

# Mutinies can Stop U.S. Wars

Angry Workers Group

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From a leaflet by the Angry Workers Group, 2000 Center St., No. 1200, Berkeley CA 94704, which was passed out during Fleet Week in San Francisco, October, 1985.

The past few years have seen a wholesale rewriting of the history of American involvement in Vietnam. From the official government versions of the events to extremely violent television shows and movies like "The Deer Hunter" and "Rambo," the people who rule us are attempting to glamorize the slaughter of the Indochinese Wars as a prelude to the next war. It might be in the Philippines or Southern Africa, Central America or Korea. It might be fought on five or ten fronts simultaneously with the Soviet Union. Or maybe they'll send us off to massacre the populations of Spain or Italy or Britain in the suppression of a revolutionary civil war in Western Europe.

The pressures of the worldwide economic crisis are pushing the rulers of the United States towards war. And the corporate executives, politicians and bureaucrats who will profit most from a war are preparing us by a reproduction of extremely nationalistic values and hatred of people from other parts of the world, pushing everything from Saturday morning cartoons and toys for children that glamorize nuclear war and bacteriological weapons to the camouflage clothing that became fashionable shortly after the Iranian Hostage crisis of 1979 through 1980. The rulers of Russia are using similar propaganda tactics to get the Soviet working class lined up to fight and die for their bosses.

The ruling circles of the United States are preparing for a big war. A war for which they hope that the people in the Army and the Navy and the kids they'll draft will quietly and unquestioningly work, kill and die. And a part of their reason for wanting us to forget what really happened in Vietnam is so we'll forget what defeated their war efforts—and the importance of the resistance of the enlisted men and women against the war effort.

## **Soldiers in Revolt—"Seasick Sailors"**

The first major symptoms in Vietnam of the breakdown of respect for authority in the military emerged among the ground troops of the Army and the Marine Corps. For soldiers in the combat zone, a radical opposition to the war became an important part of avoiding horrible injury or death. From the more mild forms of political protest and disobedience of war orders the resistance among the ground troops grew into a massive and widespread "quasi-mutiny" by 1970 and 1971.

Soldiers would go on "search and avoid" missions, intentionally skirting clashes with the Vietnamese and often holding three-day-long pot parties instead of fighting. Commanders would be threatened with "fraggings" (fragmentation grenades), forcing them to worry more about their own troops than about the "enemy." War equipment would be sabotaged and destroyed. By 1972 roughly three hundred anti-war and anti-military newspapers, with names like *Harass the Brass*, *All Hands Abandon Ship* and *Star-Spangled Bummer* had been put out by enlisted people. Riots and anti-war demonstrations broke out on bases in Asia, Europe and in the United States. By the early 1970s the government had to begin pulling out of the ground war and switching to an "air war," largely

because the ground troops who were supposed to do the fighting were paralyzing the world's mightiest military force by their sabotage and resistance.

With the shifting over to an "air war" strategy, the Navy became an important source of resistance to the war. In response to the racism that prevailed inside the Navy, black and white sailors often rebelled together. The most significant of these rebellions took place on board the U.S.S. Constellation off of Southern California in November 1972. In response to a threat of less-than-honorable discharges against several black sailors, a group of over one hundred black and white sailors staged a day and a half long sit-in. After docking in San Diego, 132 sailors were allowed to go ashore, and refused orders to reboard the ship several days later, staging a defiant dockside strike on the morning of November 9<sup>th</sup>—perhaps the largest act of mass defiance during the war. In spite of the seriousness of the rebellion, not one of the 132 sailors involved was arrested.

Sabotage was a very useful tactic. On May 26, 1970, the U.S.S. Anderson was preparing to steam from San Diego into the Pacific for Vietnam. But someone had dropped nuts, bolts and chains down the main gear shaft. A major breakdown occurred, resulting in several thousand dollars worth of damage and a delay of several weeks. Several sailors were charged, but because of a lack of evidence the case was dismissed. With the escalation of Naval involvement in the war the level of sabotage grew. In July of 1972, within the space of three weeks, two of the Navy's aircraft carriers were put out of commission by sabotage. On July 10, a massive fire swept through the Admiral's quarters and radar center of the U.S.S. Forestal, causing over seven million dollars in damage, and delaying the ship's deployment for over two months. In late July, the U.S.S. Ranger was docked at Alameda. Just days before the ship's scheduled departure for Vietnam, a paint-scraper and two twelve-inch bolts were inserted into the number-four-engine reduction gears causing nearly one million dollars damage and forcing a three and a half month delay in operations for extensive repairs. The sailor charged in the case was acquitted. In other cases, sailors tossed equipment over the sides of ships while at sea. The House Armed Services Committee summed up the crisis of rebellion in the Navy:

"The U.S. Navy is now confronted with pressures...which, if not controlled, will surely destroy its enviable tradition of discipline. Recent instances of sabotage, riot, willful disobedience of orders, and contempt for authority...are clear-cut symptoms of a dangerous deterioration of discipline."

That resistance and contempt for the military by enlisted people was often directly linked to civilian resistance to the war, and to the beginning of social unrest in the United States itself. Men who had learned to rebel inside the armed forces contributed to the beginnings of a wildcat workers' movement in the auto factories of Michigan and Ohio, and the coal miners' strike in 1977.

Along with the uprisings in the inner cities of the United States, the rebellions in the armed forces were the American expression of a wave of world-wide working class revolt, occurring in the same period as the General Strike in France in May 1968, the big strikes in Italy and Germany in 1969, the insurrection in Poland in 1970, a series of riots and strikes in Brazil, Argentina, and the Shanghai General Strike against the state-capitalist dictatorship of Mao Tse-Tung.

The era we find ourselves in, an era of re-emerging working class combativity on an international scale since the late 1960s, recalls in many ways the years following World War I, which like World War II, was a direct result of the competition between the major capitalist powers of the day for world markets. But unlike World War II, World War I did not end with the total defeat of one set of capitalist nations by their rivals. World War I wasn't ended by any liberal "peace movement," by pacifists or "disarmament negotiations," World War I was ended by wholesale collapse of the armies and navies of major combatant nations like Russia and Germany in revolutionary mutiny, by mass strikes and insurrections across Russia and Central Europe. The soldiers and sailors of different nations, who were supposed to hate and murder one another, fraternized with each other, turning their guns against their officers, and went home to fight for revolution in their own countries. There were mutinies in the British navy and in the armies of the British colonial empire in Asia. Naval bases like Kronstadt in Russia and Kiel and Wilhelmshaven in Germany became important centers of revolutionary organizations and action. The French invasion of revolutionary Russia was crippled by the mutiny of the French fleet in the Black Sea, centered around the battleships France and Jean Bart. A revolutionary in the French navy was quoted at the time as saying, "The workers of Germany, Austria and Hungary were fighting an armed struggle, and revolutionary strikes were raging in Italy, Spain,

Switzerland, and all over Europe, and in faraway Argentina,...the French soldiers and sailors saw before them the revolution which was rousing the masses of the people of France.”

The horrible wars of this century, the more than 40 “small” wars raging all over the world today, the threat of extermination of the human race and of all life on this planet, the butchering governments and death by starvation and malnutrition of one out of every six human beings aren’t caused by “human nature.” They are the direct result of capitalist society, the world of social relations based on the exchange of objects and activity through money, the system of wage labor and the market economy which finds its values created and reinforced by religion and the family, schools and the news media, organized sports, the sex industry, and the work ethic.

Capitalist society was born in warfare and has only continued-to exist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through a terrible cycle of international war, reconstruction and economic collapse. The basis of power in capitalist society is the modern nation-state. The state is only the monopoly of armed violence by which a ruling class maintains its dictatorship over the rest of society in general and over the working class in particular. And the basis of the power of the state is the armed forces.

It is very clear that one of the most important functions of the NATO and Warsaw Pact forces is to prepare for the suppression of social unrest in Europe, the way the Polish army did against the Solidarity movement in 1981. In the nations of Latin America, the only real purpose for the armed forces is the suppression of working class movements toward revolution, like in Chile in 1973.

There are no “free societies” anywhere in the world today. No ruling class in history has ever given up its power and its existence without a fight, and the men who rule the world today won’t be any exception. It may not be very long before the crisis of capitalist society forces into being an authentic anti-authoritarian rebellion against capitalism in other parts of the world and even here in the United States—one that goes beyond even the most radical moments of the workers movement in Poland in 1980 and 1981.

At that point, the conscious revolutionary collapse of the army and navy will be necessary not just for the possibility of a successful social revolution, but for the very survival of humanity. The managers of capitalist society in both the East and West blocs find their system heading into the gravest crisis in the history of the capitalist world. The response they are planning to “save” capitalism could lead to our total extinction as a species—unless the basis of their economy and power is collapsed from within by the working class men and women who they depend on.

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