Published on *League for the Fifth International* (http://www.fifthinternational.org)

Revolutionary women: Helen Keller

Wed, 31/03/2010 - 20:03

"Strike against war, for without you no battles can be fought!" Here we look at the life of Helen Keller as part of our series on revolutionary women in history

Many people have heard of Helen Keller, the blind and deaf woman who learned to talk when her friends wrote sign language on her hands.

Films have been made about her and Christian charities all over the world claim her as their own.

But no-one mentions a key fact about Helen Keller: she was a communist who fought for workers? revolution.

Well-known for her extraordinary strength in the face of her dual disability, Helen Keller began to attract criticism when her socialist views became known.

In her 1912 essay How I became a socialist, she told how she first came across anticapitalist ideas by reading books, socialist newspapers and the programme of the mass socialist party in Germany. Aware of this, the millionaire newspaper Brooklyn eagle launched a patronising attack on her, claiming her ?mistakes spring out of the manifest limitations of her development.?

She replied with cold fury: ?Oh, ridiculous Brooklyn Eagle! What an ungallant bird it is! Socially blind and deaf, it defends an intolerable system... The Eagle and I are at war.?

In 1913, campaigning for votes for women, Helen Keller was quick to point out that passive pleading would get nowhere and that the fight for women?s suffrage is a class battle, and added: ?Nearly all the opportunities, educational and political, that woman has acquired have been gained by a march of conquest with a skirmish at every post.?

Within two years class war had transformed into imperialist war as Europe descended into fratricidal slaughter. Helen Keller was appalled at the shameful support the leaders of the official socialist parties gave to the war. Alongside the left wing of the movement, she called for active opposition from workers, to turn the war of brother against brother into a war of the whole working class against capitalism:

?Strike against all ordinances and laws and institutions that continue the slaughter of peace and the butcheries of war. Strike against war, for without you no battles can be fought. Strike against manufacturing shrapnel and gas bombs and all other tools of murder. Strike against preparedness that means death and misery to millions of human being. Be not dumb, obedient slaves in an army of destruction. Be heroes in an army of construction.?

When the First World war came to an end and the workers took power in Russia, Keller backed the revolution enthusiastically, and fought to rally opposition to the imperialist powers? blockade of the Soviet Republic.On the death of Lenin, she pointed out that the lessons of the Russian Revolution are key to humanity?s future:

?I see the furrow Lenin left sown with the unshatterable seed of a new life for mankind, and cast deep below the rolling tides of storm and lightning, mighty crops for the ages to reap.?

Source URL: http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/revolutionary-women-helen-keller