

Socialist tasks in the movement

[The following is an edited version of a report on the antiwar movement approved by a meeting of the national committee of the Socialist Workers Party in New York last week. The reporter on the question was Lew Jones.]

A few weeks from today, on Easter weekend, April 5-6, there will be mass demonstrations in the streets against the war in Vietnam. These demonstrations, like those preceding and those that will follow, will be the focal point of our activity against the war. Mass antiwar demonstrations, held in the midst of the imperialist war, have helped shake up the entire political fabric of U.S. society and strike blows to the heart of imperialism—its ability to oppress and subjugate the colonial world.

The perspective of this report is that of anticipating intensified antiwar sentiment throughout the country and of a renewal of mass actions against the war.

The proposals in this report are based on four essential features of the present situation: 1) the intensification of the war in South Vietnam; 2) the temporary lull in the movement against the war, due to the Paris talks and the bombing halt; 3) the temporary divisions within the organized antiwar movement; 4) the development of antiwar sentiment and protest activity by GIs.

What began in Vietnam, in the eyes of the ruling class, as a simple policing action turned into a full-fledged war, into quite a long war in fact. It is now four years that the U.S. has had large numbers of troops in Vietnam, a longer time for the United States than either World War I, World War II, longer than the Korean War, longer even than the Civil War.

Problem remains

The war continues to drag on. Yet the problem for the U.S. ruling class remains the same: how to win a political victory. The U.S. has had no victory. Nor has it been defeated, although failure to gain victory in four years can be considered a kind of defeat for the most powerful imperialist nation in history.

In the last year the U.S. has readjusted its methods of conducting the war, its methods, not its aims. American imperialist aims in the war have not at all been readjusted, they remain exactly the same: The aim of trying to control Asia or part of Asia; to try to win a victory over the NLF and thereby a symbolic victory over the colonial revolution; if possible, to try and overturn the revolution in North Vietnam.

What is basically new in U.S. policy is not a cutback in the war effort, but an addition. The U.S. is now combining a war of diplomacy along with the military war, trying to win at the negotiating table what it has so far been unable to achieve on the battlefield.

By halting most of the bombing of North Vietnam, the U.S. mollified public opinion at home and around the world, not an unimportant consideration.

Washington also found that it made good military sense to halt the bombing of the north and concentrate its military efforts in the south. And that is exactly what it has done. The tonnage of bombs dropped is approximately the same as it was before the bombing pause in the north. Now all of the bombing is concentrated in South Vietnam. In addition, the war has spilled over more into Cambodia and Laos.

Intercontinental Press

In 1968 *Intercontinental Press* published 1,176 pages of reports from correspondents in 30 countries. This included 125 pages of dispatches direct from France during the May-June revolt; 54 pages of eye-witness accounts from Mexico during the student strike; and 50 pages of reports and translations from the radical press in Czechoslovakia. *Intercontinental Press* is the only source in the U.S. for many documents of interest to the radical movement, including official statements of the Fourth International. Subscriptions are \$7.50 for 26 issues.

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The bombing halt allowed the U.S. to start moving troops from the demilitarized zone into the southern regions where they have opened up a general offensive. According to the journalist, I. F. Stone, the U.S. increased the number of its combat missions exactly at the time of the bombing halt last November. Since then, 2,000 GIs have been killed, and just since the first of the year, according to today's *New York Times*, 1,200 have died. All evidence points to an actual intensification of the war in Vietnam, not its diminishing.

Main result

Indeed—and not accidentally—the principal result of the Paris talks so far has been to deescalate the protests against the war. Charles Mohr, writing in the *New York Times* on Jan. 3, said speaking of the government officialdom: "One important factor on which the present optimism is based is the hope that a decision to continue to prosecute the war can be reconciled with the domestic American desire to 'ease the pain.'" In other words, by their war of diplomacy they have hoped to disarm their critics and deactivate the protest movement, while actually continuing the war.

Large sections of the antiwar movement had—and some still have—illusions in the Paris talks. That simply reflects what the whole population is thinking. One might say there has been a temporary vote of confidence in Nixon and the peace talks. People are willing to give him a chance, willing to wait and see if the talks will bring an end to the war. But it is a highly temporary vote of confidence. The Paris talks are a kind of political "time bomb," one which can explode in an unintended manner.

The vote of confidence has masked a deeper, broader antiwar sentiment in the population than existed when the Paris talks began. Any great escalation of the war, rising casualty figures or the prolongation of the talks could very swiftly bring that antiwar sentiment to the surface. We can therefore expect a change, a shift in the mass attitude towards the war. We will again see a wave of righteous indignation—the kind that we have seen throughout the history of the antiwar movement when people discover that they have been lied to once more.

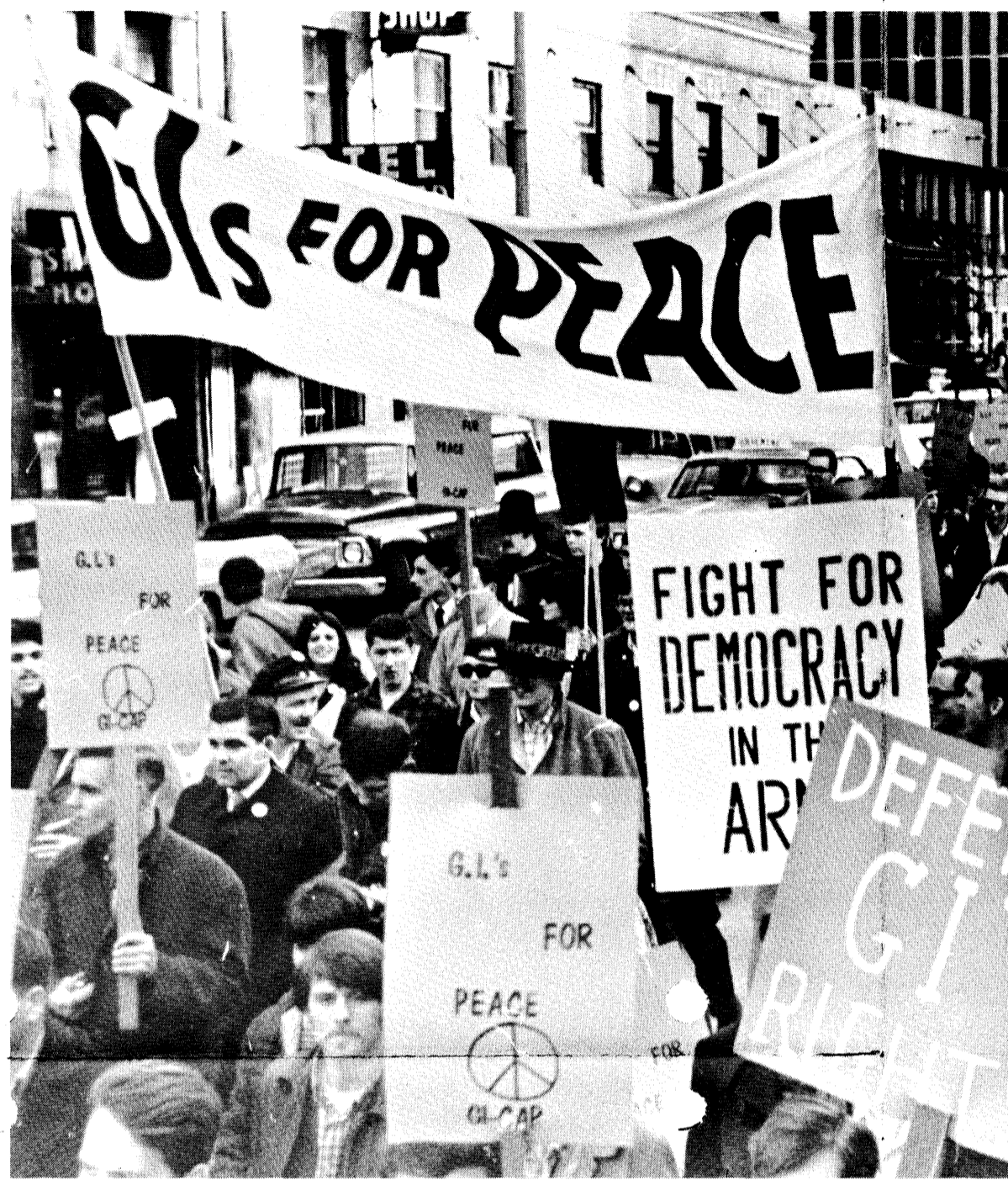
The April 5-6 demonstrations can go a long way in preparing for that coming tidal wave of protest. What is done now will be very important in helping to organize that wave of righteous indignation when it does actually occur. Even now there are signs of disillusionment in the Paris talks, among the GIs and among sections of the antiwar movement that had temporarily withdrawn from the struggle.

GI response

The GIs have had a decidedly different reaction to the negotiations than most other people. Once the U.S. conceded that it was not going to win completely by military means, the average GI naturally thought: why the devil should I waste my life unnecessarily in a war like this?—a war that he most likely did not support or did not understand. As a result, since the Paris negotiations there has been a significant increase in GI protest activities throughout the country.

We have long pointed to the important potential of GI antiwar sentiment. For a long time we alone in the antiwar movement urged that an orientation towards the GIs be part of antiwar activity. Now, with the beginnings of GI antiwar protests, and if the April 5-6 demonstrations can measure up to expectations, that orientation can become a permanent feature of the antiwar protest movement.

Our approach to GIs is linked directly to our basic approach in the antiwar movement, the building of massive actions against the war reflecting the interests of the majority of people. Mass actions, rather than the actions of isolated individuals, are the motor force of social change. Accordingly, our line of approach towards GIs has been threefold.



Feb. 16 GI-civilian demonstration in Seattle where more than 200 GIs led

First, we do not advocate that GIs take moralistic, isolated individual action against the armed forces—desertion, disobeying orders, or whatever. Such acts simply expose GIs to victimization and can effectively wipe out the leadership and cadre. Moreover, they are not a program acceptable to the great bulk of GIs. Whether cloaked in terms of pacifist moralism or ultra-left ardor, isolated individual acts are simply ineffective.

Second is our concept of the citizen-soldier, that is, the GI is a citizen who is temporarily in uniform. While serving in the armed forces he maintains his full rights as a citizen. GIs have the right to their own beliefs, their own opinions, to free speech and assembly. These rights exist and can be fought for successfully, despite the attempts of the brass to prevent their exercise. It is the duty and obligation of the antiwar movement to do everything it can to support those GIs whom the brass attempts to victimize for exercising their constitutional rights.

GI rights

Third, the war in Vietnam is the question around which GIs are exercising their rights. The war is the most important question to them, the question they can agree upon, the question on which the antiwar movement must approach them. Moreover, the war is the question around which GIs can get the most civilian protection, should the brass attempt to crack down and take away their rights. On the basis of that threefold approach we can look forward to the building of effective antiwar actions by GIs. While embracing the new development of GI antiwar protests, we should have an absolutely clear understanding of their character and pace of development. We do not anticipate, for example, that in the near future there will be massive GI uprisings like those that took place after World War II. GI antiwar sentiment is in a gestative stage right now. At this point the actions of antiwar GIs are the actions of the

most politically conscious—though they reflect very graphically the deep antiwar sentiment that generally exists.

Our view is that the political consciousness and activity of GIs is totally connected to that of the whole population. We do not think that GIs are so isolated from the rest of society that there will be a mass radicalization and massive protest in the armed forces prior to a big change inside the whole population. There will be no such thing until the mood within the population itself is such that massive GI protests can be defended and identified with.

Nor do we think that antiwar GIs are about to displace the civilian antiwar movement as the central component in the struggle against the war. No, they are a major reinforcement, and vitally important new component of the general movement against the war, but not a substitute for it. As vital as they are, the GIs cannot be the central axis of the antiwar movement.

In our view there is a very intimate interplay between the civilian population and the GIs. There may be political changes in one sector that momentarily outstrip the other, but ultimately there will be an interrelated, a parallel process in the development of antiwar sentiment and of general anticapitalist radicalization in all sectors.

Interpenetration

History shows that there is a most intimate interpenetration between the ranks of the military and the civilian population in a period of social unrest and political turmoil. This is because of the present character of the army. The army is not narrowly based, composed of an elite officer corps with social misfits in the ranks. By virtue of the draft and wartime expansion the men in uniform represent a cross-section of the population, only with a different set of specific problems. The war is a most acute question to them because they know they can get hurt in that kind of business.

According to *Fortune* magazine, 20 percent of all male youth between 18 and 24 are presently in the armed forces. That is a very active age bracket. The per-

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centage of Afro-American, Mexican, Indian, and Puerto Rican youth is much higher and increases as you get closer to the front lines. By this June, 30 percent of the draftees will be college graduates. And if the *Fortune* article on youth is accurate, half of that 30 percent are going to be people with attitudes very similar to the antiwar movement, or who have had contact with the antiwar movement. So the men in the army are not a body of mercenaries, paid killers, or willing crusaders as some have tried to picture in the past.

So we see a fundamental identity of the political climate in a draftee army and the civilian population. We should not be confused by the change in form just because one segment of the population now wears a uniform and is put in a position of special jeopardy. That is the basis for our orientation in attempting to reach GIs. That is why we emphasize the importance of antiwar GIs, but not to the point of isolating them from general antiwar activity.

Our antiwar perspective is to build and remobilize the antiwar movement after the disorientation done by Johnson's withdrawal, the McCarthy campaign, the Paris negotiations, and the Nixon election. We want to bring the mood that exists in this country against the war in Vietnam into open expression in action—the first steps in which are the April 5-6 demonstrations. We want massive numbers of people, civilians and GIs, to march and demonstrate against the war in Vietnam, to bring the troops home.

Kickback

What we are looking towards we know is bound to happen, that is, the kickback from the period of waiting to see what will happen in Paris, waiting to see what Nixon will do — the explosive resentment and opposition to the war that the American people will express at some stage when they see that Nixon won't end the war, when they see through the Paris talks. That is our general approach. To accomplish that is realistic. That is why the April 5-6 demonstrations are so important.

Seen in this light, the visible rise of antiwar dissent within the armed forces has become important for two reasons: 1) the GI component of the antiwar movement is potentially very powerful in and of itself; 2) GI antiwar activities have become the important central new factor to inspire and remobilize large sections of the American people into the struggle against the war.

Throughout the pre-election period the organized antiwar movement suffered numerous defections. The national antiwar coalition and a number of local coalitions splintered or fell apart. A large section of the antiwar movement abandoned the fight against the war in favor of campaigning for what they saw as peace candidates, for the most part the McCarthy campaign. Illusions in the Paris talks reinforced the trend away from mass action.

The default of a section of the antiwar movement increased the political weight of the ultra-left. The ultra-leftist theory of "confrontation" street actions by a dedicated few was gradually able to exert considerable weight, especially in the apparatus of the National Mobilization Committee, resulting in its demise as a coalition.

Throughout this entire period, we sought to rebuild coalitions around antiwar actions. We sought, especially, to rebuild the student wing of the antiwar movement to ramrod the actions. The SMC, with our support, has sought to rebuild and re-inspire the antiwar movement. The antiwar protest of GIs has been a key ingredient in that process.

Called conference

The SMC initiated the Dec. 27-29 GI-Civilian Antiwar Action Conference which called for GI actions of April 6, supported by massive civilian participation. Naturally that formulation did not anticipate that the predominant participation would be from GIs. It was a means of re-inspiring and rebuilding the entire antiwar movement, by calling attention to the important new component, the antiwar GI.

What we are trying to do is to organize the largest possible demonstrations this

spring to display the breadth of antiwar sentiment that exists in the general population, and among GIs in particular. It is an important responsibility on our part to bring out the largest numbers of people against the war and in support of those GIs who participate. For that, a coalition effort of all groups in the antiwar movement is necessary.

Until a short time ago there was an apparent contradiction between the perspective of building mass, coalition-organized demonstrations and its actual accomplishment. There were difficulties in getting the actions off the ground, involving coalitions in the organizing efforts, and getting the student wing rolling again. The reasons were understandable, of course. They have already been described: misunderstanding of the war, divisions in the antiwar movement, the disenchantment of the moderate groups, the disproportionate weight of the ultra-leftists, etc.

One mistake we were careful to avoid: the idea that because there were difficulties in convincing other groups in the antiwar movement, we should just go it alone, avoid the internal wrangling in the antiwar movement, and organize the action ourselves, along with only a few allies. We don't want to substitute GI work by ourselves for the building of mass demonstrations — to the detriment of both. Building truly broad-based mass actions involves more than the necessary tasks of setting time, date, place, and getting the leaflets out. We did not want to lose the essence of what we were hoping to accomplish in the course of those routines.

Within the past week, there have been a number of significant developments, which definitively get the April 5-6 demonstrations off the ground, which make it the spring antiwar demonstration for the entire antiwar movement.

Seattle march

In Seattle 200 GIs marched and 300 attended a rally. The demonstration involved 4,500 participants altogether. At Ft. Jackson, S. C. a large group of antiwar GIs are circulating a petition to hold a meeting where they could discuss the war. Their example is gaining national publicity. What the movement needed all along was a couple of victories like those, examples that could be pointed to, to convince people—and inspire them with what is possible.

In the past few weeks there has been a rebirth in local and regional antiwar coalitions, and, in embryo, of the national coalition. Just last week the New York Parade Committee decided to organize the demonstration here in New York. In all

seven regional centers chosen for the demonstration, coalitions are now involved or becoming involved in the organizing of the actions. April 5-6 is now off the ground. The demonstrations are definitely going to take place.

It is difficult to foresee the size of the demonstrations. Undoubtedly they will not be as large as some of the previous ones. But their political importance, their role as a central building block in the antiwar movement, overrides their relative size.

Central task

The central task of the Socialist Workers Party in the next few weeks will be to help build those demonstrations as successfully as possible.

Of major importance in building for April 5-6 and beyond is the Student Mobilization Committee. The entire history of the antiwar movement has dictated the importance of its organized student wing. The youth have been the cutting edge throughout the history of the movement. They have set the militant tone and helped to push the rest of the coalition along in building the mass actions. Without the student wing, the antiwar movement would not have accomplished what it has.

In building for April 5-6 one of the most important things will be to build the SMC. There is every possibility that the SMC can become the central organizer, nationally and locally, of youth involved in antiwar actions, an organization based on withdrawal that mobilizes students in action against the war in Vietnam. Part of the campaign for April 5-6 should be a campaign to build the SMC. High school youth, we should note, will be of particular importance in doing this.

Looking beyond April 5-6, we want to rebuild the national antiwar coalition and the local coalitions. Part of our effort for April 5-6 will be precisely that. The vitality of an antiwar coalition can be restored. But it won't be quite the same as it was before. Some of the old parts will be missing and some new ones added.

The aspect of GI protest is something that must be added in these new coalitions — not as a substitute for what the antiwar movement has always done, but as an important addition. The massive demonstrations against the war in Vietnam will include the GI aspect from now on.

In conclusion: we look to the dispelling of the illusions in the Paris talks. We look forward to another upsurge of antiwar action.

Our work in building the April 5-6 mass demonstrations will prepare the way for that wave of protest and help to organize it effectively.

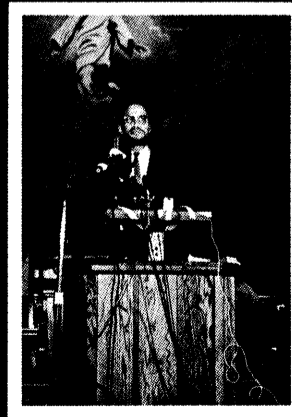
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Feb. 16 GI-civilian demonstration in Seattle where more than 200 GIs led 4,500 civilians in city's biggest antiwar action.