

THE
CASE
AGAINST
ROTC

Despite the unpopularity of the Vietnam War, many people remained convinced that the United States military serves the freedom, democracy, and best interests of the people of the Third World. A military is necessary, they maintain, to contain the forces of Communism. And they see ROTC as a positive means of supplying capable leadership for the "forces of freedom", particularly a ROTC program which includes extensive liberal arts training. Even many opponents of ROTC somewhat share this view, limiting their demands to the abolition of academic credit for ROTC courses which are insufficiently academic.

But let's examine the relevant facts concerning America's foreign and military policy somewhat more thoroughly.

AMERICAN INDUSTRIAL CIVILIZATION: IMPERIALISM ABROAD

"This war is a war for civilization," said the late Francis Cardinal Spellman in his 1966 Christmas Eve message to the U.S. troops in Vietnam. "Less than victory is inconceivable." Now three years later it is obvious to many that the war in Vietnam never has been for civilization, nor is victory conceivable.

The Vietnam War is uncivilized to many liberal Americans because the killing, hunger, and landlord oppression smashes their traditional ideas of peace, morality, and social justice. To many illiberal Americans the War is not necessarily uncivilized; rather it is senseless because it has brought defeat, high taxes, and inflation.

Really the War is neither uncivilized nor senseless. It is the logical outgrowth of a policy which has evolved over a hundred years to protect the interests of the giant corporations which are the power centers of American industrial civilization. Over time that policy has been directed against different targets: in the nineteenth century, when America had plentiful and cheap natural resources and there was no need to look abroad for them, the government was interested in repressing the labor movement. Later, with the growth of American industry and the depletion of natural resources at home, American corporations began seeking abroad for raw materials. Especially in Latin America, but also in our Philippine colony and in some parts of Africa, American firms built smelters and refineries and opened plantations. When any of these investments were threatened by local unrest, the American government intervened to protect them.

Even a partial list of such military interventions is long:

- Hawaii in 1893 to protect American sugar growers who had opened plantations in the previously independent kingdom
- Cuba in 1898 to annex good sugar cane and cattle from the Spanish; in 1933 to protect that sugar and cattle land; in 1961 with the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion to prevent a popular revolutionary government from exporting its revolution to other American-dominated countries,

and to recover for corporations like Texaco Oil and the American Sugar Company their expropriated properties.

- Guatemala in 1954 to overthrow a reform government which wanted to buy the United Fruit Company's vast plantations and redistribute them among the peasants. Now the U.S. has 1000 "advisors" in Guatemala to train the government army to suppress a popular revolution which wants to expropriate those plantations.
- Spain, where today American troops undergo training to intervene in case of civil unrest.

With the exception of black people, the main thrust of American repression seems to be abroad. It is in the Third World and in the black ghettos that people are most obviously being screwed. However, American imperialism does not all fall on poor nations. American companies have moved into the developed consumer goods' markets of Canada and Europe. (Over 65% of Canadian industry is owned and controlled by American corporations.) American firms have invested in these developed markets for the same reason that they invested in the natural resources of the Third World: profits are higher than they would be on similar investments in the U.S. One recent study concludes that an average foreign investment yields a profit twice as high as the same investment would in the U.S. It is no wonder that de Gaulle hated America; not only were American firms encroaching on France's investments and markets in her old colonies, but also were taking over French industry at home.

AMERICAN INDUSTRIAL CIVILIZATION: IMPERIALISM AT HOME

The issue of imperialism at home seems a nebulous one. Since the coming of unions, there has been little overt oppression of labor, and scenes like the one in 1937 when the East Chicago cops killed striking steelworkers have vanished. There are two possible reasons for this lack of oppression. One is that American companies have been able to give American labor a greater share of domestic income and maintain their profits by expanding abroad. Another, not necessarily contradictory explanation, is that workers, by organizing, have forced American corporations to give them higher wages, and the corporations have grudgingly gone along. Each explanation pictures the American worker as basically content with the lack of overt oppression.

Nevertheless, each explanation ignores the subtle oppressions suffered by the American worker: forced overtime, unsafe working conditions, co-opted union stewards, bosses who never cease reminding you that you're lazy, stupid, stubborn and sloppy. Further, an inflation which began in 1965 with the massive American intervention in Vietnam, coupled with the 10% surtax, has eroded workers' paychecks. Today factory workers' real wages (that is, money wages adjusted for cost-of-living changes) are lower than in 1958, a recession year. (Wall Street Journal) American workers have paid in inflation and higher taxes for a war which benefits the expansionary interests of their bosses.

The domestic oppression of American minorities is more obvious: the pig in the ghetto, the slumlord, the crew boss on a pickle or cherry plantation, the usurer, the Mafia numbers runner or heroin pusher. In a sense Blacks, Mexicans, Indians, Orientals, or poor Whites living in America are each oppressed nations. But having no land, they are not nations which the powers of American industrial civilization want to exploit for their natural resources. Rather they are sources of cheap labor and markets for shoddy and overpriced goods. Since the beginnings of industrial America, business corporations have played off minorities one against the other: the melting pot is not the correct metaphor for American society. In the 1860s the railways and fruit growers brought in Chinese and Irish to replace expensive homegrown labor. Later Jews and Italians were brought in to reduce the textile and shoe wages. Likewise, the Poles were brought into the coal industry. In the 1930s auto and steel companies brought up blacks from the South to work as strikebreakers. In California today Mexican and Filipino migrants are set against each other. It is little wonder that there were anti-Irish and anti-Chinese riots in the 1860s; that the terms "wop" and "kike" took over from "mackerel snapper" and "kraut" in the '20s; and that there were widespread riots during World War II. However, the real enemies were not the blacks, hillbillies, dagos, or Polaks; rather they were and are today the corporations who have an economic stake in racism.

THE PROTECTION OF IMPERIALISM

American industrial civilization accurately can be called imperialism. When those oppressed by imperialism organize to rid themselves of it, troops are called out. Some instances of this process have already been mentioned. The most obvious example today is the Vietnam war.

America's intervention in Vietnam is a logical result of American imperialism's natural desire to protect itself. We need only read the statements of officials of the Truman-Eisenhower-Kennedy-Johnson-Nixon administration. Speechwriter Richard Goodwin: "We made these decisions to intervene, because in the judgments of the Presidents, American power and interests demanded it." (New York Times, Feb. 5, 1967) Henry Cabot Lodge echoed him while he was an ambassador to Saigon: "Vietnam does not exist in a geographical vacuum --- from it large storehouses of wealth and population can be influenced and undermined." (Boston Globe, Feb. 28, 1965) And Senator Gale McGee of Wyoming carried their analysis a step further: "That empire in Southeast Asia is the last major resource area outside the control of any one of the major powers on the globe.... I believe that the condition of the Vietnamese people and the direction in which their future may be going, are at this stage secondary, not primary." (U.S. Senate speech, Feb. 17, 1965) As in Cuba, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico, Spain, Greece, China, Iran, and South Africa, the United States intervenes and kills to protect the profits of the corporate centers of American power. In this context, the military is not only bad because it kills, but because it oppresses as well.

IMPERIALISM AT THE UNIVERSITY: ITS NEUTRALITY EXAMINED

The University of Michigan is directly involved in international and domestic imperialism. The U of M has substantial investments in enterprises such as General Motors (which exploits the apartheid policy in South Africa) and Dow Chemical (makers of napalm --- which the University through its stock has voted to continue every year). As well, a vast amount of research on this campus is devoted to Third World countries in which the United States and its giant industries have an intimate interest. This includes discoveries and uses of natural resources on which industry can capitalize; and it includes thorough studies of the local political climate, with which local elites --- and the U.S. advisors --- can actively plan the best methods of coercion and control.

Domestically, the University social science faculty constantly strives for greater understanding of political behavior and attitudes, often to the ends of creating predictor devices (including the use of game theory for war making). Much of the research at the Institute for Social Research anticipates this coercive end --- including methods of pressure for attitude change.

But the most distasteful aspect of the University's complicity remains war research, which continues to explore methods of discovery and destruction for counter-insurgency forces--such as The Night Vision Aids at the U of M Institute of Science and Technology, a Navy-sponsored study of river traffic in Thailand (geography Dept.), an Army-sponsored study of seismic artillery (I.S.T. --- classified), etc.

The "neutral" University has further affirmed its place in the imperialist scheme by allotting to the faculty the power to enforce prosecution on anyone not enrolled in class who suggests topics other than the faculty member's lecture --- although just last spring the University fired two faculty members (Julian Gendell of the Chemistry Dept., and Thomas Mayer of the Sociology Dept.) for their political views and practices. In the present situation the instructor need not explain his action nor persuade the "outsider" that his lecture notes are more relevant than the outsider's message. Nor must he consult with his students.

But this has always been true of ROTC. Military law forbids anyone in the armed services from criticizing, defending, or even discussing Defense Department policy (Uniform Code of Military Justice). Even in the "liberalized" ROTC the future military scientist must maintain the military attitude of "yours not to reason why; yours but to do --- or die." It is imperative that he convey this attitude to his own men when he becomes an officer.

THE NEED FOR R.O.T.C.

The military itself acknowledges the need for ROTC officers. To quote Col. Pell, former commandant of the now defunct ROTC at Harvard:

"Today, reliance upon colleges and universities for officers is greater than ever. For example, the 1968 graduating classes contained over 11,000 newly commissioned officers who, as they enter the ranks of the Active Army, will find 85% of the required annual input needed to provide the junior leaders for today's troops. More than 1100 of these young men will become career officers to furnish the hardcore leadership for the future. It is very evident that the present mission of ROTC is the production of officers...

The armed forces simply cannot function... without an officer corps comprised largely of college graduates... Who is prepared to trust their sons--let alone the national destiny--to the leadership of high school boys and college drop-outs?...

There is no acceptable program...at this time to substitute for ROTC as a broad based source of college-educated citizen-soldier leaders... About 45% of all army officers currently on active duty are ROTC graduates: 65% of our 1st Lieutenants and 85% of our 2nd Lieutenants come from ROTC...

The anti-ROTC extremists apparently do not accept the criticality of ROTC...They persist in the notions that the armed forces will continue to exist and perform their functions, somehow, without ROTC....

ROTC is under attack...because a small group of student extremists... have played upon the inherent anti-war sentiment shared by a majority of peace-loving, traditionally isolationist Americans...(Let it be understood...beyond question that there is at present no acceptable alternative source of junior officer leadership if ROTC is driven from the college campus.)..." (MEMORANDUM TO: Members of the Faculty Committee on Educational Policy; other Harvard Administration and Faculty Leaders, Dec. 4, 1968)

This is confirmed by the fact that many draftees, including many with less than a college education, are offered an opportunity to become officers in the Army or in the Marine Corps. And the 1964 "ROTC Revitalization Act" has freely funded ROTC programs in high schools--projected to 1200 units by 1971--some of them compulsory.

THE "LIBERALIZED ROTC PROGRAM": WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

ROTC proponents will maintain that they have "liberalized the program by including LSA courses in history, political science, psychology, etc. These programs, they contend, provide better-rounded and sympathetic officers, who are better equipped to fulfill their roles as leaders.

But let's consider this in the context of written and unwritten military procedure and tradition, which aims first and foremost at the success of the mission. Even non-combatant medics (conscientious objectors in the armed forces) learn that they must return the injured soldier to duty as soon as possible. And the raw recruit must know that the spirit of the bayonet is to KILL--as signs and top sergeants throughout basic training will remind him.

As Michael Wittles of the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, an ex-GI who has done an extensive amount of counselling of servicemen, has observed, "No group, even blacks or Indians, is more discriminated against than GI's."

Viewing the "liberalized ROTC program" in this context, we see that it aims at easier, more plausible manipulation of servicemen. The officer's job is to maintain an effective fighting unit, a duty which the Defense Dept. believes a "liberal" ROTC education will facilitate. Certainly, junior officers have no say in the policies and strategies which affect their men. Witness, for example, the recent refusal of a small troop who refused (suicidal) orders in Vietnam. Although the officer in charge expressed sympathy, he was ordered by the troop commander to lie to and coerce them into continuing the fight. When this failed, the matter was turned over to a veteran top sergeant, who succeeded with his lies and coercion (apparently the officer had not graduated in a "liberalized ROTC program").

In this manner ROTC officers could likewise exercise a co-optive effect on the increasing numbers of GI's critical of the military style, of the War, and of blatant discrimination in the military. The authoritarian structure of the military continues, but it badly needs a quasi-liberal elasticity to maintain its fundamental rigidity.

The increased opportunity for draft deferments and scholarships further suggests this. Besides the obvious advantage for the individual, this program also strives to guarantee the maximum number of well-trained officers needed by the military. It adheres closely to the policy of manpower channeling practiced by the Defense Department.

As many people know, one can keep a Defense Department loan only so long as he doesn't participate in any major disruption while in college. Furthermore, he doesn't have to repay the full loan if he pursues an occupation approved by the government. This practice is proudly described in a Selective Service document, "Channeling":

"...In the Selective Service System the term "deferment" has been used millions of times to describe the method and means to attract to the kind of service considered to be most important, the individuals who were not compelled to do it. The club of induction has been used to drive out of areas considered to be less important to the areas of greater importance in which deferments were given, the individual who did not or could or could not participate in activities which were considered essential to the defense of the Nation. The Selective Service System anticipates further evolution in this area...."

From the individual's viewpoint, he is standing in a room which has been made uncomfortably warm. Several doors are open, but they lead to various forms of recognized, patriotic service to the Nation. Some accept the alternatives gladly--some with reluctance. The consequences are approximately the same....("Channeling" in Selective Service Orientation Kit, July, 1965),

all of which somewhat obscures the fact that the Selective Service must first fulfill Defense Dept. manpower quotas.

In these and other ways the military imposes its structure on human beings, who have no voice in its architecture. This is the essential evil of ROTC. Its designated place in the structure negates any claims of "liberalization" to fit the changing times. ROTC first and foremost must supply maximally efficient manpower for the needs of the military and U.S. imperialism.

WE DEMAND COMPLETE ABOLITION OF ROTC

First, the argument that ROTC graduates have an "humanizing" impact on the U.S. military establishment is indefensible. In the first place, whether or not corporate-serving U.S. multiversities "liberally educate" anyone is open to question. Beyond that, one must ask what appreciable effect a "humane" ROTC graduate could have on U.S. military conduct. Upon entering service as a junior officer, the ex-cadet faces a limited set of options: either implement the political and military strategy required by and in the interest of the U.S. corporate-military-political elite or face military "justice". Hopes of eventually attaining policy-making rank are mere delusions: those officers with inadequate devotions to the political-economic and strategic assumptions of U.S. military policy are simply not promoted. Differences of opinion among the Joint Chiefs of Staff concern only tactics and low-level strategy, not fundamental political premises. Reactionaries, such as Curtis Lemay and Edwin Walker, and liberals, such as Maxwell Taylor, differ only on the question of how to suppress popular revolutionary movements.

Second, We must emphasize that we do NOT demand the complete abolition of ROTC because of its lack of academic rigor, or because of the University's financial support of the program, or because of a need to cleanse the U of M of contaminating influences. It may be, as the SACUA report asserted, that the content of most ROTC courses is "cheaply moralistic" and "propogandistic". But even if the ROTC program consisted only of courses in aeronautical navigation, naval ballistics, and other courses requiring knowledge of science and engineering, our opposition to ROTC would continue. Nor do we think it is a mere matter of the U of M discontinuing its rent-free space and maintenance and expelling ROTC from the campus.

The significance of ROTC as a political issue is much more fundamental than these details. Its significance even extends beyond any question about the "purity" of the University. The U. of M.'s complicity as an instrument of American militarism and imperialism would not end even if the ROTC program were suddenly to evaporate. The North Campus and Willow Run labs which develop advanced military hardware and techniques would continue to function. The Business School and Area Studies programs which train government and corporate executives of the U.S. global imperium would maintain its operations. Social science research which develops manipulative techniques for pacifying oppressed American blacks and Third World peasants, rather than meeting their just demands, would still receive corporate-serving foundation grants.

We all must recognize that ROTC is an integral part of the military-imperialist machine. If all of us who oppose the Vietnam War realize this and actively work to abolish ROTC, we shall have advanced an important step in building the movement towards all people taking control over their own lives. Passive opposition to imperialism is meaningless; the machine ignores mere words.