

Militarism

...LABOR'S FOE!

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Published Online by
Socialist Labor Party of America
www.slp.org

June 2006

PUBLISHING HISTORY

PRINTED EDITION 1955

ONLINE EDITION June 2006

NEW YORK LABOR NEWS
P.O. BOX 218
MOUNTAIN VIEW, CA 94042-0218
<http://www.slp.org/nyln.htm>

I. Socialist Stand on Militarism

The Socialist Labor Party is opposed to Universal Military Training. But it does not oppose UMT on pacifist grounds. Pacifist opposition, the SLP holds, is ultimately ineffective opposition because it deals with an *effect* while completely ignoring the *cause*.

The reasoning of the SLP is based on these premises:

1. UMT is, in the words of the late Marshal Smuts, “the taproot of militarism.” That is, it is the main root, the root that militarism sinks deepest into the body politic, and through which it draws its principal sustenance.
2. Militarism is a powerful weapon in the existing class struggle and one that, by the very nature of things, is wielded by the capitalist class through the government, that is, the political State.
3. Since it is the aim of Socialism to terminate the class struggle by abolishing capitalism and the State and by building a classless society, logic dictates that militarism be exposed for what it is and resisted.
4. At the same time, the workers should be warned to have no illusions over the effect of mere antimilitarist protest, and never to confuse militarism, an *effect*, with the capitalist *cause*.

THE STALINISTS ON UMT

This reasoning may be best appreciated if it is contrasted with the reasoning of the Communist party. The SLP, applying Marxist logic, has developed a program that contemplates a peaceful and, as far as possible, an orderly revolution to Socialism via the ballot, backed up by the might of the industrially united workers in the integral Socialist Industrial Union. The Communist party, on the other hand, applying characteristic Anarcho-Communist reasoning, contemplates reaching its bureaucratic dictatorship via violent means. Therefore, while at times it may oppose compulsory military training for political reasons, it is convinced that UMT is basically “progressive” because it affords workers a chance to become proficient in

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the use of arms.

The summer 1952 issue of the British *No Conscription News* (quoted by the American publication, *Conscription News*, January 15, 1953) states in this connection: "In response to requests for a clear statement of party policy a well-known [British] Communist theoretician [Emile Burns] has declared that conscription 'is the most democratic way of raising armed forces.' It is thought, however, that the length of service should be shortened to a year. The main Communist justification for conscription is the desirability of military training for the working class. . . ." *No Conscription News* adds:

. . . Harry Pollitt [General Secretary of the Communist party of Great Britain] in reply to discussion at the party congress this year, used arguments in favor of conscription similar to those cited by Burns. He said "For political reasons for a long time we opposed conscription. We supported it in the anti-fascist war [against Germany] and in my judgment we are absolutely correct in supporting conscription for a year, in order that there shall be in this country people who understand what they can do when certain circumstances arise."

These "certain circumstances" are obviously the circumstances of a Stalinist-led insurrection. Such an insurrection would signify that the effort to convince the workers of the need to accomplish a Socialist reconstruction of society through the Socialist Industrial Union program had failed. Such an insurrection could only end in a disaster for the workers.¹

STALINISM NO CURE FOR MILITARISM

Finally, it should be noted here that the goal of Stalinism would not put an end to the curse of militarism because it does not put an end to class divisions or the political State. Stalinist bureaucratic rulers need militarism just as much as do capitalist rulers and for the same reasons. Today we see militarism firmly entrenched in the bureaucratic State structures of Soviet Russia, Red China and the East European satellites. In the aforementioned statement, quoted by *No Conscription News*, Harry Pollitt —

¹ For an amplification of the SLP position on the obsolete nature of military insurrection in modern nations, see Frederick Engels' introduction to Marx's *Class Struggles in France* and "Supplementary," Daniel De Leon's valuable essay on militarism or industrial unionism at the end of his *As to Politics*.

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... wound up by adding “even when we are in power in this country [Britain] we shall take the necessary steps to insure that power will never be lost.” In other words, there will be a continued need for a conscripted army. As Emile Burns says, “conscription would have to be the basis of a democratic people’s [Stalinist] army.”

Only the advent of Socialism will write *finis* to the brutal and degrading chapter of militarism. There will be no classes under Socialism, hence no class with special vested interests to protect and no class to hold in subjugation. The means of social production will be owned socially and managed democratically, and the government itself, being based on industrial union constituencies, will be at all times in the complete control of the useful producers.

Therefore the only really effective antimilitarist agitation is that which is directed toward the building of a classless society. All other antimilitarism is illusory. As Daniel De Leon observed with respect to the “antimilitarism” of the bourgeois radical, William Jennings Bryan:

When Bryan attacks “militarism” and yet upholds the capitalist system, he is fighting an effect while defending the cause. He and all others of his kind in attacking “militarism” merely imitate the farmer who knowingly planted cockleseed and then complained of the nature of the crop.

II. What Is UMT?

In presenting the position of Socialism on Universal Military Training it is important to differentiate this form of compulsory recruitment from the familiar form known as Selective Service. UMT is more menacing to the workers' interests, but in saying this we do not mean to imply support of Selective Service or any other compulsory military system. Indeed, it is a fact that Selective Service has been kept alive by the militarists, and is being kept alive today, to accustom the American people to peacetime conscription and as a stopgap until UMT can be put across. The devious way of militarism is illustrated by this tactic. It was confirmed officially by the late Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, excerpts of whose testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, April 12, 1948, follow:

MR. HEBERT (of Louisiana): "I understood you to say that Selective Service is merely a temporary measure?"

SECRETARY FORRESTAL: "Yes, sir."

MR. HEBERT: "Which will be on the books so long as you do not have UMT; is that correct?"

SECRETARY FORRESTAL: "Yes, sir; that is right."

MR. HEBERT: "But it will be as temporary as some of those buildings on Constitution Avenue which were erected during World War I and which are still there, if we do not have UMT."

SECRETARY FORRESTAL: "That is my opinion."

MR. HEBERT: "I think it is an amazing thing, as even the temper of Congress indicates, where UMT had little or no chance to get by, as soon as Selective Service was put before the people it received a great wave of support over the country by the very people who oppose UMT, they were willing to support Selective Service. If they do that as a substitute, as a temporary substitute for UMT, I think they are going to be disillusioned; is that correct?"

SECRETARY FORRESTAL: "That is my view. . . ."

SELECTIVE SERVICE AND UMT

The vital difference between Selective Service and UMT lies in the "active reserves"

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provision. Under Selective Service the names of registered youths are drawn and, if they are not deferred, they are inducted and made to serve a specified period. When their service is ended they are put in an *inactive* reserve for a time and that usually terminates their military connection. Under UMT, however, the initial training period is only the beginning. When it is ended the conscripts go into an *active* reserve in which they are obligated to report for *weekly drills* for eight or nine years and to spend a couple of weeks each year in a military training camp.

Consider what this means. Obviously millions of youths cannot show up each week at Camp Gordon or Fort Dix. Weekly drills mean *local* drills. To conduct them in all the cities, towns and villages of the nation, thousands of drill officers of various ranks will be billeted in as many communities. It has been estimated that it will require a training cadre of 17,000 commissioned and non-commissioned officers for 100,000 UMT conscripts under the President's "modified" UMT plan.² But this plan is obviously to get the camel's nose under the tent. Once accepted, it would not be long before the camel itself moved in and, instead of 100,000 annually, two or three million, or more, of the nation's youth would form the annual contingent. The training cadre would then be correspondingly larger, providing fabulous opportunities for the military caste.

MINDS IN UNIFORMS

The vast and unwholesome influence exerted on a Prussianized nation by these ubiquitous drill officers is difficult to appreciate. And, fully to appreciate it, one must first grasp the *purpose* of UMT. This purpose is not "national defense"; it is indoctrination. No less an authority on the subject than General (now President) Dwight D. Eisenhower told the House Committee on Postwar Military Policies, June 1945:

Physical training will always have to be repeated after war starts, but takes the least time. Psychological indoctrination . . . requires the longest time, but fortunately it is never completely forgotten.

What is "indoctrination"?

² This plan, which is described deceptively as a "reserve program," offers youths a variety of choices under the coercion of the conscription threat. Initially, it limits those who choose UMT (six months' training and 9½ years in the active reserves) to 100,000. But once started the plan is subject to practically limitless expansion.

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It means to imbue with a point of view. The purpose of UMT is to imbue the nation's youth with the militarists' point of view. And this point of view is one that accepts the hierarchical structure of the army, and its totalitarian character, as superior — superior not only for a military establishment which must function on the battlefield, but for society as well. It is a point of view that exalts the principle of unthinking obedience to authority, civil and economic as well as military. On the question of war or peace the militarists' viewpoint is conditioned by the firm conviction that disputes between nations can be finally settled only by a trial at arms, and an impatience with the delays of diplomacy. Finally, the militarists' point of view is one that will not even admit that there is any alternative to a policy officially accepted. This is the reason the debating teams at West Point and Annapolis were forbidden to participate in debating the subject of U.S. recognition of Red China in 1954. The *official* policy being non-recognition, the military brass could not permit cadets to argue otherwise even in debating practice!

THE MILITARY MIND

Of the military mind and how it operates, Associate Justice William O. Douglas, of the United States Supreme Court, wrote in *Look* magazine, March 11, 1952:

The military mind looks at world affairs in terms of preparations for war — bases that will be useful in defense or offense, the building of armies, the marshaling of raw materials and the harnessing of industrial production. The military look at domestic affairs in terms of giving orders and expecting obedience. The military mind does not know the give and take of public debate, the art of persuasion of people, the value and importance of dissent and disagreement, the importance of religious, political, racial minorities in our midst.

The military mind, in other words, has two distinctive characteristics — first, it tends to put every problem in the perspective of war; second, it tends to regiment people, to have one orthodox creed and to leave no room for diversity of opinion, the strength of democracy.

Through UMT all society becomes infected with the views and attitudes of militarism, and this is true even among the youth who resent the brutality and indignities of military training.³ The net results, fatal to the democratic concept,

³ “The objective is a nervous system reconditioned to respond without the slightest hesitation. As one company commander told a new platoon in his ‘indoctrination speech’: ‘If the drill instructor tells you to go out and get him a slice of the moon, you will immediately proceed outside and start

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were summed up as follows by Dr. Horace B. English, in the November, 1945, issue of *Progressive Education*:

Military discipline does something to a man. . . . The soldier must learn to yield implicit obedience to mere men because they have the power of position. . . . Few soldiers or ex-soldiers, however much they gripe disgustedly about "brass hats," can help listening to the opinion of a general with deep respect just because he is a general. Is this what we want in America? Have we dispensed with the authority of kings and potentates . . . only to train men to respect the authority of generals and sergeants and to make the easy transition to respect for . . . whomever the powers that be place in authority over us?

jumping in that direction." — Gilbert Bailey in "The Marines Still Have the Situation in Hand," *The New York Times Magazine*, January 16, 1949.

III. Militarism and the Class Struggle

There is a nation closer at hand that the powers that be are getting ready to fight in the hope of putting it down — and keeping it henceforth down under the iron heel of military despotism. That nation is not all white of skin, nor all black, nor all yellow. That nation is cosmopolitan. It is the working class of the land. The nation that the land's plutocracy is foe to, and is arming against, is our own nation's vitals — its working class. — DE LEON

We have said that it is difficult for an American to appreciate the vast and unwholesome influence exerted by the ubiquitous drill instructors who are required to implement the weekly drill program that is a feature of UMT. The very concept of UMT is as alien to American experience as it is contrary to American tradition. But we can get a pretty good idea of what it would do to America, and to the American working class, by referring to the German experience.

The weekly drill was also a feature of the German military system, the system on which American militarism is patterned. Indeed, not the least reason why the German workers bitterly resist militarization is the memory of the military martinets who, in every city and town in the country, lorded it over them, intruded into their civilian lives, and threw around the weight of their military rank.

The arrogance of military rank just naturally establishes a fraternal bond with the whole category of social snobs, and especially with the capitalist exploiters of labor. The drill officer shares with the capitalist a contempt and hatred for the workers, and the capitalist instinctively looks on the drill officer as an ally in the class struggle. In Germany, it was commonplace for these military martinets to become “leading lights,” who spoke with “authority,” not only on military matters, but also on questions involving purely civil matters, such as education and the relations of capital and labor.

In time of class strife the UMT officer is in a position to use the reserve system to harass and weaken the strikers. In Germany, military commanders openly expressed hostility to striking workers, called for special drills timing them to disrupt strike meetings, and otherwise collaborated with the master class.

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ANTI-LABOR RECORD OF AMERICAN MILITARISM

Does anyone imagine for a moment that the American military martinet, given the influence and opportunities of UMT authority, would be less inclined to “cooperate” with the employers?

If there is, he would do well to recall the history of military strikebreaking in America. This ugly but instructive chapter opened in 1877 when, for the first time, federal troops were used to crush a strike, the railroad strike. Troops were used again in 1894 against the Pullman strikers and a third time five years later to break the miners’ strike in the Coeur d’Alenes of Idaho.

Nor did the terror end there. The story of militarism and labor was resumed shortly after the turn of the new century. For ten years from 1905 to 1915, the state militia was at the beck and call of the mine barons of Colorado. No one who lived through the period will ever forget the horror of the Ludlow massacre when gunmen and state troops, bent on bringing the rebellious wage slaves of the Rockefeller mining interests to heel, shot or burned to death 33 workers and, six children. Nor will he forget McKees Rock, in 1909, where the ferocity of the militiamen earned for them the title of “The Pennsylvania Cossacks,” nor 1919, when the “Cossacks” rode again and brought terror to the workers before a single one of them had gone on strike.

THE ORDER TO “SHOOT TO KILL”

During the 1920s and 1930s there was scarcely a time when the National Guard was not on “duty” somewhere in the land to put down a strike. Detailed strikebreaking techniques, worked out like battle plans, were set down in military manuals that pretended to be instructions on how to handle “civilian rioters.” One of the most infamous of these was the Army’s *Basic Field Manual*, of 1935, bearing the imprimatur of General Douglas MacArthur. This was the “Shoot to Kill” manual. On page 18 it said:

Blank cartridges should never be used against a mob nor should a volley be fired over the heads of the mob even if there is little danger of hurting persons in the rear. Such things will be regarded as an admission of weakness, or an attempt to bluff, and may do more harm than good.

A passage on page 22 made it plain as plain could be that these were war plans

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aimed at the workers. It read:

Troops will be disposed with the object of . . . driving the mob into or through the districts of the city where looting is least profitable and where destruction of property incident to military operations will be reduced to a minimum and preferably fall on the rioters [workers], or on the class of people composing the rioters [i.e., the working class].

There are, of course, great gaps in this account. We have no space to more than mention the day when the great “pro-labor” President, Franklin Roosevelt, sent federal troops wearing steel helmets, with rifles loaded and bayonets fixed, to break the North American Aviation strike at Inglewood, California, in 1941. Nor have we space for other examples of militia strikebreaking that have occurred since World War II ended.

RESERVISTS AS STRIKEBREAKERS

But this suffices to show that militarism is still a weapon in the class struggle. It is a weapon that is potent today; it would be infinitely more dangerous to the aspirations and interests of the workers if the country adopted UMT. For UMT, through the *active reserve* program, would bring a very large percentage of civilian workers under military discipline and military law. Even if as few as a million youth were inducted each year, in ten years no fewer than ten million youth, mostly workers, would be under the military thumb.

That such a militarized body represents a potent strikebreaking force was demonstrated by France back in 1910 when reserves were “called to the colors” and ordered to run the strike-bound trains. Refusal meant military trial and imprisonment of railroad worker-reservists. They obeyed the order and broke the strike.

If anyone imagines that American capitalism would be less inclined to use UMT in a similar situation, he should recall that ominous day in 1946 when President Harry Truman (another great “friend of labor”) asked Congress for the power to draft striking railroad workers into the army in order to bring them to their knees. Congress had no need to act. The mere threat sufficed to break the strike.

As Kermit Eby, professor of social science at the University of Chicago, put it in an

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article in the summer, 1950, issue of *Labor and Nation*:

Stripped of its phony surface glamor and its hypocritical claims of health and education under army supervision, compulsory military training is nothing more than a potential strikebreaking force, more powerful than anything which we have known or dreamed of in the past.

UMT — ANTI-SOCIALIST WEAPON

UMT is as flexible a class weapon as it is a potent one. And it is, in fact, much more than a “potential strikebreaking force.” Its capitalist sponsors are firmly convinced that UMT conditions youth to accept the status quo and to shun “isms,” especially Socialism. UMT training inculcates herd-mindedness, and this is prolonged after the reserve service is ended in the military societies. Through these societies, which are dominated by the capitalist class and its agents, a militant struggle is waged against Socialism.

According to the British military expert, Col. Frederick Natusch Maude, writing in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the German militarists held —

... that the habit of obedience to constituted authority acquired in the army, together with the silent influence which could be exercised on the ex-soldiers and reservists by the sympathy and example of their former commanders of all ranks, formed the best possible guarantee against the undue spread of Socialist doctrine.

THE “CLASSES TEACH THE MASSES”

It was the boast of the German militarists that in the conscript army “the classes educate the masses.” Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt, one of the ardent “liberal” advocates of putting American youth in the military strait jacket, expressed the same idea. When the youth are thrown together “at an early and impressionable age,” she wrote, their differences “in [class] background and [class] environment would melt away before the stark realities which close association soon brings out.”

The late Adolf Hitler agreed with this view. In *Mein Kampf* he wrote: “Whatever may have a divisive effect in national life should be given a unifying effect through the army.”

And Col. Maude, amplifying on the German experience, recalled:

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It was never anticipated that all men who had served their two years would become partisans of constituted authority, but only that, whilst all would learn the hopelessness of armed resistance . . . the bulk at least would recognize the substantial advantages to them personally from their previous connection with the services, and would form a solid bulwark against the spread of subversive [meaning in this case “Socialist”] doctrines.

He added that in the early 1890s—

. . . the danger lay very near that the Socialist vote might soon exceed all other interests put together, thus threatening the stability of all existing — [capitalist and feudal] institutions. . . . To meet this danger it was determined . . . to increase the annual contingent [of conscripts].

In other words, militarism was deliberately used to defeat and frustrate the democratic will of the people in the interests of preserving class privilege and class rule.

WHAT TO DO?

This suffices, we think, to prove the SLP premises, namely:

1. That UMT is the taproot of militarism;
2. That militarism is a powerful class-struggle weapon wielded by the capitalist class through the political State.
3. And that, since it is the aim of Socialism to terminate the class struggle, it is the duty of Socialists to expose and resist the expansion of militarism.

It remains only to emphasize the warning that the workers, in opposing militarism, should have no illusions about the effect of mere anti-militarist protest; they should never confuse militarism, an *effect*, with the capitalist *cause*.

Socialist antimilitarism is, in a sense, a “holding action.” It is waged through working-class education, through letters to Congressmen and the press protesting UMT, through resolutions, etc., etc. But meanwhile, and above all, the work of educating and preparing the way for building a Socialist society goes on. For there

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can be no peace in the struggle to prevent the Prussianization of America until the capitalist cause of militarism is uprooted and society is reconstructed on Socialist lines.

Karl Liebknecht put it this way: "Capitalism requires militarism just as spies are required in times of war and hangmen and torturers in times of peace. Capitalism may hate militarism but cannot do without it; in like manner the cultured Christian abhors the sins committed against the Gospels yet cannot live without sinning. Militarism is the inherited sin of capitalism . . . capitalism will be purged of it only in the purgatory of Socialism."

Therefore, to deal finally with militarism, the thing to do, said De Leon, is:

"Organize the working class integrally — industrially. Only then can the revolt against militarism result in a Waterloo to the class of sponge, instead of a massacre to the class of labor."

The End