Military Training at the Leagues' Schools

By WILL HERBERG

"An oppressed class that does not strive to learn to use arms . . . deserves to remain in slavery."
—LENIN.

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THE decision to incorporate some elementary forms of military training (drill, etc.) into the curriculum of the Young Workers (Communist) League Summer Schools has caused a certain amount of surprise and perhaps a trace of opposition among even some sections of the party membership. This reaction is not entirely unexpected.

America, Land of Pacifism.

America is the classic land of pacifism. In America petty bourgeois pacifism has unfortunately left deep traces on the labor movement and even on the more advanced elements. We cannot here go into the well-known historical reasons for this, but it is an obvious fact that until the influence of the proletariat revolution in Russia began to be left in America practically the entire opposition to militarism and war in the labor movement revolved within the narrow limits of pacifism; it is characteristic that "conscientious objection" developed as the most popular and recognized "weapon" against the world war. Really revolutionary ideas on militarism and war came to the fore only towards the end of the war when the most elementary lessons of Bolshevism and the Russian revolution began to absorbed. It needs no long discussion to prove that in the American movement traditions of pacifism are strong and traditions of revolutionary-Leninist struggle against bourgeois militarism and imperialist war very weak. Pacifism still exercises its influence in the labor and revolutionary movements. . . .

Pacifist Opposition to Training.

The "shock" some feel when they hear of the military training in the league schools is a clear manifestation of these pacifist remnants. Some immediately raise the question: "But isn't the league

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AGAINST military training? What kind of face will you have when, on the one hand, you fight military training in the City College of New York and other colleges, and, on the other, you institute military training in your own schools?" Others, however, are not so "naive", they are "for" the military training "in principle"—but they raise all kinds of arguments against it "in practice"—"We aren't prepared for it now," "It'll bring all kinds of 'trouble,'" and so on, arguments that amount to the same thing in the end.

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TO produce such "shocks" was precisely one of the objectives for instituting military training in our schools; that is, to dramatize in clearest possible form our Leninist position on militarism and to utilize this to effect a real work of clarification. Already some good results in this direction have been obtained.

Not Against All Militarism.

Our Leninist position on militarism and war is very clear aad certain. We are NOT against war and against militarism "as such." We are against IMPERIALIST war; we are against BOURGEOIS militarism (i. e., the militarization of the proletarian and farmer youth to fight in the interests of the bourgeois-ie). But we are in favor of REVOLUTIONARY wars (wars of oppressed colonial peoples against the imperialist powers, civil wars of proletarian revolution); we are in favor of the military training of the proletarian youth to learn to use arms in the interests of their class and against the bourgeoisie. "An oppressed class that does not strive to learn to use arms . . . deserves to remain in slavery" (Lenin). We are therefore opposed to pacifism (which opposes, "as a matter of principle" ALL war and ALL military training) just as fundamentally as we are to bourgeois militarism and in fighting against the influence of bourgeois militarism and jingoism over the working class youth, we must at the same time fight just as energetically against the influence of pacifism. Pacifism is a deadly poison to a class fighting for its emancipation; in present-day relations pacifism is a most useful support and prop for imperialism. To break the pacifist illusions of many elements of the working class youth and to win the youth away from both jingoism and pacifism to the revolutionary class struggle is one of our most important tasks.

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BECAUSE of perspective of revolutionary struggle, we are willing, yes, anxious, to have the proletarian youth learn the use of arms—especially the most advanced sections of the young workers—for this training on the part of the working class is a very necessary prerequisite for the proletarian revolution. "The bourgeoisie has militarized the entire people—now it is militarizing the youth. Tomorrow, perhaps, it will militarize the women. So much the better! So much the faster do things go forward—so much nearer is the armed uprising against the bourgeoisie" (Lenin). Our main task, of course, is to prevent the young workers who are being militarized from becoming traitors to their class; it consists in winning them for the proletarian class struggle and getting them to use their training for the benefit of the workers and not against their own class. This is our main task and this attitude is in no contradiction to—on the contrary, it clearly falls in with—our bitter and most determined struggle against new imperialist wars and bourgeois militarism.

It is not, however, for the actual military instruction, that military training was included in our school curriculum. We realize very well that under present conditions and for the next period of time, the chief way for us to obtain military instruction is in the military organizations of the bourgeoisie (regular forces, National Guard, military schools, R. O. T. C., C. M. T. C., etc.). (Of course, as Comrade Gorkic points out, Jugendinternationale, May, 1928, the sending of our comrades into these bourgeois military institutions "implies no rejection whatever of the attempt to set up a class organization of the proletariat to provide military training for young workers"). Our chief reason for including military instruction in our schools is to make clear, in a way that mere teaching cannot itself accomplish, to the students, to the league as a whole, and to the young workers, our Leninist position on the question of militarism and our complete differentiation from the pacifists. And here also we are having success.

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Correcting Pacifist Errors.

THE American league has had some experience with pacifism. It was not so very long ago that we were very correctly branded as having committed some of the worst pacifist errors—and the fault was not all ours, but was shared by the whole movement. Since then, however, under the closest direction of the Young Communist International, we have gone a good way towards stamping out the last remnants of pacifism in our own league ranks, and in carrying on a broad propaganda of the Leninist principles of militarism and war among the young workers, but we can even now record to our credit some success in actual anti-militarist activities, some noteworthy accomplishments. But the important thing above all is that we are on the right track. . . .