
Our Publications

LABOR ACTION

Weekly Newspaper of the Workers Party

Regular articles and news on the war, problems affecting
Negro and White workers, unemployment, etc.

(RATES: \$1.50 per year, \$1.00 six months—per copy 3¢
Canada and Foreign \$2.00 per year—\$1.50 six months)

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

A Monthly Journal of Revolutionary Marxism

(RATES: One year, \$1.50, Six months \$1.00. N.Y.C.,
Canada & Foreign, \$1.75 half year, \$1.50 six months.
15¢ per copy)

THE CHALLENGE OF YOUTH

Monthly organ of the Young People's Socialist League

A hard hitting Youth Paper

(RATES: 25¢ per year—2¢ per copy)

Conscription-- FOR WHAT?

**AN OPEN LETTER TO THE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES**

1c

WORKERS PARTY

164 W. WASHINGTON ST., RM 910

CHICAGO, ILL.



PAMPHLET LIBRARY

-OF-

M. V. HALUSHKA

Published by the

WORKERS PARTY

— and the —

YOUNG PEOPLES SOCIALIST LEAGUE

(Fourth International)

114 WEST 14th STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

June 25, 1940



PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

An Open Letter to the President

MR. PRESIDENT:

Your administration is conducting a great drive to enlist the youth of the nation in the armed forces. We are being told that the army needs us to defend our nation from foreign conquest and our democratic rights from fascist dictators.

These are certainly most noble and worthy causes for which to fight. No one but a coward or traitor would accept foreign conquest or fascist dictatorship without a struggle.

But, as you know, Mr. President, very few youths have answered your eloquent appeals. The recruiting quotas for the various Army Corps Areas are still far from filled. There is already talk in favor of conscription.

This does not quite make sense. If a free people must be conscripted to defend their liberties, they deserve nothing but slavery.

Are the youth of today too indifferent to the future of the country to enlist? Or, perhaps, too cowardly?

As a part of this generation of youth, I know far better than to believe such slanders.

I can explain for myself, Mr. President, and, no doubt, millions of young men, why we have not rushed to the nearest recruiting station.

There is first of all the fact that we have not been taken in by the hysterical propaganda which would have us believe that an invasion is likely to take place almost any day now. Despite the great development of Blitzkrieg tactics, it will still take many a year before an army of millions can be flown across three thousand miles of ocean by air and landed in a hostile country. Though they had a smaller army and navy in the past, the military leaders have maintained consistently that the United States is impregnable to invasion.

But more important than that reason is the fact that we do not believe that your administration and its army and navy are primarily concerned with national defense and—far from being a defense—are a THREAT to our democratic rights.

All the lessons of history teach us to beware of fine sounding slogans on the lips of politicians, above all, in time of war.

LESSONS OF 1914-18

Millions of young Frenchmen, Germans, Russians, Englishmen, and Americans died in the last war because they thought they were fighting for a noble cause. "Defend Germany against the Czar." "Crush Prussian militarism." "Defend the soil of Holy Rus-

sia." "Defend the French Republic." "Make the world safe for democracy." We all remember the catchwords. But the Treaty of Versailles showed that every nation fought for gold, oil, steel, markets, and colonies.

We are told that "this time it will be different."

Why? What reason is there for believing this promise? Whom shall we trust to keep it?

Why should we trust you, Mr. President? Certainly not on your record. You posed as a friend of labor and eagerly sought its votes in 1936, but you never raised a finger after the elections when Democratic governors in all parts of the country smashed strikes. Or is our confidence to be based upon your role in breaking the WPA strikes in 1939? Or in the work of your Department of Justice in its nationwide drive to break up unions with the fake cry of "monopoly"?

Once we join the army, we are completely at the mercy of the "brass hats" who sit behind the lines in parade uniforms and wear spurs to keep their feet from slipping off the desk. We have no rights in their army. We cannot say a word about what we should fight for and where. If a soldier asks questions like "Why do we have to go to the Dutch East Indies to defend the United States?", he will be court martialed as an agitator and perhaps shot.

Most of the young workers first met these illustrious "brass hat" warriors when they broke our strikes. We have, therefore, from the very beginning

thought of them as "little Hitlers" rather than ardent lovers of democracy.

WHAT THE ARMY DEFENDS

The whole history of the armed forces shows that they are not organized to defend our humble homes or our democratic rights. The Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and National Guard have a different purpose—to defend the interests of Big Business at home and abroad.

Listen, a former Secretary of the Navy, Curtis Wilbur, speaking in a frank moment before the Connecticut Chamber of Commerce on May 7, 1925 on what he means by "national defense". After enumerating the billions of dollars which "American citizens" have invested abroad and their total commerce or the high seas, Mr. Wilbur said:

These vast interests must be considered when we talk of defending the flag. To defend America we must be prepared to defend its interests and our flag in every corner of the globe.

Is this why you need us in your army, Mr. President?

The U.S. Army, we are told, exists to defend the 48 states and District of Columbia from foreign invasion. In order to make people believe that this was its only role, the government has always preferred to use the National Guard and police against strikers rather than the regular army. But whenever the situ-

ation becomes too difficult, the authorities fall back upon the Army. Since the National Guard has been re-organized by the Department of War at Washington and supplied with equipment from the government arsenals, its efficiency in breaking strikes has improved to the point where it has been necessary to call out the Army only twice since the World War.

While the Army has only fought *once* against foreign troops on American soil (War of 1812), it has fought against American working men *seven times* as follows:

1877—Railway strike

1886—Miners strike

1892—Miners strike

1894—Railway strike

1903—Miners strike

1921—Miners strike (West Virginia)

1932—Against the "Veterans Bonus Army" in Washington, D.C.

WHOM THE NATIONAL GUARD FIGHTS

The main job of the National Guard is to act as a government-financed strikebreaking agency in the service of Big Business.

The National Guard fought more American citizens out on strike in the single year of 1934 when 3 million marched on picket lines than they fought Germans during the World War. 40,000 National

Guard troops fought strikers in 39 states in that year.

Maj. Gen. Smedley Butler (retired), U.S. Marine Corps has the following warning for the National Guard:

There is a growing feeling of resentment against American workmen—wearing the uniform of the National Guard—shooting down other American workmen striking for a fairer division of the profits their energy created.

The training of the National Guard has not been for national defense against a foreign invader but rather against workingmen out on strike. The N.Y. *Times* of August 6, 1932 reports the following on the maneuvers of the New Jersey National Guard at Sea Girt, N.J.:

Clad in blue dungarees, 200 guardsmen posing as rioters, supposed to have been inflamed to 'direct action' by soap-box oratory, advanced upon the Governor's cottage, howling for higher wages.

From the opposite direction appeared the infantry platoon with gas bombs and shining bayonets. The 'forces of law and order,' and the 'strikers' clashed. There was a considerable fuss. 'Cossacks' shouted the 'strikers', and their opponents tossed the tear gas bombs . . .

(Quoted in Walter Wilson's "MILITIA: FRIEND OR FOE OF LIBERTY?")

THE NAVY AND MARINES IN ACTION

While the Army and the National Guard have made it their main business to suppress labor at home, the Navy and the Marine Corps have fought to defend the interests of Wall Street in literally "every corner of the globe".

U.S. Marines have been landed on territory OUTSIDE the United States to "defend American interests" no less than 112 times since 1800!

These military operations have taken place in as widely separated places as the West Coast of Africa, China, Nicaragua, Siam, Colombia, Cuba, the Soviet Union (1918-19), and Argentina. In all, they have fought in 36 different countries. They fought in China on 19 different occasions, in Nicaragua upon 14, and in many other countries from upon one to 7 occasions.

When Maj. Gen. Butler resigned from the Marine Corps, he said that its main job was to act as a "collection agency" for Wall Street banks.

The U.S. Navy is built for offensive operations far from home waters. It is built to defend the Philippines, fight in Europe, operate off the coast of Africa, blockade Japan, and browbeat the small South American countries. It defends the right of the Firestone Rubber Company to work slave labor upon its plantations in Liberia, Africa and U.S. gunboats escort Standard Oil tankers 1,000 miles up the Yangtse River in China.

PEOPLE'S ARMY vs. IMPERIALIST ARMY

Since the present armed forces serve the sole purpose of suppressing labor at home and defending American imperialism abroad, why should any person in his right mind accept your mere say-so, Mr. President, when you speak of expanding them for "national defense?"

If we are to defend the nation and the democratic rights we still possess, we cannot entrust this to a small professional army commanded by a caste of professional militarists beyond popular control.

All history teaches us that a people possessing their own arms and trained in their use cannot be enslaved. In ancient times the right to bear arms was the mark of the freeman and the forbiddance to bear arms the mark of the slave.

The American workingmen and farmers who fought the Revolutionary War, despite the opposition of Alexander Hamilton and the wealthy classes for whom he spoke, forced the adoption of an amendment to the Constitution of the United States which reads as follows:

Second Amendment—A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.

The colonists who settled America had had their fill of standing armies with swaggering militarists. They determined to keep America free from such an institution. Beginning with the first settlements

and continuing through the early 1800's, every American town and village had its own militia company. The workers and farmers gathered and democratically elected their own officers. They drilled in the evening after their work was done. They kept their arms in their own homes.

This militia system was really the entire people in arms—A PEOPLE'S ARMY.

This is the only kind of army we can trust today.

A People's Army—composed of workers and farmers and controlled by them—is the only army that will defend us from a foreign invader and defend our democratic rights against the enemies at home. It is the only army we can trust not to turn its guns upon striking working people or to defend Wall Street investments abroad.

But such a People's Army has always been hated and feared by the wealthy people who make up the ruling class under capitalism. It has always been their object to keep a professional army that is loyal and subservient to them and to keep guns out of the hands of the workers and farmers.

THE OFFICER CASTE AND FASCISM

The events of the last few years have shown us that the officer caste of these capitalist armies is very sympathetic to fascism and would much prefer fas-

cism, even *foreign* fascist rule, rather than permit the working people of their own country to have their way.

In Italy in 1919 Mussolini organized his Black Shirts by enlisting the army officers and getting weapons through them. The whole officer corps of the Italian army supported Mussolini.

In Germany in 1933 Hitler came to power with the help of the leading officers of the Reichswehr.

In Austria in 1934 Dollfus had the complete support of the army officers when he turned his cannon upon the homes of the working people who opposed his dictatorship.

In Spain in 1936 Franco rose in rebellion against the Republic with almost 100% backing from the officers corps of the Spanish army.

In Norway in 1940 Major Quisling and other leading officers of the army formed a "fifth column" to turn over the country to Hitler.

In Belgium in 1940 King Leopold came to terms with Hitler and surrendered his entire army without any of the officers moving to prevent it.

In France various fascist organizations like the "Cagoulaards," the "Action Francaise", and the "Croix de Feu" had links with high army officers through whom they received guns to use against radicals.

Nearly every general in the French and British army has left behind a trail of bloody crimes against the natives of India, Indo-China, Syria, Morocco,

or other colonies which equals the worst deeds of Hitler in Germany.

THE AMERICAN OFFICER CASTE

Are we to take your word, Mr. President, that the officers of the American army are different? Why? All evidence at hand indicates that we have every reason in the world to expect them to act as their counter-parts did in Europe.

Take as an example the attitude toward democracy contained in the "Manual for Citizenship Training" issued by the War Department in Washington, D.C. for use in the armed forces:

Democracy, defined as the 'direct rule of the people', had been tried with destruction of government as its inevitable result.

Our constitutional fathers, familiar with the strength and weakness of both autocracy and democracy, would have neither.

And at the end of the chapter, among the questions and answers we find the following:

What are the principle characteristics of a democracy?

Demagogism, license, impulse, agitation, discontent, anarchy, chaos, and socialism.

Are the men who write the above, Mr. President, are they the knights in shining armor whom we are to follow in the fight against fascism? *Goebbels could hardly improve upon their language.*

The officers of the U.S. Army and Navy are notor-

ious for their anti-labor, anti-Negro, and anti-semitic views. This is the stuff fascists are made of. Little wonder that Gen. Moseley, recently second in command of the U.S. Army, came before the Dies Committee as a leader of the fascist "Knights of the White Camelia."

The Jim Crow conditions in the army are notorious.

A camel could far more easily get through the eye of a needle than a Negro through the military academy at West Point.

Negroes are absolutely barred from the Air Corps. The vast new training program for pilots makes no mention of accepting Negroes.

There is not a single ranking Negro officer in the entire Navy. It bristles, however, with the sons of the "very best lily white families" of the South who pride themselves upon their descent from the Ku Klux Klan terrorists of the post-Civil War period and from lynchers of more recent notoriety.

Little wonder that the Army and Navy are run by labor-haters. The vast majority of the officers come from upper middle class and wealthy families.

IN WHOSE ARMY WE WILL FIGHT

We, for our part, will never voluntarily submit to such armed forces. We will never serve in the armed forces of capitalism except as conscripted cannon fodder. And a slave with a gun, even in the most dictatorily-run army, is a dangerous man.

We trust only our own army—one that is democratically controlled by the workers and poor farmers—a **PEOPLE'S ARMY**.

Under the banners of such an army we would gladly risk our lives to defend national independence and democratic rights. Support to such an army would advance, rather than retard, the liberation of the working masses from economic and political oppression.

Once the working masses were armed and democratically organized in a People's Army, they would end the dictatorship of Big Business over the lives of the people. Workers would no longer be the industrial serfs of the giant corporations. The working people would operate the basic industries through committees of the workers in the shops. They would not tolerate a government that was subservient to the bankers and industrialists and sought to help them. The working people would establish a government representative of the vast majority of the population—the workers and poor farmers—a **WORKERS GOVERNMENT**.

To serve in your army, Mr. President, is to defend the past—with its unemployment, misery, economic insanity, war, and trends toward totalitarianism.

To serve in a **PEOPLE'S ARMY** is to fight for the future—a **WORKERS GOVERNMENT** and the Socialist organization of industry on a plan to make America's abundance available to all.