoChina. The U.S. will remain ready to resume armed hostilities at a more favorable moment. This means that we must be prepared to carry on a struggle against imperialism in a period of cold as well as hot war. It follows from this that it is

crucial for the anti-war movement to further discredit the Thieu regime and develop the understanding that the P.R.G. is the legitimate government of South Vietnam.

Criteria for judging the anti-war movement

We believe that there are three tasks facing the antiwar movement and anyone who claims leadership of it. They are: 1) The program and practice of the organized anti-war movement must be aimed at transforming the general anti-war sentiment of the people, particularly the working people, into political opposition to imperialism. A key test would be the ability of the anti-war movement to relate to the initiatives of Black political forces, such as the recent convention in Gary. Understanding of imperialism is much more widespread and much more sophisticated in the Black community than among white workers, or for that matter, white students. A movement that cannot relate to that constituency has little hope of advancing beyond where we are now. 2) The anti-war movement must be able to provide leadership and coordination to the mass upsurge that will result if the administration pursues escalation further. This means the movement must be prepared to intervene in, as well as support, work stoppages, GI rebellions, campus uprisings, etc. To do this, the movement will have to establish a presence in plants and on bases, as well as on campuses, *prior to the upsurge*. 3) The movement must be prepared to function forcefully at times of lull in armed conflict as well as when the bombs are falling. Otherwise it remains on the defensive, yielding the initiative and the timing to the imperialists. To do this, opposition to imperialism must be based on more than moral abhorrence of killing, it must be based on the class interests of the working people.

There are two existing national centers of anti-war activity, and an attempt is now underway to form a third. Measured by the criteria above, they are all grossly inadequate to the task.

NPAC

The National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC) is not really a coalition, but a grouping based on the organizational resources of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and in particular on its two mass youth organizations, the Young Socialist Alliance and the Student Mobilization Committee. NPAC's sole activity is to organize monster rallies semi-annually around the slogan of immediate withdrawal from Vietnam.

In the past these rallies have been valuable in crystallizing and publicizing popular opposition to the war, even though their political impact has been diluted by the failure to give political support to the National Liberation Front. In part this failure grows from the sectarianism of the SWP, but probably more basic to it is the fear of alienating the liberal politicians and trade union officials whose endorsement and participation is seen as the key to legitimatizing the anti-war movement by NPAC.

More importantly, this strategy of uniting everyone around the slogan of immediate withdrawal means that NPAC addresses itself indiscriminately to Blacks and racists, workers and bosses, feminists and Hugh Hefner. With such an approach they cannot begin to put forth even a minimally coherent anti-imperialist political program, to say nothing of clarifying the class character of imperialism. Given the high general level of popular opposition to the war, these amorphous rallies no longer serve any useful purpose, while their lowest common denominator politics only serve to strengthen the influence of liberalism in the anti-war movement.

PCPJ

The People's Coalition for Peace and Justice, organized supposedly as a left alternative to NPAC, has not managed to transcend its origin as a conglomeration of diverse and politically incompatible 'personalities' and organizations. Typically, the various groupings and factions within it, the CPUSA, the Christian Pacifists, the aging new leftists, each put forth their own contradictory projects and programs all of which are endorsed by PCPJ. The PCPJ is a sort of

fleamarket of anti-war schemes and ideas, each of which is trying to attract the attention of anti-war activists.

3-Point Program

Recently a group of liberals and new leftists associated with PCPJ have put forth an ambitious strategy called the Three Point Program. This program bears some discussion, not so much because of its potential mass impact, which we believe is small, but because it reveals very sharply the liberal ideology dominating the political forces which make up PCPJ, despite their differences in rhetoric and style. This program is exceptional among PCPJ programs, in that there do seem to be resources, money and the support of prominent liberal politicians, behind it.

The Three Point Program calls for mounting a public campaign aimed at pressuring the Democratic Party into adopting as part of its platform the following three planks: 1) An immediate unilateral ceasefire in IndoChina. 2) A definite date by which all American armed forces will be withdrawn, contingent only on the release of American prisoners of war. 3) The withdrawal of all military and material support of the Thieu regime. The pressure to obtain this plank is to come from a whirlwind national campaign of the peace movement urging that the peace vote be withheld from any candidate who does not endorse the three points.

On one level it is difficult to take this seriously. Any democratic candidate who takes a discernibly more dovish position than Nixon will get the peace vote, whatever the party platform is. The organized peace movement doesn't have the power to grant or withhold the peace vote, and every politician (and most everyone else) knows this. Further, though voters may still have illusions about the two-party system, they certainly have no illusions about party platforms. Platforms aren't worth the paper that they are written on. The only people who care about platforms are the various factions within the party who use fights over the wording of the platform for factional intrigues and jockeying for position.

Traditionally, it has suited the interests of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party to mount platform fights. It has made good press for the folks back home and allowed them to distinguish themselves from the patently reactionary elements of the party. In the past this has been done around a civil rights plank, but, given the present level of racist sentiment particularly around busing, that might backfire. The war will be a fine issue to play with this time, and the issue won't be too divisive since the party already pretty much accepts the necessity of a tactical retreat in Southeast Asia.

This all makes the Three Point Program attractive to Democratic Party liberals. Former Senators Morse and Gruening have already stepped forward as national spokesmen for the program. McGovern has quietly given his endorsement. Money and media coverage have been committed. It is quite possible that a watered down version of the program will be adopted which can be trumpeted as a victory for the movement - and if some purist demands the original formulation...well, he can always vote for Nixon.

There are two arguments directed at the left as reasons to work on this program despite everything aforementioned. The first is that endorsing the Three Point Program provides a concrete way to give political support to the Vietnamese, since, in substance, the three points are the basic political stands of the PRG. However, those promoting this activity are keeping it very quiet that this is true in order not to endanger the endorsements of the liberal notables and the breadth of the mass appeal. But such covert support for the PRG is no better than no support at all. Nixon was able to pass off Vietnamization and the most recent escalations with relatively little response in this country because most people are willing to accept massive bombings of yellow people to "stop Communism" so long as U.S. casualties are being held down. The Three Point Program does nothing to challenge that kind of consciousness by challenging its racist premises and by increasing the popular understanding of, and support for, the national liberation movements in Southeast Asia, particularly understanding of, and support for, the P.R.G. Not only does the PRG need a conscious American public that can see through the maze of lies and deceptions that

Nixon puts out to justify his policies, American leftists in all of their work must stress the necessity to raise the level of popular consciousness. The Three Point Program, however, undermines popular consciousness by building the Democratic Party. Activity around such a program is antithetical to the work necessary to develop a conscious working class, and to build the organizational forms which the working class will need in order to take power.

The other, more theoretical, argument says that the ruling class is split between those who favor stepped-up intervention in IndoChina and those who favor a tactical retreat. Therefore the left has a rare opportunity to influence policy decisions (as argued above, we're not sure how, but...). By exerting such influence and thereby winning a victory for the movement, we can begin to reverse the cycle of demoralization and disintegration that has overtaken the left. It will indeed be a victory for the U.S. movement - and for the Vietnamese people - if all U.S. forces are withdrawn, but that has nothing to do with the left becoming immersed in a platform fight with Democratic Party 'progressives'.

This type of permeationist strategy has been advocated repeatedly by certain sections of the Left for some time, although rarely in such a bald unsophisticated form. Those groups that have tried it have either vanished from history or have become explicitly reactionary. For example, some groupings within the Socialist Party entered the Democratic Party to strengthen its left wing and ended up aligned with its more reactionary elements.

The basic flaw in this type of approach is to forget that a left that is reformist, that puts forth no alternative to capitalist society, has no reason for existing. While it may survive for a time as a clique built around some individuals, eventually it dissolves. Any programmatic or organizational merger with a sector of the ruling class insures such disintegration. At those times when our short range goals are similar to those of the liberals, it is particularly important to maintain independent left organization and programs that reflect the needs and potentials of the working class.

This point is particularly important in a presidential election year. At such times there is the perennial redis-

covery by some sections of the left of the importance of relating to the elections, of 'going where the people are', and of 'relating to the actual consciousness of the masses'. In practice this means coercing one's friends to vote for the more 'progressive' of the candidates and knocking on doors and licking envelopes for your favorite Democratic politician. Despite the fact that such activity has engaged a good proportion of the left's energies in each election year, it has never built the influence or authority of radicals on any major issue. On the contrary, it has sapped the morale and internal coherence of the left. Over the past 30 years the CPUSA has put enormous amounts of energy into this kind of politics only to find their favorite politicians turning into their fiercest persecutors.

The leftists working on the Three Point Program are making the same mistake and promoting the same illusions. They fail to grasp the fundamental fact that the only power of the left lies in the rebellious activity of masses of people, not in having friends in high places. Only so far as we can become part of such insurgent activity and can help bring coherence and self-consciousness to it can we talk of influencing policy...making history.

The war in Vietnam won't end because some liberal politician wants it to, or because a small group of radicals discovers the 'right' strategy, but because the capitalists are forced to end it by military defeat and domestic resistance. It is the central task of the anti-war movement to consolidate and politicize that resistance. The Three Point Program, on the contrary, diffuses and depoliticizes the popular anti-war sentiment. Such maneuvering in Democratic Party politics, and all similar forms of electioneering, are in contradiction to the basic tasks of the left in the anti-war movement.

The coalition around the Three Point Program represents the worst sort of capitulation to liberalism and capitalist politics. That the PCPJ should find itself tied to such a program is conclusive proof of its inability to provide adequate leadership to the anti-war movement.

United Front Against Imperialism

Recently the Revolutionary Union (R.U.) has been at-

tempting to form a third national anti-war center around its strategy of a 'united front against imperialism'. This strategy requires an extended critique which this organization has made in another pamphlet (*The United Front Against Imperialism, A Critique*). However, from that analysis we have concluded that while it is most likely that the United Front will remain small, isolated, and sectarian - less able than NPAC or PCPJ to relate to the on-going mass struggle - insofar as it is able to gain a mass base, the basic reformism of the united front strategy will open this formation to the same weaknesses as NPAC and PCPJ. At best, it will be an NPAC with better slogans for its demonstrations, or a PCPJ with equally empty programs with the addition of a pledge of allegiance to a vaguely Maoist position from its participating organizations. We don't think that such a formation is any better able to fulfill the tasks of the anti-war movement than the older, more established ones.

A Class Based Anti-Imperialist Movement

If one agrees with Lenin that 'imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism', then the only fundamental basis for an anti-imperialist movement is a worker's movement capable of overthrowing capitalism and replacing it with socialism. Much of the U.S. left, while paying lip service to Lenin, act as if imperialism was a matter of government policy. NPAC, PCPJ, and the United Front Against Imperialism base their activity on appeals to humanitarian sentiments, while attempting to point out that meddling in other people's business is not profitable, as well as being immoral. They relate to the war in Vietnam in ways that obscure, rather than clarify, the capitalist essence of the policies which this government is pursuing. They see the primary task of the left in the anti-war movement as inflaming public opinion against the war in order to pressure the government to alter its policy, when the primary task for the left must be to focus the sentiment against the war on the root causes of the war.

While we agree that popular opposition to the war puts constraints on the government and provides an opening

for left agitation and organizing, we argue for a different conception of an anti-war movement and of the role of a left within such a movement. We envisage a movement able to attack and disrupt capitalist production and distribution, its military power and its mechanisms of ideological control - a movement capable of exercising social power and mounting challenge to capitalist hegemony at vital points of the capitalist structure. Such a movement must be connected with all struggles in all sectors, and must inevitably project alternative modes of social organization to capitalism. Although at this point such a movement is clearly quite a distance away, all of our work must keep it in mind and prepare for it.

In 1919, the longshoremen of Seattle refused to load arms for U.S. troops being sent to Russia to suppress the Bolshevik revolution. In 1968, 43 Black paratroopers refused riot duty in Chicago against anti-war demonstrators. Black Polaroid workers have been conducting a struggle to disrupt production of photographic equipment by that company for the government of South Africa. Black longshoremen have blocked unloading of ships from Rhodesia. Tens of thousands of draftees have simply not shown up for induction, while thousands more within the military have deserted or refused to fight. Students all over the country have run recruiters off campuses, paralyzed and disrupted ROTC programs, exposed and discredited Cold War ideologues and Pentagon-CIA research programs.

A viable organized anti-imperialist movement could develop, sustain, and politicize such mass struggles which are already taking place, and prepare for those that are likely to occur in the immediate and not-so-immediate future.

Although development of such an anti-imperialist movement is a long term process, we believe it is the only one that will work. We do not have a detailed blueprint on how that process will unfold, nor do we presume to know all the organizational forms it will take. However, we do think that certain basic points are necessary to the development of such a movement.

1. While there are occasions when the left initiates significant mass action, it is imperialism in crisis that daily generates a mass opposition to itself. This opposi-

tion regularly boils over into localized rebellion, generally of a minor character. Though the left has not recognized it, these actions are a force against imperialism that is much stronger than anything exerted through the present organized movement activities. In fact, the attitude is widespread in the anti-war movement that without the continuous prodding of the movement the people would fall back into passivity.

Let us give an example of this peculiar myopia. Recently in Chicago, thousands of Vietnam veterans, mainly Black, trashed a 'job fair' to which they had come seeking jobs only to find stalling techniques and endless forms to fill out. The vets fought it out with the police, attempted to march on Mayor Daley's house, drove out the interviewers from the big corporations, and, generally, tore the thing up. At the same time the organized peace movement had its dependable minimum of marchers parading around the Federal Building in the loop, unaware of what was happening three miles away.

2. Such an anti-imperialist movement cannot be built without serious sustained organizing work, the kind of work that may not produce immediate results, particularly the sort of results that can be measured by bodies at demonstrations. At present the movement doesn't take such organizing work seriously, in fact, it is contemptuous of it. Movement meetings and conferences, rather than dealing with the actual problems and possibilities in organizing, are preoccupied with schemes and gimmicks and sectarian posturing.

3. A real anti-imperialist movement must be solidly based in the working class, and without a clear class perspective no such base can be developed. Such a perspective is inconceivable without a radical change in the current a-political and anti-theoretical style of the anti-war movement. While it is true that, at present, it is usually the sectarians in the movement who are pressing for 'political discussion', this doesn't mean that it is sectarian to deal with political and theoretical issues. In fact, such discussion and debate is essential to the development of a coherent and practicable working class perspective.