

Labor Actions To Stop the War Machine!

American workers can and must stop the monstrous killings of the Iraqi workers and poor by imperialism. The first few weeks of the war brought hundreds of thousands of demonstrators out into the streets. These demonstrations showed the spontaneous outrage of the American people and the labor movement. In San Francisco, thousands of trade unionists marched in the January 19 and January 26 mobilizations. Demonstrations alone, however, cannot stop the war or even slow the imperialist attacks against Iraq. While they are a good way to show spontaneous outrage, more is needed to dismantle the imperialist war machine. In order to win, the workers must bring the war home. They alone have the power to turn the war into a class war against the ruling classes at home.

Workers can bring the ruling class to its knees. They can cut the economic arteries of the capitalist system. *There is no other way out if the American workers and people are serious about stopping the imperialist war machine.* They can start the process of dismantling the war machine by refusing to handle shipments of supplies and equipment headed for the Gulf. Unfortunately, the self-proclaimed "leaders" of the anti-war movement refuse to consider the idea of labor actions against the war. Here we examine the reasons for this refusal, and show how to overcome the resistance of the anti-war "leadership".

At the end of January, the January 26 Mobilization (JM), the coalition behind the big demonstrations in the second week of the war, rejected a proposal by the Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (RTT) to adopt as part of the coalition's points of unity a slogan calling for labor actions to stop the US war machine. The RTT proposed the labor actions slogan to replace the pacifist, utopian, and outdated position of calling for "No War in the Middle East".

The problem with the slogan "No War in the Middle East" has always been that it does not take a side against imperialism in the war. Now, in addition, it denies the stark reality that there IS a war. The question is not how to prevent the war from starting, but how the American people can help to defeat the imperialist butchers and force them out. The majority of the anti-war movement so far refuses even to consider how this might be done other than by more protests.

JM is led by the Communist Party (CP) and Socialist Action (SA) (who claim to be "Trotskyists" but keep their mouths tightly shut when the Stalinists in the coalition denounce other groups as "Trotskyites"). JM is a cross-class anti-war coalition that includes (besides the "socialists" and "communists" who dominate it organizationally), the churches, the union bureaucracy in the Bay Area, and liberal Democrats, who provide direct representation within the coalition for the politics of the ruling class. These are the forces who supported sanctions against Iraq and who want to stop the military war against Iraq only because they would prefer it to take the form of an economic war against Iraq, enforced by a military blockade.

The representatives of the ruling class dominate the *political positions* of the coalition, while the "socialists" and "communists" (Stalinists) do the organizational work for them. JM refuses to adopt the slogan of labor actions against the war because SA and the CP know that the liberal Democrats, churches and union bureaucrats will not tolerate for a minute the prospect of anything that goes beyond peaceful preaching of "No War". The liberal Democrats

who endorse JM include John Burton, California Assemblyman from the 16th District; Harry Britt, President of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors; Charles Hayes (Democratic Congressman from Illinois), and many others. These liberals are willing to "endorse" demonstrations and even to appear at them and give speeches about the need to end the war. They know that such peaceful demonstrations will not harm the ruling class, and, instead, could exhaust the energy of the masses and leave the war effort of the ruling class intact.

The first two massive demonstrations that took place after the war started did not happen because JM or the Emergency Committee to Stop the War in the Middle East (EC) organized them. (The EC has essentially the same politics as JM. See International Trotskyist, No. 2.) They were spontaneous reactions to the war. If JM had not called the demonstration on January 26, somebody else would have, and the attendance would have been the same. The tens of thousands who took to the streets did not care about the slogans of the organizers. They wanted to register their anger against the war.

But the organizers did not give the people any idea how to stop the imperialist war machine, besides calling for another rally a few weeks later to hear the same speeches. Precisely for this reason, many will not bother to come next time. This is exactly how the liberal Democrats and their representatives in the anti-war movement diffuse the energy of the masses and demoralize them. Unless crucial developments in the war result in hundreds or thousands of American casualties (or the beginning of defeat for imperialism - an unlikely turn of events!), the next demonstrations will be much smaller, and the speeches will remain just as boring.

When the RTT proposed the slogan of labor actions against the war, SA and the CP responded that the labor movement is not ready for it. When SA and the Stalinists talk about the "labor movement", they have in mind specifically the union bureaucracy, not the rank and file of the working class. One of the main concerns expressed by

SA and the CP in response to the RTT's proposal was that if the anti-war movement called for labor actions against the war, their allies within the union bureaucracy would not organize people for the next marches and would not continue to let the anti-war movement use union halls for meetings and offices.

Thus, together with the union bureaucracy, SA and the Stalinists are bound hand and foot to the program of the liberal Democrats. Together with the bureaucracy they continually tell the workers that they are too backward to do anything independently from the ruling class. For the last 50 years, the bureaucracy has been telling the workers that the time is not ripe for the working class to break from the liberal Democrats and build an independent Workers' Party. Now SA and the Stalinists are telling us that the time is not ripe for the workers to take independent workers' actions against the war, because the union leaders object. The time, you see, will never be ripe as far as the union bureaucrats are concerned; they want to keep the Democrats and the churches in control of the political program of the anti-war movement. Thus, the so-called "socialists" in JM are controlled by the direct representatives of the ruling class via the services of the union bureaucracy.

If this is not a cross-class "alliance" between the "socialists", the union bureaucracy and the ruling class, which is designed to preserve the political backwardness of the working class under capitalism - nothing is.

The "socialist" charlatans of the JM permitted the liberal Democrats and the priests to speechify freely to hundreds of thousands, poisoning their minds with illusions, while they excluded from their speakers' platform genuine socialists who would talk openly about the need for labor actions. Prior to the January 26 march, Socialist Action and the CP defeated several proposals in the general meetings of JM that called for anti-capitalist and socialist speakers in the demonstrations. They bureaucratically suppressed the right of open socialists to speak. How can we know what the thousands of workers in the marches are willing or unwilling to do, if they don't have a chance to hear labor alternatives to the pacifist "no war" message of the liberal representatives of the ruling class and their collaborators?

Labor actions against the imperialist war machine will not be generated overnight by waving a magic wand. There is a need for time for propaganda and preparations. The organizers of the January 26 mobilization claim that dozens of union banners were carried on January 26, with thousands of rank and file union members marching behind them. If the January 26 mobilization had had the guts to call for labor actions, and had allowed speakers to present the hundreds of thousands who wanted to stop the war with such possibilities, they would have heard a massive positive reaction. The best workers would have gone to their unions and workplaces and started to discuss the issue with their co-workers. That would have laid the groundwork for later labor actions.

But the anti-war leaders who complain about working class backwardness do not even want to talk about the possibility of future labor actions against the war. Their

silence will not help to raise the political consciousness of the working class. The political backwardness of the American working class will stay exactly where it is as long as the labor movement is dormant - a prospect with which the union bureaucrats and "socialist" fakers are very comfortable.

It is impossible to initiate labor actions against the war without waging a political fight against the union bureaucracies. Their ties to capitalism have always been the chief reason for the political backwardness of the workers, and the root cause of their failure to break from the politics of the ruling class.

In the Bay Area, workers have traditionally been in the vanguard of political strikes and struggles despite the objections of the bureaucracy and their cheerleaders. In the mid-1980's, the rank and file of the ILWU (International Longshore Workers Union) conducted a political strike against apartheid despite objections from their union's bureaucracy. For several weeks, the workers refused to handle goods from South African ships. If today the workers refused to handle equipment being shipped to the Gulf, they could create an example for other workers to follow.

The ILWU allows the anti-war movement (specifically JM) to use its union hall for meetings and office space. This clearly shows where the workers stand on the war. It is SA and the Stalinists (who have members in the union) that are holding the workers back.

Unfortunately, both SA and the CP have demonstrated that they have great skill at stopping the working class instead of leading it. It is not possible to generate labor actions against the war without a program and leadership that is committed to fight capitalism and stand up to the pressure of the ruling class and its representatives in the unions. This basic truth is hundreds of times truer in times of war.

We cannot wait for the anti-war movement's "leaders" to adopt a call for labor actions against the war. They will be telling us "the working class is not ready" long after the war is already over! We must organize rank-and-file meetings in every union local to discuss the war and explore the possibility of workers' actions. We must encourage anti-war organizers in the high schools, colleges, universities and community groups, and urge them to coordinate their efforts with those of the workers.

- **Labor Actions to Smash the US War Machine - Victory to Iraq!**
- **Students Boycott all Classes! Occupy the Colleges and Schools!**
- **Turn the Imperialist War into a Class War - the Real Enemy Is at Home!**
- **Break with the Democrats and Republicans - Murderers of the Iraqi People! Build a Labor Party!**