

Whither the anti-war movement?

Fifth Estate Collective

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In many respects the November 15th March on Washington was a monumental success: the issue of the war in Vietnam was once again brought before the American people with the drama that only masses in the streets can achieve. Many new participants were drawn into the anti-war movement and demonstrators left the capital with a sense of accomplishment and commitment rather than the disillusionment of less meaningful days.

In the midst of the congratulatory feelings that are now pervasive in the movement, however, we feel the necessity of stepping back somewhat and evaluating our shortcomings as well as our virtues. It is essential that those of us who consider ourselves revolutionaries analyze our brief history so that we may be better prepared for the future.

In viewing the anti-war movement, it at once becomes necessary to differentiate between the millions of people who give this movement such relevance and the group of individuals who are generally considered as its leadership. The obligation of those who occupy a leadership position is to take the movement forward in its development. Unfortunately this has not been the case with the movement of opposition to the war in Vietnam.

In fact, the present anti-war leadership has been playing a negative role in this development. As things are at present the main figures of the movement are pacifists and liberals; whether their brake on revolutionary consciousness is by commission or omission is not the point. Functionally their effect is the same

The nature of pacifism is always reactionary. By denouncing all violence as immoral and opposing the war on this basis, the pacifists succeed in obscuring the real issues at hand: the war is not only an expression of violence on the part of America's rulers, but a logical extension of their policies of economic, political, and cultural subjugation of the Third World in their quest for greater profits. Herein lies the true evil of America's imperialist venture in Southeast Asia.

On the other side of the pacifist coin is the attitude of non-struggle that most always accompanies non-violence. As the people of Vietnam are proving, it is necessary at times to pick up the gun in order to rid yourself of an oppressive foe. Moreover, we must learn to defend ourselves against our enemies. To lie down passively in the face of repression and attack is suicidal as well as cowardly.

Besides the pacifists, the anti-war movement is also infected with the plague of liberalism. The liberals would have us believe that Vietnam is a mistake in an otherwise sound foreign policy. As we noted above, the war is in fact only the most overt manifestation of a world system of imperialism. We will be faced perpetually with such "mistakes" as long as this system continues to exist.

Also jumping on the liberal anti-war bandwagon are noted members of the ruling class who now find themselves in opposition to the war. These blatant opportunists simply realize that a majority of Americans want an end to the war and are attempting on the one hand to avoid the pitfalls that overcame Lyndon Johnson because of his imperviousness to the wishes of the American people and on the other to steer the anti-war sentiment back into the mainstream of American politics where it can be more easily manipulated.

We should spend less time tripping over our feet trying to get these capitalist politicians to speak out against the war and more time exposing them for the pigs they are. They have access to the established media as well as

institutions of bourgeois power where they can comfortably express, their weak disapproval, to U.S. action in Vietnam. While we welcome anything that will expedite the removal of American troops and material from Vietnam, we also feel the necessity of attacking those who spend 99% of their time maintaining U.S. imperialism and 1% of their time talking vaguely about the “mistakenness” of their cohorts actions in pursuing the war.

Also deserving of criticism are individuals and groups within the anti-war movement who claim to be radical yet practice right opportunism (submerging ones politics so as to maintain unprincipled coalitions and “not offend anyone”). It is the duty of revolutionaries to put forth their politics within the arena of the anti-war movement to constantly raise the consciousness of that movement as to the true nature of the war. Right opportunism is the twin brother of left adventurism (failing to relate to the struggles and needs of the people because they are not “radical” enough). The effect of both is the same: leaving the anti-war movement to those who will never attempt to bring to the surface the material forces behind U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

New Directions

What then is the proper role to be played by revolutionaries within the context of the anti-war movement? We must first of all begin to reach out to the people who are most affected by the war in Vietnam, have the greatest power to bring it to an end and yet, paradoxically, have been at best peripheral to the movement: the men and women who work in the factories that produce the war materials and operate the distribution systems that deliver the war goods.

The movement must spend less time vituperating about the “immorality” of the war and more time speaking to its material effects on working people. Unless we can make clear how the war is responsible for inflation, incredibly high taxes, the ever decreasing budgets for social services, and the death of thousands of working people (Vietnamese as well as American), workers will never relate to the primarily middle class movement. And when and if such a shift in the anti-war movement does take place entirely new forms of struggle will have to be developed (undoubtedly by workers themselves) as most workers cannot leave town for a weekend of demonstrations when they have to be on the job at the bosses’ convenience.

Most strongly effected by the war is the black proletariat. As long as the anti-war movement fails to attack the racist nature of the war—in terms of who dies first as well as in terms of who feels the effects of the war most harshly—black people will at best continue to feel alienated from the movement.

Another area of work that is of obvious importance is organizing against the war within the imperialist army itself.

GI opposition to the war has grown tremendously in recent months and will continue to do so. American soldiers are forced to fight a war they have no interest in while their real enemies sit safely behind desks in the Pentagon.

This paper has a policy of sending each issue to GIs stationed in Vietnam free upon their request (our circulation there is the largest of any underground or radical paper in the country).

Revolutionaries must also be constantly putting forth anti-imperialist politics in opposition to the war. It is no longer enough to simply oppose the war. The imperialist nature of the war must be continually brought out and we must reaffirm our support for the Vietnamese revolution \within the anti-war movement. We Are not suggesting that the slogan of the anti-war movement at this point be Support the Provisional Revolutionary Government (the Vietcong in racist American terminology) although we certainly support independent actions that put forth such a slogan.

Rather, we feel that within the broad based anti-war movement—united behind the slogan U.S. Get Out of Vietnam Now—it is the responsibility of revolutionaries to explain the program, history, and significance of the PRG and to always try to raise the consciousness of those engaged within the movement as to the real nature of American imperialism in its global context.

If we feel our politics are correct and speak to the needs of the American people, then we should never feel intimidated in any popular movement.

ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE! U.S. GET OUT OF VIETNAM NOW! SUPPORT THE PRG!

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