

# On the Slogan 'We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War'

"We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War" is one of the main slogans of the Rich Off Our Backs—July 4th Coalition. Party members and others are taking it out broadly to the American people in both their agitation and propaganda. As the danger of world war grows the importance of popularizing the stand and meaning of this slogan also continues to grow.

What does this slogan mean? First of all, what is the common understanding we want to develop when we bring this slogan out?

To justify their military preparations and to try to win popular support for another war, the U.S. imperialists have been stepping up their propaganda around the need for the U.S. to stand up to the Soviet Union. This was the way they have tried to sum up their Angola adventure for instance, saying that the U.S. made a big mistake by letting the USSR push her around.

And just recently in the draft platform of the Democratic Party, a big deal was made about how Russian actions "pose severe threats to world peace and stability." It condemned "the continued USSR military occupation of many Eastern European countries" as "a monument to their oppression of the peoples of those nations, an oppression we do not accept and are committed to oppose. . ." All this they use to justify stepping up their own military buildup and war preparations.

But the masses of American people, and especially the working class, have many experiences which point to exactly what is driving the U.S. to war. Millions of workers and others on one level or another realized that the big corporations were behind the U.S. war in Vietnam. And the everyday experience working in capitalists' factories and mines provides the basis for workers to see what drives the capitalists forward—the need to maximize their profits.

While these experiences remain separate in the understanding of many, much has been learned that can be built on, and much continues to be learned every day. The massive opposition and resistance of the American people to the U.S. war in Vietnam is a glorious chapter in the history of the struggle in this country. Especially as the war dragged on, as many veterans brought home their stories, the lies of the government about "defending democracy" and "stopping aggression" wore thin.

Millions came to oppose the U.S. war effort, and a growing number of these came to understand that by "defending the free world" the U.S. government meant the freedom of the giant corporations, the oil companies, the banks and others, to set up shop in Indochina and discourage further rebellions against their plunder. Many in this country became revolutionaries as they came to understand the class basis of this war—to see that it was rooted in the same expand-or-die law of capitalism that produces exploitation and oppression here at home.

## Stench of War

Today as economic crisis drags on, the stench of war thickens. Many people oppose particular acts of aggression—like that of both the U.S. and the USSR in Angola—and it is important to broaden and build on this resistance and understanding. On top of this people are faced with a situation where for many "the only job around" is in the army, and military recruiters hang around high schools and unemployment offices like vultures.

And the idea is floated that the only way out of this crisis is to go to war, that this is the only choice the masses have. The capitalists at times even push the idea that it may be a hell of a way to live, but it's the way it has to be. In this context it is crucial to unite with the hatred of the masses for this situation, to point out that war is no mystery—its source lies in the rule of the capitalist class—and to bring out the idea that there is a way forward, a path to fight and break through.

By doing this we can explain to people in a down-to-earth way, based on their own experiences, the class content of the war preparations and initial skirmishes of both superpowers. For the imperialists, for the Rockefellers, Duponts, and Mellons of the U.S., and the New Tsars of the Soviet Union, it is a question of armed conflict for profit—to decide who will be the biggest robber barons and exploiters of the world's people. It is a struggle of slaveowners over the division of the loot they get through robbery of whole peoples. Such a war cannot be in the interests of the people and must be opposed.

The slogan "We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War" sums this up by pointing to the source of their

current war preparations and the working class' answer to it. It draws a line of demarcation by saying our fight is not *with* these rich bastards but *against* them and their bloody wars for profits.

## Deeper Questions

In taking out this slogan and stand to the masses, including in work around July 4th, it has met with much agreement and has raised people's understanding. It has also generated controversy, and many other questions have been raised by people.

This means we need to go still deeper into these questions, and communists certainly have the obligation to understand more deeply and bring out still more sharply the revolutionary working class stand on the question of war. And this can only be done in the context of understanding, explaining and exposing the current imperialist war preparations and acts of aggression, and the kind of war they are presently preparing to fight.

Many of people's questions stem from the fact that the main kind of war that is shaping up today is a war between two imperialist superpowers, the U.S. and the USSR. This kind of war, world war, while growing out of the same basic cause—the imperialist drive for profit—would obviously be different from the U.S. war in Vietnam. Instead of a war of aggression waged against an oppressed nation, this war would be an armed collision between two sets of aggressors, both driven toward collision by the same law of capitalism—expand or die. Such a war would have different and still more destructive effects.

And these very real facts are used by both superpowers to try to line up people behind them. The U.S. imperialists in particular, are trying to wipe away the opposition to their war efforts that grew tremendously during the Vietnam war by saying that now, with the Soviets as the enemy, it's a whole different story.

During the Vietnam war, they used the argument of "North Vietnamese aggression" and "defending freedom there before it is lost here" to try to paint up their own aggression as a just cause. This lie became exposed to many, but now their opponent, the USSR, is a real aggressor and imperialist, just like the U.S. And this fact is not lost on people.

During the Vietnam war people questioned what interests we were defending far away in Asia and the idea of the Vietnamese attacking California was downright laughable. But now the opponent is a powerful, aggressive country, with imperialist armed forces cruising all over the world. In this situation people have very real concerns about their own safety and security, and the capitalists eagerly pick up on this sentiment and try to turn it into a basis of support for their own war preparations under the slogan of "defend the country."

Unless consistent exposure is done from a revolutionary working class point of view of what class interests are involved in such a war, and unless another way forward for the working class in the event of such a war is brought forward, people will be abandoned to the strong pull of the U.S. imperialists' arguments to side with them in their war efforts.

## "Defend the Country"?

What is the class content of the bourgeoisie's slogan "defend the country"? It can only mean one thing in a country like the U.S. where the imperialists rule society—defend their rule. And this comes out in a double sense—defend their empire abroad and their system of wage slavery at home.

There is no war, no military action abroad that the U.S. imperialists, or the Soviet imperialists, can fight for any other reason than to defend or extend their international robbery. Talk of defending freedom or opposing aggression is meaningless for them. For them

the class content of "freedom," as many began to see in Vietnam, is the freedom to exploit, the freedom to defend their old markets and grab new ones.

The U.S. imperialists very quickly point to the oppression of whole nations and peoples under Soviet social-imperialism and argue, as the Democrats' draft platform states, that this is "an oppression we do not accept and are committed to oppose. . ." But there is no way that U.S. imperialism can liberate these peoples. Even if Eastern Europe were "liberated" by U.S. action, it could only mean the enslavement of these people to U.S. capital instead of Soviet capital.

When they speak about defending the U.S., all they can mean is defending U.S. society the way it is—with them on top. They mean defending a social system which is based on the daily robbery of the working class, a system that results in the cancers of unemployment and seemingly inevitable wars. They want us to "defend the country" because they want to preserve their rule as slaveowners.

## Interests of the Working Class

Clearly the working class of the U.S. has no interests in defending these imperialist goals. For the working class, the starting point cannot be "defending the country," but defending and advancing the interests of the working class, here and worldwide. Still a lot of people will say they support the U.S. building up its military in opposition to the Russian military buildup, not because they support the capitalists' plunder at home and abroad, but because they feel it is the only way to protect themselves and their families. The media builds up this argument saying the only way to preserve peace is by the U.S. being number one militarily. They pose the alternative: either build up U.S. weapons systems or face the danger of Russian bombs landing on major U.S. cities in the future.

Is it a fact that sticking with the imperialists and their war preparations will mean less misery and destruction for the working class? Exactly the opposite is true. In Vietnam, for example, the U.S. imperialists talked about "light at the end of the tunnel." But that war dragged on year after year, sometimes seeming like it would never end. It was only the struggle of the Vietnamese people against U.S. imperialism, combined with a powerful anti-war movement in the U.S., that finally ended it.

In the same way we need to use this experience to sum up that the U.S. military buildup will not prevent war but will only make the war that eventually breaks out even more destructive.

Even if the U.S. wins another war it will not protect our families and communities. A victory for the U.S. would mean the imperialists would continue to rule society. And just like their rule has led to crises and wars in the past, so too would it lead to more crises and a fourth world war, until finally they are overthrown and their criminal system put in the museum of history.

When all is said and done the imperialists of both superpowers pose two alternatives to the masses of people should a war break out: either it ends in a victory for the U.S. or a victory for Russia. And of course they make it seem like a defeat for themselves would be the worst of all possible worlds.

## Third Way Out

But why are these the only two alternatives? Why does such a war have to end with the victory or defeat of the *present, capitalist* governments? While this view makes perfect sense to the capitalists, it is losers' logic for the working class. In fact, there is a third alternative: for the workers in this country together with our class brothers and sisters in the USSR and elsewhere in the imperialist world to rise up in revolution, overthrow these oppressors and end the war in a victory for the working class.

The imperialist system breeds wars fought slave vs. slave to decide which slave-owner will reap the bigger profit. The proletariat of all countries says: "convert this war between slave-owners for the division of their loot into a war of the slaves of all nations against the slave-owners of all nations." (Lenin, "The Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution," *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 56)

Overthrowing the rulers of the two superpowers, not uniting with one set of them, is the only way a world war can be prevented. Should the USSR and the U.S. drag the world into another war for their empires of profit our stand must be: They make us shed our blood, but let us not shed it for them. Let's shed it

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## Revolution

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# War...

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for ourselves, for our class, and for a future for mankind free from their rule and free from their wars.

## Pacifism Not the Answer

Communists do not want war, we advocate the abolition of war. But unlike petty bourgeois pacifists and those who raise nonviolence to a principle, communists recognize that this question cannot be separated from class struggle. War cannot be finally eliminated until classes have been eliminated and communism built. Imperialism breeds war and imperialist war can't be killed until imperialism is killed. To eliminate war it is necessary to make war on the imperialists.

The imperialists do not allow the working class the freedom to stand aside from their wars. They drag the workers off to fight for them. When they place guns in the workers' hands and tell them to shoot down their fellow workers we have no choice but to organize against them on this front. The weapons they order the workers to use to prop up their rule on the broken bodies of millions must be turned into weapons against them and their system which breeds destruction.

Even the threat or reality of a Soviet attack on this country would not change this stand. Rather than uniting with one set of rulers to expel the other, the way forward for the working class would be to break through the middle of this conflict and make revolution, against whatever set of oppressors had consolidated their control.

Not only must the working class not fight for the victory of its rulers in such an imperialist war, it is in the interest of the working class to welcome the defeats of these rulers. This is not because the working class wants the rulers of the Soviet Union to win. Exactly the opposite—we stand for the working class of the Soviet Union to overthrow their oppressors and reestablish socialism. And we do not stand for Russian capitalists oppressing workers here, any more than we do for the U.S. capitalists.

## Revolutionary Defeatism

The reason the working class welcomes the defeats of its own bourgeoisie in an imperialist war is because their defeats, their weakening, gives the working class a chance to advance its struggle to overthrow them. It is like the question confronting the slave who sees his master's house burning down: is he going to run for water to put out the fire, or welcome it and use the opportunity to step up his own struggle for liberation?

It is only by overthrowing the imperialists and building socialism that society can move forward and end once and for all the miseries and oppression of capitalism. This is why in such a war, the only stand which corresponds to the interests of the working class is to work to turn the imperialist war into a civil war, a revolutionary war.

This stand is not a pipe-dream of Marxist-Leninists, although carrying it through during an imperialist war certainly involves some very real difficulties and calls for courageous struggle. Fighting to advance the struggle toward the goal of revolution through the course of war is in fact the only stand that can produce advances and not defeats for the working class.

This is something that historical experience clearly shows. In previous wars, armed with a correct line, the masses of people in many countries have turned the outrage of imperialist aggression and war into an occasion to redouble their determination to be rid of these oppressors, and have won great victories in revolutionary struggle.

World War 1 was marked by the first revolution in which the working class was able to seize and hold power, Russia in 1917, and was followed by revolutionary upsurges of the working class in a number of countries, including Hungary and Germany. Following World War 2 a whole series of proletarian revolutions were successful in China, North Korea, North Vietnam and Eastern Europe, although since then capitalism has been restored in a number of these countries, including the USSR.

## War Sharpens Contradictions

As this historical experience shows, imperialist war means tremendous suffering for the masses of people, but it also tremendously sharpens the contradictions and many times brings on a revolutionary situation in which the working class has an opportunity to overthrow their weakened rulers and establish socialism.

Of course none of this will happen "automatically." It will only happen through the conscious struggle of working class, led and armed with revolutionary understanding by its Party.

How can this be done? Our stand and actions in the class struggle *right now* will determine to a great extent whether or not we are prepared to lead things

forward should war break out. Under current conditions, this does not mean our main task is to build an anti-war movement, although struggles must be waged against acts of aggression and war preparations. What it does mean is that we must develop a revolutionary movement led by the working class, fighting on all fronts, that is capable of overthrowing the imperialists when conditions are ripe and put an end to their rule and their wars.

It is in this way, with this goal in mind, that every struggle of the working class must be approached, including the daily battles against speedup, layoffs, and other attempts to increase exploitation where the workers' struggles are mainly centered today.

Failure to build the struggle aimed at this revolutionary goal would seriously disarm the working class, and make it impossible to take advantage of the crisis an imperialist war would cause. History is a useful teacher here, too. Most of the leaders of the working class parties of the Second International practised reformism and opportunism before World War 1. When the war broke out each sided with their own capitalists in sending the workers to kill each other on the battlefields.

Lenin pointed out the roots of this when he said "social chauvinism is opportunism in its finished form." ("Opportunism and the Collapse of the Second International, Vol. 22, *Collected Works*, p. 113) Today the leaders of these parties are people like Willy Brandt of West Germany and Golda Meir of Israel—past and present heads of capitalist governments and open traitors to the working class.

## Link With All Battles

On the other hand great advances can be made if struggles are developed on all fronts that attack and expose the system and the consciousness of the workers is raised in the course of many battles. To do this, the Party must arm the workers with an understanding of the *class basis* of all events in society— from fights on the shop floor to acts of aggression and war preparations.

It is in this way that the Party must draw out the real links between different events in society, and as the Party Programme says, develop "fighters on one front against the enemy into fighters on all fronts."

So in taking out the slogan "We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War" we must not do it in an abstract way, unconnected with the current struggles the workers are involved in. Neither should we mislead people by making wrong connections, by spread-

ing the illusion, for example, that the imperialists should "reorder their priorities" and spend money for "jobs, not war."

Instead we should draw the actual link that does exist: that the cause of war and unemployment and every other abuse lies in the capitalist system of wage-slavery, and that to finally do away with all this, the workers must do away with the source, the rule of these imperialists. We need to show that just as the crisis is driving the ruling class to intensify its attacks on the working class in this country, so too is it driving them to intensify their exploitation around the world and to contend with the other capitalist powers, especially the Soviet Union, and to push that contention toward war.

Taken out broadly in the Party's agitation and propaganda, the slogan "We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War," when it is linked in a lively and down-to-earth way to the actual struggles and experience of the working class, can heighten the struggle against the imperialists, especially their current war preparations, and prepare the working class to seize the initiative in a revolutionary situation and do away with these greatest of oppressors once and for all. ■

## CORRECTIONS

Corrections to *Revolution*, May 15, 1976:

On page 6, column one, a quote appears from Mao Tsetung's essay "The Identity of Interests Between the Soviet Union and All Mankind." It is from *Selected Works*, Volume 11, p. 277.

The quote from the same essay by Mao (p. 279) should read:

"Germany started the war in order to plunder the Polish people and smash one flank of the Anglo-French imperialist front. By its nature, Germany's war is imperialist and should be opposed, not approved. As for Britain and France, they have regarded Poland as an object of plunder for their finance capital, exploited her to thwart the German imperialist attempt at a world redivision of the spoils, and made her a flank of their own imperialist front. Thus their war is an imperialist war, their so-called aid to Poland being merely for the purpose of contending with Germany for the domination of Poland, and this war, too, should be opposed, not approved."

On page 14, column two, the last full sentence from the bottom should read: At one gate at the Goodyear Plant 2, two hundred pickets showed up ready to fight!

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