

BETTER RED THAN FRED  
FROM "ACTIONS" TO POLITICS

Who is Fred Halstead? The leaflet put out by Ultimate Weapon for G.I. Day gives a thumbnail sketch that makes a surprising omission: Fred Halstead was the SWP (Socialist Worker's Party) candidate for President last year, and he was the only candidate to call unequivocally for the immediate withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. In a major speech during his campaign Halstead offered the following program:

"Don't be fooled. Don't get sucked in. Stay independent. Stay in the Streets. Build black power. Build brown power. Student power. High School student power. Independent political action. Labor power."

With the above program, Halstead received 41,000 votes, only 2,000 more than the SWP candidate received in 1960, before the black ghetto rebellions, before the campus uprisings, before the Bay of Pigs and Dominican invasions, before the massive American aggression in Vietnam, and when Kennedy, not Humphrey, was the liberal alternative to Nixon. Perhaps the Halstead supporters were too busy in the streets to make it to the polls on election day.

Such a program assumes that politics, like air pollution, is made by traffic in the streets. Heretofore the streets have served as a forum for making air pollution 360 days and "independent political actions" two to three days a year. With more radical utilization of the streets the anti-war movement could clean the air as well as stop the war.

The actual hustling to get 'em in the streets has been left to the SWP's cub scouts, the YSA (Young Socialist Alliance). "We propose," in the YSA resolution Young Socialists And The Fight Against The Vietnam War, "the building of mass actions, in the streets, independent of the politics of the ruling class". Unfortunately, the YSA proposes for the antiwar movement "independence" not only from the political parties of the "ruling class", but in addition, "independence" from all relevant action, which means abstaining from all political struggle while the bourgeois are in power. (Which is a betrayal, because the struggle for socialism requires making the working class into the ruling class).

In their antiwar resolution, the YSA contrasts "staying independent" with the McCarthyites and the Communist Party whom they condemn for their "class collaborationist tendencies" in trying to turn the anti-war movement into a pressure groups for liberal capitalist politicians. However, the YSA proposes:

"at the present stage of political development it would be a mistake for the (anti-war) movement as such to engage in any electoral activity... Those who support Halstead and Boutelle are only a part of the total number who oppose the war... Many militant anti-war activists are opposed to any electoral activity, others support the Peace and Freedom Party, Liberal Democrats, or the Communist Party campaign."

In order to keep the "class collaborationists" within the antiwar movement, SWP-YSA was willing to sacrifice their national campaign, even though that campaign had the only veritable antiwar program, rather than struggle to win the movement over to their campaign. By catering to the "present stage of political development" rather than struggling to raise the movement's political development (e.g., by engaging the movement in electoral activity) the SWP-YSA toadies to the "pressure group" illusions within the movement that "street actions" alone, without any political fight, can halt the warmakers. In the anti-war movement, the SWP-YSA have traded their professed revolutionary vanguard role to become the vanguard of the class collaborationists, "leading" the movement away from militant political struggle and down 5th Avenue arm-in-arm with the liberal pressure groups.

The antiwar movement, now in its fourth year of staying "independent" and "in the streets" has neither clean air nor peace to show for its many "actions". Undaunted, YSA at its national convention (Nov 68) called for the GI-Civilian Antiwar Conference in December which in turn was to call for the GI-Civilian Antiwar Action in April. In addition, the convention proclaimed 1969 "Year of The Antiwar GI". As in Eliot's "Wasteland", where "April is the cruelest month...stirring dull roots with spring rain", the SWP-YSA plans to stir the dull roots of the anti-war movement with the spring rain of antiwar GIs. Whereas the Army conscripts GIs to serve as cannon fodder, the antiwar movement will

conscript GIs to serve as new bait to get the old fish back into the streets. And we know what happens to bait: first hooked, then consumed.

The GI Anti-war Conference, in its apathy, ritual and significance for ending the war, resembled nothing so much as the Paris peace talks. (see Clark Kissinger's description in the Guardian, 11 Jan. 69). The conference was purported to be "initially endorsed by 100 individuals and organizations, including over a score of GIs, GI newspapers and coffee houses". However, it later proved that many of the endorsers knew as little of their endorsement as they did of the conference (see Last Harass letter in Vietnam GI, Jan 69, also Kissinger's article). The GI-Civilian Anti-war Action was dutifully called for Easter Sunday, April 6. Easter Sunday was chosen "in order to maximize GI participation. It will be difficult for the brass to restrict men to base or give them extra duty on Easter Sunday in order to keep them away from the demonstration". However, in New York City, the 5th Ave. Peace Parade Committee, where Fred Halstead is "from" according to the GI Day leaflet, decided that it was more important not to tear away the peace-loving patrons of St. Patrick's from mass and Sunday picnics than to "maximize GI participation" so that New York's "Action" will be held on Saturday, April 5. Of course, the SWP and YSA capitulated. For after all, what is more important, catching the fish or losing the bait?

Unless the April Actions are used to raise rather than toady to the "present stage of political development" of GI antiwar sentiment (and it is, even with the newspapers, petitions, "peace mutinies" and demonstrations a widespread inchoate sentiment rather than an organized movement), which is pacifist, not anti-capitalist, we may "bring the troops home" only to allow the even war weary capitalists time to recoup for the next Korea, the next Vietnam.

In order to raise the political development of GIs, the SWP and YSA and others who work with GIs must recognize the consequences and class nature of imperialist war and the mass standing army as was pointed out by Mike Maggi in his paper on YSA GI work (Young Socialist Discussion Bulletin, part 2):

"GIs are overwhelmingly members of the working-class in uniform, and when they leave the Army (as tens of thousands do each month) they go into the unions."

If the YSA and radicals are to reach the GIs they must give up their anti-worker prejudices. For example, the YSA states in the antiwar resolution: "The struggle of the Afro-Americans is deeper and more radical than that of the labor movement." This makes as much sense as saying "the waves are deeper and higher than the level of the ocean". Afro-Americans are "overwhelmingly members of the working class" and insofar as their struggles are significant in the fight for socialism, they are class struggles. If black workers are raising anti-war slogans and anti-leadership positions in the unions, it will have political meaning only when they become the clarion call that awakens the sleeping volcano that is the white working class. The backward political development of white workers reveals the magnitude of our tasks; the necessity for class struggle, not class surrender; for the building of truly independent mass labor actions, not the mass lumpen-liberal-collaborationist street actions. Out of the streets and back to struggle! Turn antiwar "actions" into anti-capitalist politics!

---

Subscribe to GI VOICE! Return to: GI VOICE, Box 825, Stuyvesant Station, New York, N.Y. 10009

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ CITY \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_