

FOR NC INFORMATION ONLY

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New York, N.Y. 10003

July 24, 1969

TO ALL NC MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

Attached are the following items:

(1) An English translation of an article which appeared in the July 2, 1969 Rouge, newspaper of the Communist League, French section of the Fourth International.

(2) A letter from Fred Halstead to the Editorial Board of Rouge concerning this article.

(3) A letter from Joe Hansen to Ernest concerning the article.

(4) A letter from Joe Hansen to Pierre Frank concerning the article.

These items are for NC information only. They are not for general membership distribution.

Comradely,

Jack Barnes
Organization Secretary

Translation of an unsigned article
in Rouge, July 2, 1969

THE U.S. ARMY PRODUCES ITS GRAVEDIGGERS

From desertion...

The opposition to the war began in 1965 when the first units of GIs were sent to reinforce the number of special forces stationed in Vietnam. At that time the opposition consisted only of isolated circles of university students amid the general apathy of the middle layers and the poor people most affected by conscription. No fifty-seven varieties of expressing refusal existed then -- individual heroism within the army led only to prison and isolation, that is why desertion was the general channel through which rejection of the system, although still vague, was expressed. It should be noted that there was very little politics in these desertions and most often they were short-lived, soldiers on the lam returning to the fold after a few weeks of going hungry and hiding out individually.

The main requirement for undertaking long-term work in the army was creation of an outside base in Canada, and above all Europe. The creation of such bases, in which deserters could regroup and, through contact with militants of the European extreme left, acquire a minimum of political consciousness and education, made it possible to transform individual revolt into militant opposition. Beginning from that, desertions became massive around 1966-67, becoming transformed into a genuine political movement.

This is what made possible the necessary qualitative leap of that period and the transformation of this passive movement into active resistance, that is, organized resistance within the army.

While desertion rested essentially on a social base of student conscripts, resistance represented a qualitative leap ahead as to its foundation, in that it rested on a different base within the army.

...to resistance

It is necessary to understand that despite the conscription, 80 percent of the American Forces are composed of men who enlisted before they were called up (3,200,000 out of 3,800,000 men), that is, unemployed, poor workers, blacks (20 percent) who thought they would find things better in the army. Coming into contact with the reality of the discipline, the brutality of the officers, the vile ragging, they rapidly become disillusioned. Thus, while the basis of the revolt of the soldiers is less political in an immediate sense than that of the students, it is nonetheless profound. For these soldiers, individual desertion does not offer the solution which the student, freer socially, can envisage. Thus it is that an ordinary soldier is led to struggle directly against the military organization, against the hierarchy, the racism, and in this struggle

set up the organizational forms that are indispensable to carry it on.

The difference in character between desertion and resistance in the army explains why the antidraft organizations of the students and pacifist intellectuals paid no attention for a long period to the necessity and possibility of resistance within the army.

In 1966, a soldier, Bill Callison, founded a resistance newspaper The Bond which, in six months, expanded from ten to 4,000 subscriptions. Bill Callison, an isolated individual, quickly succumbed and The Bond was taken in hand by Audy Stapt [Andy Stapp], who had organized cells on his base, and won in the trial that was brought against him; at the same time he founded the American Servicemen's Union (A.S.U.) January 18, 1968. The success of this union organization was quite considerable. The development of the resistance, shown by the mutinies in Danang in 1968, and the Long Binh jail in which the soldiers took over control, by sporadic refusals to march, by the demonstrations on the bases in the U.S.A. itself, led the antiwar organizations as a whole by the end of 1968 to recognize the validity of resistance.

From Europe...

Beginning in 1968, the movement took on considerable scope in Europe. First of all the Seventh Army based in Germany had a more marked composition of workers and small farmers than elsewhere. In Germany, the army felt cut off from Vietnam and the U.S.A. despite the sporadic efforts of the German student movement. In this situation any infiltration into the army required preliminary work leading from the barracks towards the outside -- this explains the importance of desertion in 1967. Beginning with the creation of outside bases, agitational work within the army could then be organized, some of the deserters feeling ready to return at any time to the army as a R.I.T.A. (Resister Inside The Army).

Beginning in 1968, union demands met with considerable response among the GIs stationed in Germany. Groups of militants formed on the bases along with the cells of the A.S.U. A sheet was published, R.I.T.A. Act, on offset with a run of 30,000 copies, but often republished on the army machines themselves. GIs wrote for it, signing their names to encourage other soldiers, and to overcome fear of the officers. Considerable groups of soldiers formed around the Act, broader than the A.S.U. (recruitment strictly excluding officers higher than the rank of sergeant), but generally under the leadership of members of the union and strongly resembling the structures of soldiers Committees of Action. They served as a base for the agitational campaigns against the hierarchy, discrimination, for freedom of the press, freedom of speech, etc. These groups likewise facilitated expanding the union, a permanent structure of militants. The movement rapidly took on scope, in October 1968 a meeting of soldiers was organized by the GIs in Frankfort, other rank-and-file newspapers were established, like the one at the base in Baumholder.

Thus, in two years, the movement for desertion was transformed into an organization of resistance. It is likewise indispensable to understand the qualitative difference between these two concepts, resistance implying the establishment of structured organizational forms, rooted and politically consistent, and by the same token of a potentially high level of political consciousness and a proletarian social base (Blacks, Puerto Ricans, white workers).

It should not be forgotten however that these two forms of action cannot be counterposed but are complementary.

It is indispensable to understand that the resistance organization presupposes the existence of solid bases, outside the army, but maintaining close relations with it; this base was created by the organization of desertion.

...to America itself

To understand the foundation of revolutionary work within the army, it is indispensable to grasp the nature of the contradictions running through the army.

For Marxists, it is obvious that the army is not something neutral, but on the contrary it is an instrument of class domination; within it are contained the contradictions of class society. Both the military discipline and the hierarchical organization are nothing but the concentrated expression of the bourgeois rule in society.

Reflecting class relations, the army thereby becomes the concentrated reflection of the decomposition of these relations, and in the very first place the American army expresses the inadequacy of the American bourgeois institutions (the product of the bourgeois revolution and the War of Secession, these are the most democratic bourgeois institutions anywhere) in playing the ultrareactionary historic role of the American bourgeoisie today.

The whole hierarchical organization of the American army, an ultraliberal organization, derives from the fact that this army was forged in the course of the War of Secession. What made the U.S. army homogeneous was the ideal that animated it, the ideal of a prosperous ruling bourgeoisie, going into war essentially against forces condemned by history. The army had this ideal because it was that of a bourgeoisie on the offensive.

What is producing the decomposition of the U.S. army at the present time is the fact that the American bourgeoisie is now on the defensive, against the rising social forces destined to succeed it, that it is condemned, that because of this fact the ideal that once unified this army no longer exists.

Because of this, the stupidity of the military structure is directly felt by the workers, the blacks, the small farmers enrolled in it. The existence of a union, absolutely intolerable to the army under these conditions, is the gangrene in the fundamental instrument of the rule of the bourgeoisie.

Any struggle along these lines thus involves adequate and intolerable organizational forms which in plain language are called transitional slogans. And this is what leaps out when you read the program of the A.S.U.:

1. An end to saluting and sir-ing of officers.
2. Election of officers by vote of the men.
3. Racial equality.
4. Rank-and-filers control of court-martial.
5. Federal minimum wages. (\$1.50 an hour)
6. The right of free political association.
7. The right of collective bargaining.
8. The right to disobey illegal orders -- like orders to go and fight in an illegal war in Vietnam.

And this contradiction in the American army makes the exercise of basic rights bring the system into question. What is decisive in the transitional logic of this program is that it is not the preliminary understanding of the injustice of the war in Vietnam that leads to resistance, but it is the immediate resistance to discipline and to the military hierarchy that leads to the struggle against the imperialist war.

The internal front

The results of resistance in the army today are remarkable, and there is a dialectical link between the development of Black Power, the rise of the world revolution placing the U.S.A. more and more on the defensive, the strengthening of the American student movement, and the development of resistance.

The three resisters of Ft. Hood, in 1965, became transformed into 43 militants preventing their regiment from repressing the student riots in Chicago in August 1968. In the same period, the military prisons of Danang and Long Binh rose up. The repression, at first reduced to continual harassment, sharpened. On October 11, 1968, at the Presidio, a guard killed a soldier in prison. Two days later the GIs went on a sit-down strike. Twenty-seven soldiers were court-martialed for having sung pacifist songs. The first three, Private Ridel [Reidel], Private Oszczepinsky [Oszczepinski?], Private Sood were given 14, 16, and 15 years respectively at hard labor! But the reaction was such in the barracks, where the R.I.T.A. spread the news, that the trial had to be stopped. One of the defendants, who spilled his guts in the trial, nevertheless got four years!

When a deserter who was in Paris, Comrade Terry Klug, returned to the U.S.A. to rejoin the army January 17, the military "justice" threw him in prison. His "trial" took place three months later. While he was not legally guilty of desertion, he was given three years in prison.

But the reaction has been such that today "justice" has been compelled to proceed more timidly. At Fort Jauxon [Jackson] where

some black soldiers succeeded in organizing their entire company (120 men -- Company B, 4th Battalion, 14th Regiment -- the nine comrades who were arrested following a meeting March 22, 1969 had all the charges withdrawn during the trial. A new tactic is being utilized in an increasing way -- the discharge of soldiers. However, they demand to be taken back in, which poses big problems for the hierarchy, and they file suit for violation of their constitutional rights!

Today in Germany, beginning with agitation over control of leaves for the evening, a movement has been broadening in a certain number of barracks in Mannheim. The soldiers are publishing antiwar, antiarmy, antimilitarist posters and succeeded in publishing in the base's newspaper a call for a public demonstration, reading as follows: "Before losing your existence as an individual; if the army is getting you down, if you have had friends killed or wounded in Vietnam, if you are against the army in principle, come and demonstrate your presence. This is a peaceful demo, we want to show we are there." The success of this was remarkable in view of the spontaneous nature of the initiative -- several dozen GIs demonstrated in front of their barracks.

It is estimated that today the A.S.U. has several thousand members, including several hundred in Europe. It is likewise thought that there are 1,500 to 2,000 members of the R.I.T.A. in Europe within the army.

Through this struggle a genuine vanguard is being built in which the other poles are the Black Power and the student movements. This vanguard is rooting itself deeply among the proletarian youth in the U.S.A. and giving it the means for struggle at a high political level. We must, through our own work, draw the necessary lessons. We must support it.

-- Down with the bourgeois army! Long live the revolutionary work that is disintegrating it!

-- Long live the struggle of the American soldiers, workers, peasants, intellectuals!

-- Immediate freedom for all the imprisoned!

Translation of a biography and excerpts from a letter printed in Rouge, July 2, 1969

[The letter appeared in The Bond, May 20, 1969]

LETTER FROM FORT DIX

Terry Klug quit his unit in 1966 when it was about to leave for Vietnam and when he himself was named an officer. In France, he educated himself through contact with militants and other deserters. In 1968, he became one of the leaders of R.I.T.A., organizing contacts

with the GIs in Germany, participating in setting up cells of the A.S.U. on the European bases.

At the end of 1968, he returned to the U.S.A. to rejoin the army. "As a militant, my place," he said, "is at the side of my comrades, in the barracks. I must continue my work, in prison if necessary." He had hardly arrived, when he was arrested and thrown into prison. Because he undertook to explain things to some of the other prisoners, he was isolated in an iron cage of 2.4 by 1.8 meters in Fort Dix, the same as 14 other prisoners. He was held there for three months, up to his court-martial when he was sentenced to three years. Today, he has been taken back to his cage in Fort Dix.

* * *

"As I am presently back in solitary confinement, I've had much time to think and thus bring myself together...

"First of all, thank you! -- each and every one of you who was able to stand with me during those trying hours of my court-martial. I thank those of you who were there in heart and deed, as well. I thank the Union for its total support!...

"I was afraid up there. I won't try and deny it. I was scared shitless! Especially when they were actually going through the preparations for sentencing me...When they read off those three years I swear I could feel the pressure of the blood rushing from my head...But even though I was afraid, there was something else I felt that was much more overwhelming than fear -- pride! As I stood there facing the enemy during the moment they sentenced me, I knew that that was the proudest moment of my life...I wanted to shout at them and scream, 'We're going to win, baby!' just so they'd know where they were at.

"Since my court-martial, I've really calmed down a lot. My outlook is optimistic -- extremely so! My force has been compounded. The machine's attempts to break me down in these two weeks since my 'trial' have been fruitless, for it is impossible to break an individual who is certain within himself that he is right. [...] Again I would like to thank all of you for your support.

"Our fight is one common goal and I remain right in the middle swinging with both fists.

"I would especially like to mention my love and revolutionary solidarity to comrades Dick Perrin, Phil Wagner, Jonathan, Andy, Marryann, Bill Smith, John Lewis, Max, and June, and all of those who worked with me during my AWOL in Paris. They especially should know that my faith grows only stronger!

"Until final victory.

"Pvt. E-1, Terry [G.] Klug, RA 16884493"

Free TERRY KLUG, SOOD, RIDEL, OSCZEPINSKY and all the imprisoned militant soldiers!

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New York, N.Y.
July 15, 1969

Editorial Board of Rouge
Boîte Postale 201
Paris 19
France

Dear Comrades,

An article in the July 2 issue of Rouge entitled "l'armée U.S. produit ses fossoyeurs" ["The U.S. army produces its own grave diggers"] has been called to my attention. Since the article includes a number of errors of a factual nature, I should like to offer some corrections for the benefit of your readers.

The article begins with the assertion: "L'opposition à la guerre commence dès 1965 quand les premières unités des G.I.'s vont renforcer le gros des forces spéciales stationnées au Vietnam." ["The opposition to the war began in 1965, when the first units of GIs went to reinforce the main body of the special forces stationed in Vietnam."]

Actually, opposition to the war was apparent on a wide scale before 1965 and this issue played a central role in the presidential elections of 1964 when Johnson ran against Goldwater and appealed for votes on the promise that he would not send "American boys to an Asian land war." Most of those opposed to the war, including virtually all sections of the radical movement -- except for the Trotskyists -- supported Johnson as the "lesser evil" to Goldwater, who advocated "winning the war in Vietnam."

The article in Rouge continues: "A cette époque elle n'est le fait que de milieux universitaires isolés au milieu de l'apathie générale des couches moyennes et pauvres les plus touchées par la conscription. Il n'existe pas alors trente six solutions d'exprimer son refus: l'héroïsme individuel ne conduit au sein de l'armée qu'à la prison et à l'isolement, c'est pourquoi la désertion est le canal général dans lequel s'exprime le refus, encore vague, du système." [At this time it was only the work of the student circles, isolated in the midst of the general apathy of the middle layers and the poor, who were the most affected by conscription. There were not, then, a great number of ways for them to express their resistance: individual heroism in the midst of the army only leads to prison and isolation; that was why desertion was the general channel by which resistance, still vague, to the system, was expressed."]

The fact is that after Johnson escalated the war in 1965, the very broad opposition took a new form of expression -- mass demonstrations of civilians, the teach-in movement among students and professors, and such actions as the Berkeley Vietnam Day and the first International Days of Protest Against the War in

Vietnam (October 1965), which was called by the American antiwar movement and assisted by an important response from antiwar forces around the world.

Isaac Deutscher, who was invited to come to America by the antiwar movement, was immensely impressed and elated by the mood and the militancy which he could observe at first hand across the country.

At that time only a very few of us within the antiwar movement advocated taking the antiwar activity to the GIs. Those of us who took this position did so on two grounds:

1. The general Marxist understanding that the armed forces, as the article in Rouge explains, reflect the surrounding society, that the U.S. armed forces today constitute a cross section of the population, but with a higher percentage of workers and blacks than the general population. In accordance with this general understanding, we were sure that as the mass of the civilian population turned with increasing energy against the war, so would the soldiers.

2. The experience that some of us had gone through immediately after World War II when American GIs staged giant demonstrations, demanding that they be brought home and not left overseas, particularly to fight any new war in Asia -- but also not to be used against the resistance in Europe. While the situation in 1965 was different in many ways from the situation twenty years earlier, we were sure that if massive civilian demonstrations could be mobilized there would be a response among the GIs and that the precedent would be recalled.

So during 1965, we -- that is the Socialist Workers Party, the Young Socialist Alliance, and a few other currents -- started a propaganda campaign along these lines. That is why the particular form of the slogan for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam was chosen: "Bring the Troops Home Now!" This wording was selected precisely because it would be readily understood by GIs and would make it easier for them to identify with the antiwar movement.

There were some within the antiwar movement at that time who thought it was more important to choose slogans expressing moral outrage rather than slogans aimed at raising the political consciousness of the mass of American workers and GIs. These elements counterposed slogans labeling the average GIs as mercenaries, butchers, and aggressors, condemning them together with the ruling class for the war in Vietnam.

But those of us who were serious about mobilizing our own working class and the mass of American GIs in effective political action, rejected these ultraleft formulations and insisted on the slogan: "Bring the Troops Home Now!"

It might be pointed out, in passing, that this slogan was likewise counterposed to the proposals of the liberal and class-collaborationist opponents of the war, including the Communist Party, who insisted on calling for "negotiations."

At that time, too, the pacifist line was very strong within the American antiwar movement. The pacifists held that the only correct way to proceed was to organize individual resistance among the youth against the draft -- that the youth should refuse to go when drafted and accept the perspective of spending several years in prison.

This pacifist policy was held by many in the antiwar movement at the time. We, however, hammered away on the fact that while only a handful of young men were prepared in actuality to refuse to be drafted and to accept going to jail, between 20,000 and 30,000 men were being drafted each month and they preferred to enter the army rather than prison, even though many of them opposed the war. In addition, other tens of thousands were joining the army, under pressure of the draft, in order to be able to choose some particular type of training, a choice that was excluded if they wanted to be drafted. Many young men enlisted so as to be able to choose a specialty that would keep them out of the infantry.

Besides this, there were many young men who joined for economic reasons, as indicated by Rouge, but who later became convinced from their experience that the war in Vietnam was wrong.

The problem was how to reach these hundreds of thousands of young men, overwhelmingly working class in composition and heavily black. Simply to have the most dedicated antiwar organizers go to jail as draft resisters would not accomplish this.

As early as 1965 we began to distribute antiwar literature directly to GIs. This was done by leafleting at bus terminals and other places where GIs were to be found in large numbers, and by urging those in the antiwar movement to send this material to any friends or relatives they had in the military services. This was not an insignificant factor, since hundreds of thousands of civilians participated in mass demonstrations against the war in the course of 1965.

The first overt resistance against the war within the military forces took the form, not of desertion, but of refusing to obey orders to go to Vietnam. This never assumed massive character, but the few cases that did occur received considerable publicity and served to help convince the civilian antiwar movement that the men in the armed forces were not entirely brainwashed and were not impossible to approach.

In 1965 and 1966 there were several such cases. The most celebrated was the 1966 case of the Fort Hood Three, three GIs who were trained at Fort Hood, Texas, and who decided to refuse

to obey orders to go to Vietnam.

While on their last leave before reporting for shipment to Vietnam, they contacted the Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee in New York. Through this channel they received support throughout the civilian antiwar movement for their case.

Actually, these three young men were themselves products of the civilian antiwar movement in the United States and had been part of that movement before they were drafted. That was why they understood what could be accomplished if the civilian antiwar movement would take up their case. They were, of course, correct. The civilian antiwar movement distributed literature on a huge scale to GIs, telling them about the case.

As a matter of fact, the very first demonstration at an army base in opposition to the war in Vietnam occurred around this case when civilian supporters of the Fort Hood Three went to Fort Dix, New Jersey, on July 9, 1966 to demand the immediate release of the three, then under arrest at Fort Dix.

Another form of antiwar activity by GIs, which began in 1965 and which finally assumed mass character in 1969, was participation in civilian antiwar demonstrations.

The first widely publicized case of this kind was that of Lt. Henry Howe, who carried a sign denouncing President Johnson in an antiwar demonstration in El Paso, Texas, November 6, 1965. Howe was court-martialed and sentenced to a year in jail for "conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman." His family in Denver contacted the civilian antiwar movement there and a defense committee was built to publicize the case. The work of this committee was so effective that the army officials had to back down and release Lt. Howe within three months.

As a result of these and similar cases, more and more people in the civilian antiwar movement came to realize that the soldiers were approachable on the war question and that fresh possibilities were opening to lift the antiwar movement to a completely new level.

In opposition to this, the pacifists shifted from stressing draft resistance to appealing in an intensive way for desertion as the only moral way for GIs to register opposition to the war.

Those of us who had initiated the educational process about including the GIs in the antiwar movement rejected the pacifist arguments and policy for the very practical reason that a soldier who deserted had to stay out of the country. If he returned, and was caught, he automatically went to prison for a long period, removing him from contact with soldiers in the army. Whether in exile, or underground, or in prison, he could not do effective work among GIs. He was isolated from the field of action and from the generation of youth it was necessary to reach.

I read with interest the comments in Rouge concerning the alleged necessity to create a base outside the army composed of deserters, who then made it possible to organize agitational work within the army. "A partir de la création de bases extérieures, the article claims, "le travail d'agitation au sein de l'armée peut alors être organisé, des déserteurs se considérant prêts à rentrer à tout moment dans l'armée comme R.I.T.A. (Resister Inside the Army)." ["On the foundation of external bases, the work of agitation in the midst of the army, can therefore be organized by deserters considering themselves ready to return at any moment to the army, like R.I.T.A."]

If any of these deserters, or men Absent Without Official Leave for an extended period, ever returned to the army to do such work no one in the vanguard of the American antiwar movement has heard of them with the exception of Terry Klug. He tried to return to the army in 1969, long after antiwar activity within the army was expanding on a wide scale. And when Klug did return, he was immediately arrested, sentenced to three years, and will have to confine any organizing he is able to do to that extremely difficult and isolated situation.

It is impossible for GIs to desert and then return to carry on effective antiwar activities within the U.S. army. The reason is patent. They are immediately put in prison when they apply for readmittance.

This is not to say, of course, that some of the deserters have not made statements which have received publicity and which have had an impact. Nor is it to say that they have not assisted in producing and distributing literature such as RITA Act to the best of their ability under the difficult circumstances they face. But the fact is that a deserter living in Paris or Sweden or Canada or some such place will contact fewer GIs in a year than an organizer within the army will contact in a day.

I also read with interest Rouge's comments on the American Servicemen's Union and its newspaper The Bond. (The editor's name, incidentally, is not Audy Stapt, as you have it, but Andy Stapp.) The Bond was founded, as you note, in 1966, by Bill Callison and was taken over by Andy Stapp in 1968.

That's a gap of two years, during which many other papers edited and distributed by GIs came into existence.

It was during this two-year period that the antiwar movement, which had developed a massive character among civilians in the United States, began to spill over into the armed forces. Many young militants, trained in the civilian antiwar movement, were conscripted along with other youth coming of draft age. Within the army, these young militants found that the antiwar sentiment was as high among the GIs as it was among the students where they had just been organizing. This is the correct explanation as to the main source of cadres in the present resistance movement.

As dozens of fresh cases received widespread publicity, different currents and tendencies tried a variety of approaches in hope of gaining support among the GIs.

Stapp's concept of organizing a union was only one of these experiments and it still amounts to but a very small part of the overall movement. The American Servicemen's Union is in reality the projection of a political group in the U.S.A. called "Youth Against War and Fascism" and its adult counterpart, the Workers World Party, to which Stapp belongs. This tendency, headed by Sam Marcy, stems from a split-off in 1959 from the Socialist Workers Party. Marcy left the American Trotskyist movement because the SWP refused to support Soviet intervention against the struggles for socialist democracy in Eastern Europe. The Marcyites offered critical support to the invasion of Hungary in particular, and, in fact maintain that position to this day. This tendency took the same position toward the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, again offering critical support to the Kremlin. The Marcyites, incidentally, are quite pro-Maoist.

The ASU was initiated by this tendency and is tightly controlled by it. The main, or more correctly, only activity of the ASU is to put out The Bond, a four-page tabloid, once a month and to send Stapp around on speaking tours. The Bond comments on activities among GIs, but these activities have not actually been organized by the ASU, although one might get a very different impression if one's information on developments in the antiwar work were confined to this single source.

As far as the demands of the ASU are concerned, there is nothing objectionable in them per se, as I am sure readers of Rouge will have concluded upon studying the list referred to in the article. But there is no significant organizing being done on the basis of such demands at present, nor can there be at this stage.

It is the war which is the great radicalizing force in the army today, not economic grievances or the question of saluting. And it is on the war question that the broadest numbers can be involved and the most effective defense and support can be mounted for GIs from the civilian base outside the army.

The article in Rouge contains the following statement on the famous Presidio "Mutiny" case: "Les trois premiers, 2e classe Reidel [not Ridel], 2e classe Oszczepinski, 2e classe Sood se retrouvent avec 14, 16, et 15 ans de travaux forcés! Mais la réaction est telle dans les casernes, où les R.I.T.A. organisent l'information, que les procès devront être arrêtés. Un des inculpés qui se débalonne en procès écope cependant de quatre ans!" ["The first three, 2nd class Reidel, 2nd class Oszczepinski, 2nd class Sood, found themselves with 14, 16, and 15 years of forced labor! But the reaction was such in the barracks, where R.I.T.A.'s got the news out, that the trials had to be stopped. One of the accused who confessed during the trial still got four years."]

I wish it were true that the trial had to be stopped. But that was not what happened. The trial was carried through to the end and all the defendants who were tried were convicted. The severity of the sentences was later greatly reduced because of the great public outcry. The extent of the outcry can largely be credited to the civilian antiwar movement in the San Francisco area, including a mass march on the Presidio last April involving 35,000 persons, who demanded freedom for the Presidio 27 and immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam.

The march was led by hundreds of active-duty GIs and was organized by the GI-Civilian Alliance for Peace.

No doubt resisters inside the army likewise spread the word inside the barracks, but the particular organization R.I.T.A., which Rouge credits for this activity, is based in Paris and has no organization whatsoever in the San Francisco area, or anywhere else that I know of outside of Europe.

The article also contains a statement that might lead to some illusions about the nature of the U.S. army: "Toute l'organisation hiérarchique de l'armée américaine, organisation ultra libérale, provient du fait que cette armée s'est forgée au cours de la guerre de sécession." ["The whole hierarchical organization of the American army, an ultra-liberal organization, comes from the fact that this army was forged in the course of the war of succession."]

Actually the present hierarchical organization of the U.S. army is not at all liberal, ultra or otherwise. The Union armies of 1861-65, not to speak of the revolutionary army of 1776-83, were long ago disbanded.

Until recently, it was traditional in the United States not to maintain a large standing army. American imperialism kept only a small professional body which served as a training nucleus for the expansions required on occasion. Thus, while the Union armies during the Civil War were largely raised by separate states, and different units made their own rules, even in some cases electing officers, the army that waged the Spanish-American War of imperialist conquest was something quite different. And since that time, when the U.S. entered the phase of overseas imperialist expansion, the army has tended to resemble more and more the Prussian model, one un-American institution that has been much studied and admired by the American military caste.

However, the contradiction mentioned by Rouge between the American liberal "ideal" and the reactionary aims of U.S. imperialism today holds true to a considerable extent in civilian bourgeois circles and the layers under their influence. Important civil liberties traditions do exist among the American people. There is a Bill of Rights in the constitution that guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to assemble. This applies to all citizens. No law suspends these rights for soldiers although in practice the military

hierarchy acts as if they had been suspended.

In view of this tradition, the average American finds the argument that GIs should be free to organize politically and to express their views about the war to be an eminently reasonable position. The military brass, of course, are in complete opposition to such an outlook. It is this contradiction which the antiwar movement is now using to great effect.

This line of approach places the antiwar GIs in position to receive maximum support from very broad masses of people. At the same time it places the officers and government authorities in the position of violating the civil liberties traditions which the masses take very seriously.

The chief contradiction in the situation is that the Pentagon and White House are carrying on a war which is unpopular and which the majority of the people in general and the majority of GIs in particular do not support. The development of this contradiction increasingly exposes the true nature of American imperialism and the capitalist government to masses of young people. And the serious revolutionists within the antiwar movement do not intend to allow the authorities to escape the consequences.

The political representatives and agents of the ruling class would much prefer to battle over such issues as saluting. On that level they can argue and convince many that all that is involved is "malcontents" and "spoiled children" in the ranks. But a burning issue like the war is a very different matter.

When a GI takes a stand against the war, the whole world knows immediately that he is right and the authorities are wrong, and the majority of the American people feel sympathy with the GI because he has taken a political stand which they share.

The article published by Rouge also implies a connection between the Fort Jackson case (not Fort Jauxon as Rouge has it) and the case of Terry Klug.

Actually, the two cases are not connected. It is unfortunate, but the fact is that the Klug case has received very little publicity, most people having never heard of it, while the Fort Jackson case was a nationwide sensation.

The army officials had to back down in the Fort Jackson case. They felt compelled to drop the charges against the eight GIs who were accused of engaging in an illegal demonstration, of showing disrespect, etc. This was a consequence of the fact that it was possible to bring out very clearly that what was involved was the right of GIs to speak out against the war in Vietnam.

This right of the GIs is being taken very seriously by millions of Americans. They are, in fact, not being fooled by Nixon's promises about withdrawing troops from Vietnam.

It is quite possible that the world will soon see the greatest mass demonstrations yet organized against the war. These have passed the preliminary stage of planning, have been announced, and the preparatory work is now going ahead, for antiwar actions that will be highlighted by a mass march in Washington, D.C., on November 15. These actions are certain to involve fresh layers of those sectors of the population that have the power to bring a halt to such imperialist adventures as the intervention in the internal affairs of the Vietnamese people.

We, of course, are counting on the readers of Rouge to participate in the international aspects of these demonstrations as they have, to such good effect, in the past.

Comradely,

Fred Halstead

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July 15, 1969

Dear Ernest,

I am enclosing a copy of a letter written by Fred Halstead to the editorial board of Rouge correcting some of the errors which appeared in an article in the July 2 issue dealing with the American antiwar movement. The letter is self-explanatory.

I am also enclosing a copy of a letter to Pierre concerning this contribution by Fred. I don't know if you will want to discuss this at the next United Secretariat meeting, but in case you think it is best to do so you will have all the information at your disposal.

I assume that someone on the staff of Rouge was taken in a bit by someone in Paris having connections with the Marcyites.

The result was an article that gave a quite inaccurate picture of the relative importance of the Marcyites in the antiwar movement in which they have functioned as an obstacle -- fortunately a small one -- in organizing mass mobilizations; that gave these sectarians credit for work done by other groups and tendencies; that made it appear that Rouge has close and fraternal relations with a tendency that is bitterly hostile to the SWP, the YSA, and the Fourth International; and that further reinforced the impression of Rouge's favorable attitude toward them by not even mentioning the work of the American Trotskyists in the antiwar movement which has been of key importance to the development of that movement.

Best regards,

Joe

Enc.
Airmail

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July 15, 1969

Dear Pierre,

I am enclosing a copy of a letter from Fred Halstead to the editorial board of Rouge. It is intended to rectify a number of errors of fact. I imagine that the editors of Rouge will welcome Comrade Halstead's contribution. Evidently they were misled by bad sources of information in Paris.

In case they should wish to identify Fred, he was the presidential candidate of the Socialist Workers Party in 1968. In addition, and this is more important probably for the immediate purposes of the article, he is a well-known leader of national stature in the antiwar movement.

It is not clear to me whether there will be time to translate and publish the contribution before Rouge goes on vacation. However, its appearance at the beginning of September when Rouge resumes publication should be timely, as that will fit in very well with an account of the first demonstration scheduled in August and the succeeding demonstrations that will follow.

With warmest regards,

Joe

Enc.
cc: Ernest
Airmail

P.S. The Fort Jackson case is mentioned in the article in such a way as to imply credit to the Marcyites for the victory there. For the main facts on this, Dick Roberts' article in the June 9 IP (p.579) is a ready source. As you will see, the GI newspaper involved there was The Short Times not The Bond.