

Two Soldiers of Freedom

By MANUEL GOMEZ.

THE soldier has no vote. The slogan, "Keep politics out of the army!" represents a time-honored and jealously guarded tradition. Every precaution is taken to cut the army off from the rest of society so that it will be an unreflecting agent of the ruling class. With the increasing centralization of state power this becomes more and more necessary, for frequent use of the military against the workers in strikes tends to revive any vestiges of class feeling lying dormant in the soldiers and carries with it the danger of fraternization with the "enemy."

The court martial that sentenced Paul Crouch and Walter Trumbull to prison terms of 40 and 26 years respectively for organizing a Communist group among the U. S. soldiers in the Hawaiian islands, no doubt considered Communism in the army as akin to mutiny. It was not hatred of the abstract doctrines of Communism that dictated the original savage sentences (later reduced, under pressure, to 4 years for Crouch and 2 for Trumbull), but rather the knowledge that the Communist movement has become a world force. In the minds of the military judges was the hidden fear that the army cannot permanently be isolated from the influences sweeping over the social class to which most soldiers belong by origin. They were confronted by the fact that every important revolution of masses in history was participated in by the military. Precedents of the most disconcerting nature exist—as for instance the revolutionary activity of the national guard in Paris in the days of the 1871 Communards—or the action of the czar's cossacks who refused to fire upon the tumultuous workers of Petrograd and made common cause with them one historic day in 1917.

Possibly the judges would have been less severe with Crouch and Trumbull had they not committed their "crime" of Communism while stationed at an overseas colonial possession. Modern governments are extraordinarily sensitive about their colonies and semi-colonies. Morocco, Syria and China are constantly before their eyes. The Philippine islands are close to China. The Hawaiian islands are several thousand miles away, but the influence of Chinese events spreads rapidly among the Hawaiian working class, made up predominantly of Filipinos and Asiatics. The judges were not ignorant of this.

When Communism appears in an army of occupation, notwithstanding all the efforts at political segregation of the soldiers, it is a sure danger signal for imperialism. It is a sign of decay in the inner organism of the imperialist system so widespread as to stimulate the national liberation movements in the very territories which the imperialist armies are required to keep subject.

II.

Big changes have taken place in the United States army thru the 150 years of its existence. Qualities required of the ragged riflemen of 1776 were the exact antithesis of the contemporary military ideal. Washington's army was revolutionary. There was no talk of "keeping politics out." The ranks were supposed to be imbued with a deeply felt political purpose. Today the army is a typical auxiliary force of parasitic capitalism—expected to serve with equal equality, in aggressive warfare, in defense, or in

putting down a revolutionary disturbance.

The Mexican War was a war of aggression; nevertheless the character of the army was still quite different from at present. The Civil War was again revolutionary. The army was permeated with political life, despite the draft. It was not until after 1898 that a new type of army began to develop, with the characteristics of a permanent "army of occupation."

Meantime U. S. capitalism was already beginning to pass from free competition to monopoly. The United States was in process of becoming a land of trusts, with an unprecedented concentration of capitalist strength against the workers in the class struggle. In 1894 President Cleveland used federal troops against the workers in the big Pullman strike despite the protest to Governor Altgelt of Illinois, into whose state the troops were sent. From then on, use of state and federal forces to break strikes became more and more frequent.

The so-called "democratic" period of American capitalism gave place to the absolute domination of Wall Street's financial oligarchy. The United States became the American empire.

The army became an imperial army. "Join the army and see the world!" became the slogan of recruiting bureaus. American soldiers (or sailors, or marines) were stationed in the Hawaiian islands, in the Philippines, at Porto Rico, Panama, Cuba, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Central America. The Americans appeared everywhere as aliens, clearly marked off from and entirely out of sympathy with the native population which they dominated. A new type of officer appeared in the U. S. military service, the typical colonial administrator—long a familiar figure in the British colonial possessions of the Far East. Wood, Lassiter, Russell—these names indicate the development. Such military rulers naturally became thoro autocrats among their own soldiers.

Considerable sections of the soldiers themselves degenerated to the level of colonial parasitism and brutality, treating the natives with unconcealed contempt. I had several long talks with Trumbull when he came to Chicago, shortly after completing his term at Alcatraz military prison, and he recounted numerous instances where the soldiers in the Hawaiian islands went out of their way to visit indignities upon the natives. The phrase, "as good as a white man," represents the ultimate superlative in the lingo of the U. S. colonial armies.

At the same time, these very conditions tend to undermine the self-respect and morale of the soldiers—unless their isolation from the economic and political currents in the homeland can be rigidly maintained. The reactionary role of the army becomes manifest. The inner resistance to disintegrating influences is weaker. Thus when the army seems most identified with imperialism, when it would appear to be incapable of being stirred by an idea of any kind—precisely at this point is there the greatest danger of the balance being disturbed at the first contact with the facts and ideology of the class struggle.

III.

The World War supplied this contact. Professional soldiers were thrown together with freshly recruited masses and drafted men direct from the factories, mines and mills. The swollen

war army required different slogans from the old "regulars." There was a general politicization of the troops; official propaganda, tendencies and poisonous tho it was, appealed to the political consciousness of the men. Special laws even provided for soldier participation in the elections at home!

Added to such factors was the experience of the war itself—and finally, the influence of the Russian revolution.

Mutiny appeared in the American army when troops were shipped into the arctic north to fight against the Soviet forces at Archangel. The French sailors of the Black Sea fleet also mutinied when sent against the workers' and peasants' republic.

And now, years after the war, we find an American army of occupation carrying the seeds of a national liberation movement to an American colony where no such movement had previously existed! One of the primary aims of the Hawaiian Communist League, Trumbull told me, was national independence for the Hawaiian islands. Seventy-five soldiers had joined the league up to the time of its suppression.

Crouch and Trumbull noted the intense exploitation of the contract laborers from the Philippines, who toll away on the American-owned plantations for \$1.05 a day. They realized that there can be no emancipation for these workers without the overthrow of American imperialist rule. It is significant that, to accomplish their aim, they turned their eyes toward Soviet Russia, organized the Hawaiian Communist League and applied for affiliation to the Communist International. The Comintern is the rallying center of every kind of struggle against imperialist capitalism. It is the active ally of Chinese, Hindus, Moroccans, Koreans and Syrians. Why not of the Hawaiians?

Communism is the natural form in which the aid of Americans to the Hawaiian cause would express itself. The Workers (Communist) Party in this country is the ally of all American colonies and semi-colonies in their struggle for national liberation. The revolt of the colonies translates itself into support of the American working class.

There are not many Crouches and Trumbulls in the army. The forces of U. S. imperialism, at home and abroad, are the enemies of American workers as well as of the oppressed peoples of the colonies. But Crouch and Trumbull are symbols of the working class origin of the army, of its probable participation in the critical stages of the proletarian revolution. They are symbols of the Communist alliances between the revolutionary working class in the United States and the national liberation movement of the American colonies and semi-colonies.

All honor to Crouch and Trumbull true soldiers of liberty!

The Passaic Textile Workers Mass Meeting In Garfield Saturday

GARFIELD, N. J., March 25. — A meeting for the Passaic strikers will be held Saturday night, March 27, at 7:30 o'clock at the Belmont Hall, River Road and Belmont Avenue. Ben Gitlow, Charles Krumboltz and Jack Stachel will speak.