

Experiences of Communist Organizing in the U.S. Army

INTRODUCTION

"Hello, Joe? Denny here. Listen—I'm still at the induction center. I gave out the leaflets, disrupted the physical, made some speeches about the imperialist war in Vietnam—you know, I said I was a communist, that we needed revolution, all that. But the sons of bitches still took me! What do you think I ought to do now?"

"Organize. Good luck!"

Thus the Progressive Labor Party began its work in the bosses' armed forces in 1966, with the drafting of one of its members. Up to that date, no one had been accepted from PL. The party had fought against going into the service to organize. The job was too difficult, our cadre were inexperienced, and other similar rationalizations were used. The experience of Davis turned around the party's thinking on the matter. We began the major organized, anti-imperialist, pro-working class campaign inside the army, an effort which lasted for 7 years. This article is an effort to trace the development of that struggle.

Who are our friends and who are our enemies in the armed forces? One starts by looking at the role of the armed forces as a whole. They are the trump cards of the capitalist state, wielded in the interests of the boss class alone. As a part of the state, the armed forces hold a peculiar relation to the material forces of production. They do not produce value, although they are essential to the production of any value. Without the armed forces (and other state organs), capitalism could not resist the rebellions of workers.

As a system of social relations, the army is peculiar. There is not a ceaseless effort by the brass to exploit surplus-value from soldiers (like bosses do from workers). It is not unusual for soldiers to have absolutely nothing to do in terms of production. A frequent complaint is boredom or chickenshit assignments. On the other hand, the legal relations resemble indentured servitude. You may not quit a job, as can a "free" worker. You do not have legal hours of work. You do not have 'due process' as in the civilian criminal sys-

tem. (Not that due process is observed in most civilian cases; at least it is there 'legally'). You are required to perform whatever tasks you are ordered to do—including the murder of fellow workers. Unionization is, of course, illegal. So-called 'bourgeois' democratic rights don't exist.

Because the social structure of the army does vary significantly from typical capitalist factory relations, the presence of the army in the midst of capitalist relations jeopardizes its special forms. Soldiers who see their friends and neighbors working a 40-hour week with some benefits, free to quit their job if they want to, become particularly discontented with the restrictions which the army puts on them. This discontent is magnified when the GI realizes that he has been bamboozled into enlisting by a lying recruiter in the first place! Life on the outside is not particularly rosy, of course. The 40-hour week becomes increasingly a myth, as families work several jobs just to make ends meet. Nevertheless, the myth is there, and it has a powerful effect on the average GI's thinking.

The army responds to the external pressure of normal capitalist relations in two ways. On the one hand, it tries to hide, to isolate its soldiers from civilians. The army is a self-sustained operation, complete with internal guard duty, internal KP, internal garbage collection (police calls, "asses and elbows"), internal recreation, and physical requirements to differentiate soldiers from civilians (haircuts and uniforms). In World War II, you could be courtmartialed for wearing civilian clothes in your own home while on leave!

Anti-war sentiment, and anti-military sentiment, were important aspects of the civilian population during the Vietnam era. The effects of these sentiments on the soldiers were dangerous to the brass. The result was to begin to move major troop bases away from population centers, where there were large concentrations of workers. Ft. Dix (near New York City, and the center of much struggle) has been virtually closed down, several other bases have been closed down entirely, and



Ft. Hood GI's hold an anti-war march, 1971

the bases located in the Louisiana swamps and the forests of Missouri have been strengthened (CAMP News, May 1973).

While attempting to reinforce isolation from the civilian population, certain concessions have been forced on the military during the 60s and 70s as political consciousness and struggle developed both in the army and in the population at large. The proximity of the civilian world began to take its toll on army life. Thus, civilian KPs were hired—at slave wages—to replace GIs who were particularly disgusted with this extra duty. The command structure began to emphasize the 40-hour week as a standard, with “comp time” for overtime and special duties. Civilian clothes could be worn off-duty, and even appearance standards ebbed. Moustaches were legalized, sideburns crept down, hair grew longer, boots glistened less—not that the army really wanted to do this, but these were the minimum reforms which they could make which, they thought, could stave off the tremendous rebelliousness of this period.

THESE REFORMS DID NOT BRING INTO QUESTION the central role of the army—repression. They were sops forced onto the service by rebelliousness, and because one of the standards by which GIs judged their oppression was how they stood vis-a-vis the civilian population. And because these reforms did nothing to alter the fundamental internal contradiction of the armed forces themselves—that is, the subjugation of

workers to the brass for the purpose of fighting sharply against their class interest—they failed to stop the rebelliousness of the troops.

The army which imperialism requires cannot be bought with promises of long hair, 40-hour work-weeks, and educational benefits. The army requires, in its active, war-time phase especially, a strong combination of coercion and false consciousness to be at all reliable. Patriotism, racism and anti-communism are important ideological elements of false consciousness which are fostered through indoctrination, lies and training. But the most important element of false consciousness is defeatism, that you can't beat the army. It is the desired product of the continual coercion meted out to GIs, from the day they step off the bus to their last salute to their company commander. Our party's experience proves that all these elements of false consciousness can be defeated through struggle, and that the grip the army holds over the masses of enlistees is slim indeed.

Central to the needs of the imperialist army is a respected or feared chain of command. It is important to recognize both the similarities and differences between the chain of command of the army and that of industry. While superficially similar (officer, NCO (non-commissioned officer), EM (enlisted men) vs. management, foremen, workers), an examination of the military chain itself reveals some peculiarities that revolutionaries must consider in discovering their friends within the structure of the armed forces.

THE CLASS STRUCTURE OF THE ARMY

The officer corps is made up of highly indoctrinated lackeys. The highest level officers are almost all West Pointers, with a crusty tradition of mindless service to capitalism. Their promotion through the ranks is based on their willingness to carry out their orders without question, and on their ability to carry them out. During peacetime, the absurdity of their antics is clearest. They lose sleep over parades, inspections, and over who gets to kiss the superior's ass the most and with the most gusto. In war, the same principles apply. The body count is primary—whoever gets the most bodies gets the promotion. The field grade officers and above—the career officers—are reliable agents of capitalism. They are trained in slavishness and commandism. They are thoroughly bourgeois. There is no way to ally with them. They must be destroyed without mercy.

Junior officers—captains and below—fall into three main categories. Some of them are career soldiers who just haven't gotten rank. They are really just like the ones mentioned above. They have to be wiped out. Some junior officers vacillate, however. Many are in the service because the army paid their way to school. Some opportunistically went through ROTC or OCS to avoid the unpleasantness of being a grunt. Naturally they drip with bourgeois habits. But they are not committed and loyal to imperialism the way the career officers are. In some situations, particularly situations of sharp struggle like in Vietnam, they will desert their fellow officers because they opportunistically see it in their interests to do so. Occasionally a junior officer can even be won over ideologically to a socialist perspective. This second group of officers is unstable, and often dangerous to the working class movements, because it is within this group that bourgeois misleadership can develop the most easily, precisely because of their background, training, and position in the army. When they fight for reform, it is only in the most legalistic framework; they constantly backtrack, and usually end up turning on the working class forces to save their own ass. Nevertheless, we must be aware of some junior officers who can be useful, if they are kept in a secondary role in the struggle.

THE THIRD GROUP OF OFFICERS INCLUDES the professionals—the doctors, lawyers, and clergy. Often the two former groups are drafted or join for opportunist reasons, that is, for scholarships through medical or law school. Some of them can play an important role in the struggle. Doctors can fight against the butchery that goes on in military hospitals. Lawyers can sometimes help in the fight against the UCMJ. The professionalism, opportunism, and individualism of this third group makes them unreliable in any real struggle. They are prone to dramatic gestures, such as that of Dr. Levy in Vietnam, which do not contribute in any great measure to the development of the working class movement.

As for the clergy, forget it. They can occasionally be useful the way congressmen can be useful



Lawrence, Mass. Striking textile workers are stopped from marching by riot control GI's, Jan. 12, 1912.

in a particular individual problem. But as an ally in the mass struggle, they are useless. In fact, while in general we can say that the clergy in the society at large is at best a questionable ally in a very few cases, in the army even those few cases are hard to find. The "Christian Soldiers" in the army are the most reactionary of all clergy.

The armed forces are aware that the last two categories of officers vacillate. The brass deliberately set out to separate and isolate all officers from enlisted men, in terms of clubs, mess halls, "Military Courtesy," and job differences. Even the most progressive junior officer is constantly under pressure to move into ideological acceptance and alliance with the military tradition.

Non-commissioned officers are the transmission belt between the officers and the enlisted men. They have come from the ranks of the EM, and have "risen" above them. Very few NCOs consider themselves successful. They generally are cynical about life, are in for their 20 (or 30) so they can retire, and above all do not wish to rock the boat. They feel themselves trapped in their role, because most of them have failed in the outside world, and have turned to the army for security, much as a baby clings to a ragged teddy bear. To lose their position in the army would be a tremendous blow, for that would mean ultimate failure, since they have already "failed" in the much tougher "outside world." The NCO often turns to the army to escape the class struggle raging "out there," where he is not sure what to

do, and does not have the stomach to join with the working class struggle.

The senior NCOs, then, carry out their orders, channel their resentment into constant attacks on EM, and because of their fear of losing their job or missing a promotion, they will go berserk over little details, like the quality of the paint job on the barracks steps.

Naturally, to justify this kind of disgusting parasitical existence to himself, the senior NCO internalizes the propaganda of the military tradition. He is difficult to shake in his beliefs. He is, in short, an asshole.

There are some important distinctions among NCOs, however. They include the lifer versus the career man, the senior versus the junior, and the black versus the white.

THE LIFER IS SIMPLY AN EXAGGERATED case of the general NCO. He bellows, fumes, harasses, and believes what he has been told about communists, about how EM have to be repressed continually to make men out of them. These lifers have carried the process of internalizing military myth to the point of pink-elephant hallucination. The product is the kind of animal who orders basic trainees to walk over a fellow trainee who is obviously having convulsions. These lifers should be exterminated. They often become objects of struggle because of their intimate messing over of the day-to-day life of the EM.

Career NCOs tend to be cynical about everything. Sometimes they can be talked into doing an EM favors on an individual basis. They will not stick their neck out. Sometimes they will look the other way, however. They are sad cases of degenerate human beings, whose asses tend to spread until they slip over both sides of the seats of their chairs as they drown in coffee.

Junior NCOs often plan on getting out at the end of their current enlistment. They are unreliable usually, since they are after a clean record above all. Sometimes they get mad enough to do something, but not often.

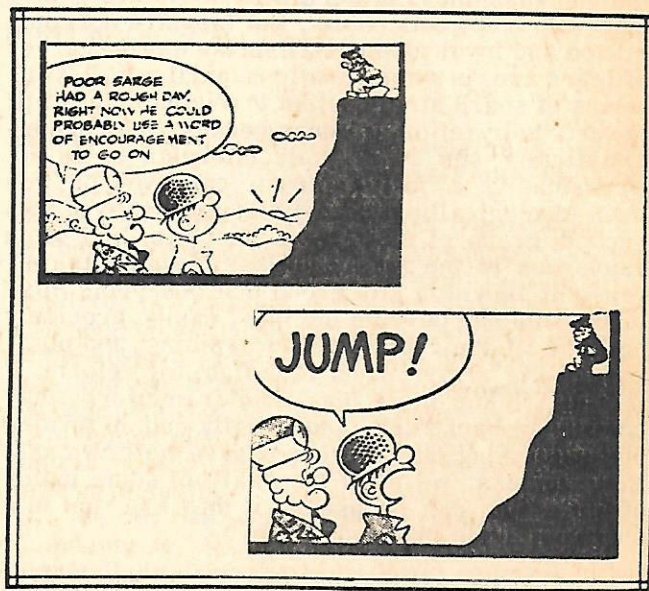
Many black NCOs are examples of capitulation to racism. Fearing to confront discrimination head on, they hide their heads under Uncle Sam's beard like other NCOs. As a group they are the most defeatist and cynical about the army. They are fully aware of racism, but fear to do anything about it. In contrast, many white NCOs actively seek ego-gratification and actually come to believe the racist patriotic horseshit spouted in the classes on subversion and espionage. Naturally NCOs vary widely individually. But none of them can really be relied on to carry any struggle through to the end. Any movement they lead is doomed to be half-assed, non-militant, and a loser in the long run. Although there are some friendly forces among NCOs, they must be kept in the background of any struggle.

Despite their qualitatively different backgrounds, then, junior officers and NCOs play a common role in the class struggle in the armed forces.

Then, of course, come the enlisted men and

women. Here is where the action is. The distinction between the draftee and the enlisted man is insignificant. Most enlisted personnel were tricked into joining, or forced as a last resort in their efforts to find a job. They universally discover that the recruiter was a lying SOB, and they are sometimes madder than the draftee at having been shanghaied into a slave army.

There are important differences among the EM, however, which themselves are based largely on the class background of the EM. Students and workers were drafted into the Vietnam era army, and the dichotomy this represents in terms of background is translated into the clerk/grunt stratification. Often, the students do the office jobs, the workers the shit work. Not that many students escape, but some end up in a relatively powerful position, such as filling out the morning report and leave requests. The combination of their class background and the working condition this background leads them into in the service can lead them into an erroneous alliance with the brass or NCOs. Not that this is the dominant form of clerk. Most of them hate the army as much as the young workers, and are reliable in struggle.



WORKERS—MAIN FORCE FOR CHANGE

But at the core of any struggle is the grunt. The basic soldier. The man with the gun. The man with the wrench. The woman with the bedpan. The woman within the typing pool. The man with the cigarette-butt detail. The person being harassed for the length of hair. Like in society at large, blacks are overrepresented in these, the crappiest jobs in the service, the jobs most likely to get you killed. It is within this group that you find people willing to wholeheartedly fight the brass. It is within this group that one finds people with some trade union experience which they can bring to bear in organizing the fight.

GIs are mainly young, full of fight, and ready to go. But because of their youth, they do not have the kind of stable ties that marriage provides and that maturity brings, so often they are somewhat unstable in the fight. The army uses this fact, of course, and builds on it by frequent transfers, preventing the formation of a solid footing for the young soldier, trying to get him to identify with the unit as a whole (including officers and NCOs) rather than with his fellow GI. But despite these shortcomings, the soldiers form a militant section of the working class. Communists must join the service to provide an alternative structure and leadership to the GIs who are ready to fight.

THE FRIENDS, THEN ARE THE GIs. THE enemy is the top brass, fronting for their capitalist bosses (often being the same class as the capitalist bosses, tied together financially, socially, and politically). In between lie servants of the brass, whose loyalties in some cases may be undermined. As the struggle sharpens, as in Vietnam, the defections to the side of the GIs increase as the junior officers and NCOs try to protect themselves opportunistically. Occasionally, high ranking officers will make concessions. But we should not be fooled. There is a qualitative difference between the field grade officer who agrees, in the face of a mutiny, to pull back, and the young sergeant who resists taking men into the field. For the former, a frag is required. For the latter, watchfulness and struggle. For the day-to-day struggle, we must rely on the GIs almost exclusively. In some particularly sharp situation, some other strata of the armed forces will fall in behind the lead of militant GIs.

WHAT ARE THE GENERAL CRITERIA FOR ISSUES TO STRUGGLE OVER?

In the work of PL in the industrial working class, the issues are much clearer than elsewhere. The struggle is direct. Whatever the bosses get, the workers lose. When safety conditions improve, the boss loses profits since he has to pay for the improvement. When the workers get a shorter work-week, the reproduction of surplus-value is lessened. But the army is not the same kind of institution that a factory is.

The end goal is the total destruction of the armed forces. This is different than destroying a factory. The factory produces the means of subsistence; the army only provides the framework within which the production of surplus-value is guaranteed. It is a tool of the bosses, used to preserve their system. Any slogan to change its use—without overthrowing the system—is reactionary—such as the revisionist Communist Party calling for the troops out of Vietnam and into Selma.

The struggle inside the army takes on a two-fold character. There is the struggle against our use (as a boss's tool), and there is the struggle against our lot. The struggles complement each other. The fight against riot duty aids the rebels, and it also inhibits our being put into a personally dangerous situation. This struggle is

both in our direct self-interest, and it is also in our long-run class interest.

NOW IF THE ARMY IS A TOTALLY REAC-tionary organization, why struggle to improve the life of the soldier within it? Doesn't that merely buck up the system's ability to keep itself going? The holders of this sectarian viewpoint fail to realize the interrelation of self-interest and class interest of GIs opposing the brass. They do not understand the dialectic outlined above. Perhaps most important of all, any struggle against the brass which builds the possibility of unity among GIs provides a training ground for communists and revolutionaries, and helps break down the fears that potential revolutionaries are imbued with from the day they're inducted. So reforms—including structural reforms, such as changing the UCMJ—are struggles which communists can correctly build. After all, no reform in and of itself produces revolutionary consciousness. It's in the process of struggle itself that such consciousness can be developed to its highest form by communist involvement. Practice is primary.

This was a lesson that PL learned in its struggles in the service. The development of this understanding, and the development of the communist-led struggle in the armed forces, is at the core of the following history.

THE PARTICULAR SITUATION IN TODAY'S ARMY—RACISM

Black GIs took the lead in Vietnam in fighting back. Their experience in ghetto rebellions of the 60s served them well in leading mutinies and rebellions on the front lines, where they were inevitably sent by the racist brass. For example, an all-black unit on patrol in the mountains in Vietnam was visited (via helicopter) by several staff officers. They harassed the black soldiers about their shoes (not shiny enough) and the ragged appearance of the unit operating in the boonies. The response? Several of the soldiers organized to shoot down the helicopter when it took off. All the staff officers were killed.

This kind of rebellion was repeated literally hundreds of times. It was this rebellion which undermined the ability of the U.S. government to use GIs to fight their class brothers and sisters in Nam.

The bosses tried to undermine the anti-war movement by ending the draft and replacing it with the "Modern Volunteer Army" (MVA). MVA was billed as a modernization of the army, with beer in the barracks and more freedom. Those Volunteer Army (VOLAR) experiments were quickly scrapped. MVA was rapidly exposed as an effort to bribe young workers, especially blacks, into the army by razzle dazzle bonuses and benefits. Now it is clearer than ever that conditions in the army are deteriorating, with hospital cutbacks and increased harassment (Basic Training has been extended from two months to 6 months.) MVA stands as a cynical effort to take advantage of unemployment, to bring in vastly disproportionate numbers of unemployed black workers.

REBELLIONS AND LARGE NUMBERS (VIA MVA) make black soldiers a real threat to the brass. They rely heavily on racism to put over their game. If troops are divided by race, then white GIs won't follow the lead of black rebels, and may even be induced to attack them. The working class in general will not struggle against deteriorating conditions in the service if racism carries the day.

The key to the GI movement is anti-racism fought for by multi-racial organization. This spells the success or failure of the anti-brass movement. The issue of racism runs like a thread through the GI work of the party. In a sense this history is the history of figuring out how to defeat racism and put the brass up against the wall.

GI JOE'S A RED!

Davis, the first Pler in the army, formed study groups in his barracks. He was constantly transferred from unit to unit, as the brass tried to undermine his base. But, with each transfer, he kept the old contacts and developed new ones, so that a significant base for PL developed, and a mass underground newspaper (The Last Harass) was published with the participation of dozens of GIs.

The army decided to get rid of him through an administrative discharge in the face of this stepped up activity. His hearings were packed with sympathetic GIs, something the army tried to prevent by holding the hearings at weird hours. Despite his support and his efforts to stay in, Davis was railroaded out of the army in 12 hours, with his first sergeant personally escorting him around the post to clear his records. He was simultaneously given his discharge papers, and a notice of eviction from the post as a civilian.

The lesson we learned here was that good political work could be done in the army. The brass were weaker and the GIs more receptive than we had initially estimated. PL saw the main contradiction in the world to be between U.S. imperialism and the Vietnamese liberation struggle; naturally the result of the Davis experience in that context meant sending more cadres into the service, and expanding our overall army work.

PUT THE ARMY ON TRIAL!

Although there were many more cadre involved in developing work similar to Davis', the real qualitative change came at Ft. Dix in 1970. We had a serious collective for the first time. The party operation consisted of one club, an off-post center, and support work from New York City. The political line of the party was "**Smash the Bosses' Armed Forces.**" The program included roughly 15 demands, from an abolition of article 15 non-judicial punishment to an end to riot duty to the right to refuse to fight in Vietnam. Taken together the demands would have meant the total destruction of the armed forces. The line came from the correct political evaluation that the army was a totally reactionary institution which had to be destroyed lock, stock and barrel. PL also

argued, however, that efforts to reform the army were reactionary. This notion is one-sided and sectarian. While it was correct to point to the destruction of the armed forces as a goal of revolutionary forces, we really failed to do more than pay lip service to some of the concrete problems that GIs face in the service, which could be attenuated by communist-led reform struggles.

Reform struggles in the army (or anywhere, for that matter) build illusions. But it is precisely in those reform struggles which include broad numbers of people that communists can most successfully raise higher-level issues, such as imperialism in Vietnam, and the joint need of U.S. and Vietnamese workers to fight for socialism.

This sectarian political line manifested itself at Fort Dix in the uncreative way the party related to its base of support. Challenge Clubs, which were explicitly led by the party, and which were oriented around revolutionary agitation, were the only "mass" organizations the party seriously developed. In terms of political line, the sectarianism was reflected in opposing any use of UCMJ rights in defense trials, relying one-sidedly on all-out courtroom attack, in some cases pleading guilty with pride. Long after this political line was modified, a Pler in the army refused to press charges against a drill sergeant who struck him in full view of his company, on the grounds that such action would build illusions about the military judicial system! What it really built was confusion and some doubts about the guts of the Pler.

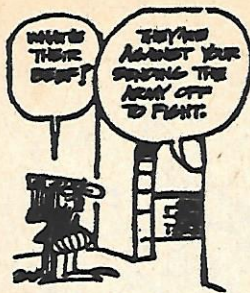
With these limitations in mind, however, the party developed some remarkably strong, militant, multi-racial and mass struggles at Fort Dix. We had taken the approach of organizing around particular points of the program, particularly around the issue of racist harassment by the brass. We initiated a struggle around the trumped-up courtmartial of PVT Marinez.

MARTINEZ WAS ACCUSED OF SHOOTING HIS foot to get out of the service. Here is a young GI, on guard duty in the rain with the rifle slung pointing downward, under his poncho (all according to regulations)—and his rifle goes off into his foot. It happens sometimes. But the brass saw this incident as an opportunity to courtmartial him because of his having begun working with a Challenge Club.

The party held meetings with other GIs in barracks, in laundromats, in Pemberton (a nearby base town); a leafletting campaign was conducted on post illegally, off post legally, and at the Port Authority in New York. The leaflet called for GIs to denounce this racist attack and to pack the courtroom. The courtroom confrontation which followed scared the brass to death, and they dropped all the charges against Martinez.

A crucial factor in this victory was the militancy of GIs under communist leadership.

We really saw in this trial that military courts (or civilian courts) can never serve the people. They aren't meant to... The



brass would not let us in to watch the trial. In fact, they tried to hold the trial without us knowing it!

We went into the courtroom anyway, past an armed guard. The officer judge stopped the trial and called the MPs to remove us...

After the trial another Lt. Colonel ordered us out of the building. When we told him we were waiting for Martinez he assured us that he would take care of Martinez for two months and we didn't trust him to start doing it now. He blew up and screamed to a WAC lifer to call the MPs. In seconds 16 cop cars and 2 paddy wagons pulled up. They had a traffic jam in the street, almost running into each other. The army was really scared to death of 12 GIs sticking together and fighting racism. (Challenge-Desafio, Aug. 24, 1970, p. 11.)

Out of this struggle, several GIs were consolidated into Challenge Clubs, and the threat to the peace and tranquility of Ft. Dix sharpened up. The brass intensified their attacks, arresting a party member in a classic entrapment:

...one night, P.B. was talking to some brothers in doughboy field on post. After two hours he said, 'Wow, I forgot to show you something.' He was just reaching in his pocket for the "Challenge" leaflet when two CID agents (one of the three forms of Army FBI) arrested all 3 of them. (Self Criticism of the Dix Collective, p. 3)

OUR SUCCESS AROUND THE MARTINEZ CASE had helped us develop a stronger capability to fight the brass. Twenty-five GIs came to testify as "character witnesses" at P.B. trial (many of them never having met him). P.B., acting as his own lawyer, turned the courtmartial into a sharp political attack on the army. "After awhile the judge ran out of the courtroom saying we didn't understand that 'This is the U.S. Army'." (Challenge-Desafio, Oct. 5, 1970)

The trial was postponed to an unspecified date, and then rushed up into a Saturday with a few hours' notice to P.B. This time P.B. refused to go into the courtroom because he had had time to rally only about 15 supporters; he was not going in until all of his character witnesses were present. The MPs proceeded to attack the 15 GIs and GI wives, re-arresting P.B. and arresting two more GIs. Meanwhile, P.B. was found guilty,

sentenced to 30 days and loss of pay. The people arrested were placed in pretrial confinement in solitary.

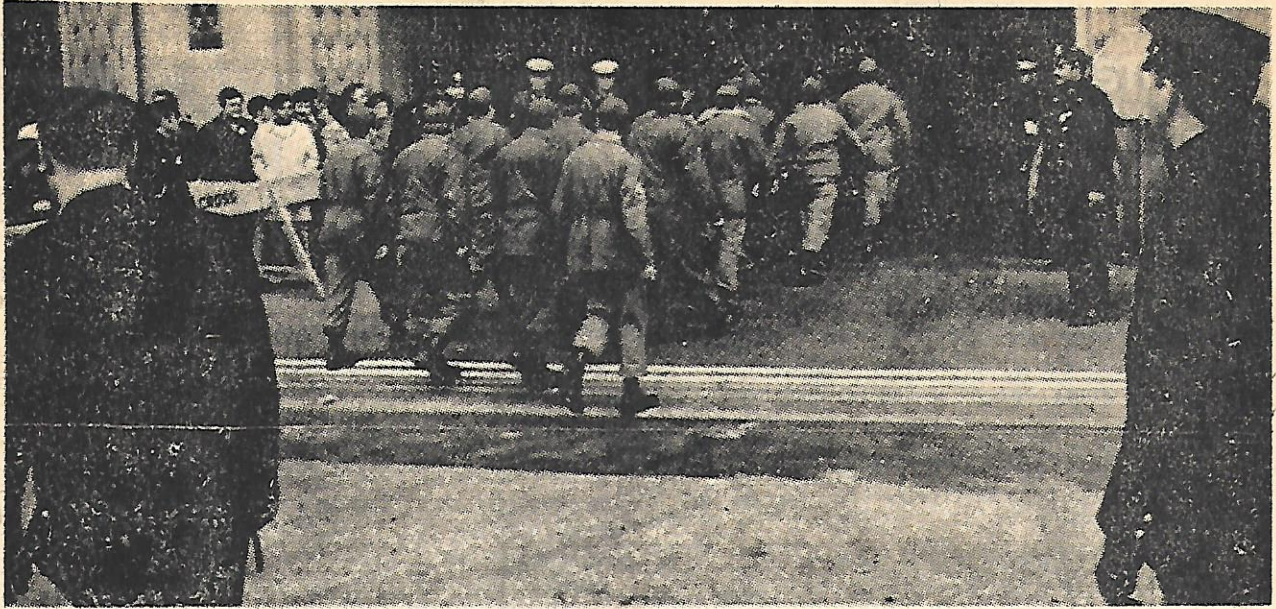
The best defense is a good offense. Turning the attack around, the Challenge Clubs took to the streets of the base town, rallying GIs all night long, selling 100 Challenges, passing out hundreds of leaflets explaining what had happened, collecting money for the defense fund from GIs and, most importantly, meeting more people interested in building the fight against the boss's armed forces.

So we organized for his court-martial, around defending a communist. The center (non-PLP) put forward the position that they were attacking P.B. and PLP because we were telling the truth and the Army was scared. The Party was sharper, the center was stronger, and the approach was more militant. So on Aug. 19 there were 20 GIs and 5 civilians present at the court-martial of P.B. We said we were going into the courtroom—all of us. Unlike the last time where we submitted to the rules and went in one by one. The brass said 'No,' but we went right on in. We were together, and we had leafleted the surrounding barracks, and we knew the guys were with us. They were all SPDer/GIs awaiting courtmartial, and all forms of protest are familiar to them. They had just had a 200-man demonstration in the middle of the night to get a recreation room in their company.

So we knew we had the GIs behind us. When the GIs testified they told the brass exactly what they felt. And when they tried to exclude some from the court we threw three officers out to make room for them. We cheered, and attacked the judge in the court, and really took over and put the representatives of imperialism on trial. So they recessed. (Self-Criticism, p. 3)

The fight to defeat the attacks on the three GIs was the strongest fight yet. It included 40 GIs, and combined militant courtroom tactics with wide publicity throughout the post, and was beginning to link up with the perennial rebellion in SPD.

There are a billion examples of how GIs politically attacked the Colonel Judge and the panel of 7 officers. J.P. went up and saluted the panel with a partial "Heil Hitler" and a loud clicking of heels. The judge told V.R. to stop talking about Puerto



New York City, 1970. A platoon of Ft. Dix GI's march into a post office to sort mail during a nationwide postal worker's strike.

Rican gangs organizing to fight the landlords because it was irrelevant. V.R. kept right on talking even while the judge was telling him to shut up. When L.O. was sworn in and asked if he promised to tell the truth he said, "If I am allowed to and not interrupted." During the questioning of the panel the lawyer asked Lt. Colonel Harding if he knew what communism was and he said no. GIs yelled, "Why not, you taught us lies about it in basic training." And when M.M. testified he said, "Lt. Colonel Harding here calls himself a leader among men. And if he doesn't know what communism is and he leads millions of GIs to fight it, then he must be just a sadistic murderer." When an MP testified that H.P. was a "big man, and it took 2 of our best available MPs to apprehend him," the audience almost brought the rafters down with cheers. When K.P. testified that women aren't sex objects but can and do fight back, and that it felt good to have kicked an MP in the face, the audience went wild. J.P. told of all the CID harassment (he had been beaten, picked up 25 times and threatened with two drawn .45s).

Attorney: Have you knuckled under?

JP: Are you putting me on?

Attorney: What will be your response to continued harassment?

JP: (leaping out of the witness stand with fist raised) I'll fight the bastards all the way!!!

Despite heavy sentences for the two PLers involved (the non-PLer was acquitted—a victory in itself), the GIs vowed to continue the struggle. The next day, two of the "character witnesses" led 20 guys in their companies to complain to the IG about racism and harassment in their com-

pany. The same group surrounded one of the officers on the jury, berating him for being a pig.

UNDER THE PARTY'S LEAD, FT. DIX HAD become a tinderbox. Nevertheless, serious weaknesses undermined our ability to consolidate and move on to higher victories. Perhaps the most vital problem was a lack of faith in the people, which led to bossiness and a lack of struggle. Through internal party struggle and several public self-criticisms to the base of support, much of the damage was undone, and the party began to develop a solid base and mature politically itself. Unfortunately, the persistence of these and other errors prevented us from recruiting significant numbers into the party. Unless the party is built, the mass struggle inevitably declines. Unless the party is built, cadre can be moved around by the brass and a movement undermined. This failure then may have been the crucial one for the Ft. Dix work.

There was also a lack of a long-term perspective in this work. Unless revolution is imminent—not our viewpoint—it is crucial to be developing a long-term ongoing campaign around certain reform issues. This must go beyond saying "end racism" and then engaging in specific struggles around it. It is good to do even that—but a long-range plan is a necessity for developing a long-term outlook.

Underlying this lack of long-term planning was our notion of "Army Exceptionalism." Anything which happens in the army is wonderful, because the army is the "front line," where fascism reigns. While it is true that conditions in the service are slightly different than in industry, the ability to carry out open political activity is still there, and it can be developed as our experience told us. But it was a hard lesson to fully absorb.

GI's ARE WORKERS: NO ARMY EXCEPTIONALISM!

The first effort to overcome army exceptionalism was to try to link the GI struggle directly with working class struggle at the point of production. This was a concrete effort to defeat "GI consciousness" as opposed to working class consciousness. The Ft. Dix Challenge Clubs began making visits to the strikelines of auto workers. Leaflets distributed on post and at the Port Authority began to express the need to link together concretely the two kinds of struggle—in the army and in industry. In a leaflet entitled "WAR—What is it good for? It depends," put out to build for the courtmartial trial of P.B., began,

On Sept. 14, 350,000 auto workers in the U.S. and Canada went out on strike against General Motors. Thousands of other workers may go out against Ford and Chrysler—even though the union leaders want only GM struck. These workers are fighting for better wages and benefits and an end to lay-offs and killing speed-up, against some of the largest corporations in the world. The auto strike is one of the major battles in the class struggle—workers vs. bosses—with both sides ready for a long strike.

What does the auto strike have to do with GIs in the army? Everything: the same rich bosses who run the auto plants and make billions off the workers' backs, make more billions by using GIs to fight over in Vietnam to defend their investments and steal natural resources there. These bosses pay such low wages (\$1.40 a day in Saigon is maximum legal wage—labor unions are illegal) that they have to use GIs to fight the Vietnamese when they rebel against these rotten conditions.

Second, these auto bosses are laying workers off like crazy, just as other bosses are doing everywhere. Many GIs joined the army because they couldn't find a decent job on the outside and the army lied about how good it was on the inside (join the Army—see the World—be a Man—Learn to Lead—and all the other Lies). Job prospects for GIs who are getting out are worse and worse.

The leaflet continued by discussing the role of troops against striking workers. The second portion of the leaflet dealt with the P.B. courtmartial. The leaflet concluded with two slogans: GIs—REFUSE TO SCAB IN THE AUTO STRIKE IF TROOPS ARE CALLED OUT! THEIR FIGHT IS OUR FIGHT TOO! FIGHT THE ARMY! COME TO THE COURTMARTIAL!

A month later, two carloads of GIs were organized to go down to the picket lines in Trenton, N.J. One of the cars was stopped by the MPs, and its occupants held by the MPs to prevent them from going. The rest of the GIs went to the lines, got a permit from the union office to join the lines:

We asked questions and got quite a good response from the workers. The general feeling was that we were welcome there;

they were really happy that GIs were on their side. Two black women said that we had a lot of courage to go AWOL to support them.

Union leaders kept driving up to us in brand new Cadillacs (which explains why they give out such stingy funds) to see if we were passing out any 'literature.' They were afraid we would talk to the workers about organizing real unions that the workers lead.

When we left, the workers thanked us for coming and said they hoped we'd come back soon.

We made a big mistake in not going to the picket lines sooner, as the strike ended shortly afterwards. We should have been more vigorous in organizing other GIs to seeing the need for a GI-worker alliance. We must win GIs to refuse to let the bosses use us against other workers, as in the Post Office strike and the threat used in the railroad strike. GIs must fight with the workers, not against them. (Challenge-Desafio, Jan. 4, 1971)

This activity was a good development in trying to raise the level of consciousness among active GIs, but the notion of integrating the GI work with main mass line of the party through making racist unemployment the main issue for GIs to fight on still failed to grasp the essential point—the need for a mass line applicable directly to the situation of GIs in the army.

Nevertheless, the tying together of racism, harassment and imperialism in the service with unemployment and racism in society in general was useful. Many GIs participated in the big March 20 unemployment demonstrations around the country, led by PL. GIs came from Ft. Dix, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Ft. Hood, Ft. Ord, and several other posts, putting on a skit demonstrating the divide-and-conquer character of racism in the service, and how the struggle against it can lead to unity against the brass in general. The GIs who came had played leading roles in many struggles on their posts. Through events like this massive unemployment march, involving over 6000 people, the party was able to develop the understanding of the GIs new to political work, encouraging the relatively small GI groups at each post to sharpen the struggle when they returned.

Despite a lot of hard struggle, good work, and some counter attacks, PL cadre had still failed to develop the mass inroads necessary to carrying out a communist program. The National Committee made the evaluation that the sectarian policy of forming narrow Challenge Clubs instead of more broadly based mass organizations came from the underlying weakness of opportunism. Specifically, PL cadre were scared. This fear—which is not abnormal, and is precisely what the army relies on to continue its activities—had been fed historically by the leadership's errors in mis-estimating the objective situation in the army.

We believed it was extremely difficult to do much of anything in the Army. We seri-

ously underestimated the militancy of the GIs and their receptiveness to communist ideas, while at the same time we overestimated the Army's ability to stop us. Based on this mis-estimation, we had the approach of keeping fairly quiet, "being a good soldier" and maintaining secrecy.

—Nat'l Committee Report on Army Work.

It took many months for this incorrect evaluation to be overcome. The struggle in the army as a whole was therefore held back because the only revolutionary organization active in the army—PLP—had fallen prey to an overestimation of the brass and an underestimation of the willingness of the GIs to fight. This was precisely the lesson of the self-criticism from the Ft. Dix Collective. There the fear of the army and the lack of faith in the people had led to various commandist errors which, when the struggle sharpened up, led to several very good militants falling away.

THE BEST EXAMPLE OF FEAR AUGMENTED

by an erroneous line was in Vietnam, where many PLPers just kept quiet. Yet there the struggle was the sharpest. Our line was fraternization with the "opposing" forces. Beyond a few leaflets in Vietnamese and English, this was not carried out, even though the level of struggle included fraggings, mutinies, and much more. Much of the weaknesses can be attributed to isolation from collectives, inexperience of cadre, the middle class background of most of the army cadre. But fundamentally the problem remained the failure to have become convinced that relying on the people—here the fellow GI—was the road to revolution.

This evaluation in the summer of '71 led to a decision to up the ante in the army work, and broaden our United Front work *inside* the army. While our long-run objective of destroying the armed forces as a part of the capitalist state remained, new emphasis was placed on the broader issues of racism, UCMJ abuses, and harassment.

In Vietnam, in Germany, and in many bases in the U.S., spontaneous struggle against the brass, particularly around the issue of racism, was very sharp, much like the ghetto rebellions of the '60s. In some cases bases were burned. In many instances, thousands were involved in riots on a single base. Stockade rebellions were endemic. Most struggle which erupts in response to the abuses of capitalism is unorganized, lacks ideological clarity, and inevitably falls victim to one or another of the bosses' ruses. Such struggle requires a communist party to give it direction and staying power. Our party's failure to boldly lead such action is more serious than simply "missing the boat." We probably did not have enough cadre in the right places to qualitatively alter the course of the spontaneous rebellions. Nevertheless, we could have made a significant difference were it not for the weaknesses which the National Committee diagnosed as disguised opportunism. As it was, we still played a leading role in many struggles and we stimulated anti-imperialist sentiment and actions among thousands of GIs.

THE LIBERAL-LED "GI" MOVEMENT

Revisionist and liberal activity in the service was sparse. The volatile situation in the service made it dangerous to the revisionists to try to establish a nationwide organization of GIs, since such a movement would inevitably get out of hand and jeopardize their ties with the liberal bourgeoisie, expose their counter-revolutionary role, and, since PLP would be there putting forward a militant program, they would rapidly lose any leadership of the GI movement. (At one SMC—the Trotskyite Student Mobilization Committee—conference in Cleveland, the entire GI contingent swung over to support the anti-racist, anti-imperialist slogans put forward by SDS. That's just a small taste of what would have happened if the revisionists had had some kind of broader vision for GI organizing.) Additionally the commitment to struggle of most of the revisionist cadre was lacking, smothered by elitist phrasemongering, so that they were unable to build a base. Consequently, most revisionist activity was from the sidelines. They would parasitically leech onto coffeehouses. Naturally, when super-star Jane Fonda visited, hundreds of GIs would show up. But these two-bit phonies were too fearful of the GIs to use even these events to consolidate new members into GI organizations.

The coffeehouses and storefronts themselves varied enormously in terms of the people who ran them. Such places inevitably had two aspects. On the one hand, they were escapist. They helped people get out of the service, in many cases were heavily into drugs and drug culture, and often were negative about the potential of GIs to do anything to *fight* the army. On the other hand there were many honest civilians and GIs who were involved in the coffeehouses/storefronts, and who hated the army and were open to struggle. It was the lack of leftist GI leadership which often left the coffeehouses dominated by the liberal/pacifist/revisionist forces, who led any mass movement to a dead-end. In fact, most of the mass outbursts mentioned above passed the coffeehouses by without so much as a tip of the hat.

Some of the storefronts had made efforts at GI organizing, but they came at it from an elitist, anti-working class background. They would finally close down, condemning the GIs as apathetic, deadened, and hopelessly intimidated. Never did a coffeehouse or storefront publish a self-criticism about their lack of involvement in struggle, about their counter-cultural anti-working class tendencies.

Take FTA, one of the first underground GI newspapers. When it folded in May, 1972, one of the organizers wrote a letter to CAMP News:

The key factor in the folding of the project was the total apathy among the enlisted men. It was difficult to get people to write articles and help with the production. There was never any feedback, and believe it or not, I was almost beat up by a group of trainees while distributing the paper in Louisville.

I have several notions of why this is happening . . . With the decrease in the threat of the draft, there are very few college graduates or men with a college background coming in. In their place are numerous 17- and 18-year olds . . . the new recruits are not interested in bringing about social or political change. They are more concerned in balling the chick at the PX (their words, not mine), buying a new car, and drinking Boone's Farm Wine. (CAMP News, Dec. 15, 1972, Vol. III #12)

Another paper called *The Other Voice* published at Richard-Gebaur AFB folded with the following denunciation of GIs:

We learned a lot about people in doing the **Other Voice**. We saw and heard the 'bitchers,' those chronic complainers who froth at the mouth about what should or should not be done, but are nowhere to be found when words are translated into actions

We saw the dopers. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the dopers for their zero contribution to the **Other Voice**. These are the people who should know what is going on, but would rather stumble-bumble from one day to the next. Their only ambition in life is to cloud the mind in a cloak of drugs and avoid facing the boogie man—reality. (CAMP News, Sept. 72, Vol. III #9)

In the same two issues of *CAMP News*, there are, respectively, stories about an active duty chapter of VVAW at Ft. Lewis taking 40 GIs and supporters to confront Rep. Hicks over his racist investigation of the Constellation rebellion, the victory of the mass movement to free Billy Smith, and stories on widespread naval rebellions; and articles about VVAW agitation at the Republican Convention among Ft. Bragg 82nd Airborne troops and the positive response it received, the building of an organized campaign at Aberdeen Proving Grounds against a racist frame-up, and the formation of a Black Servicemen's Caucus in San Diego. No lack of struggle here! But the above mentioned "organizers" suffer from a one sided view of GIs. Only college-educated types are together enough to get involved, while weaknesses which most young working class GIs have cannot be struggled with and overcome. The biggest weakness was the "organizer's" internal weakness of despising GIs!

The contradiction within the storefront/coffeehouse aspect of the GI movement cannot be avoided. It had to be dealt with. PL had failed to deal with it, assuring that only the schmucks were really involved in the coffeehouse/storefront route. Again, we had shown a lack of faith in the people.

There are plenty of problems involved in joining in with a movement often dominated by escapist, anti-working class ideology. But the resolution of the contradiction in favor of working class struggle was an implicit task set by the decision of the National Committee to expand our united front work in the armed forces.

THE FT. HOOD BREAKTHROUGH

The Ft. Hood coffeehouse was a good case in point of the contradictions of the GI movement. Fair numbers of GI activists would go there, but the civilian leadership was cliqueish and pot-headed by and large. The coffeehouse carried on military counseling and provided a base for anti-war activity. It was not initially militant.

PLP joined the coffeehouse group, bringing around the militant GIs they had been working with. A breakthrough occurred as a solid militant united front emerged.

Previously PL had been involved in fighting a racist frame-up, involving about 25 GIs in courtroom struggle similar to the Ft. Dix events.

Non-commissioned officers spread the story among whites that Sanders was a troublemaker—hoping to encourage the racist lie that all blacks are troublemakers . . . they deserve what they get.

But this racist plan was defeated as GIs discussed the attack and organized a spirited counter-offensive. When the brass tried to rush through the courtmartial on two hours' notice, seven GIs showed up and forced them to postpone the trial . . . Then nearly half my unit was there, 12 black and 12 white GIs. Witnesses pointed out how racism was a regular policy in the army, and how officers and lifers—including the "neutral judge" Casias—had spread racist lies.

Casias then tried using anti-communism to split us up, since the racism was back-firing. He attacked a PLP member who testified. But this attack was about as successful as the recent Laos invasion. PLP literature is widely read and respected in the company.

. . . Fifteen of the people who attended the courtmartial came to the PLP-sponsored March against Racist Unemployment in Houston, March 20. There GIs, workers and students from all over the South united against the class enemy, the big bosses. We returned to Ft. Hood determined to organize many more GIs to fight the ruling class' U.S. army in solidarity with the struggle of all working people. (*Challenge-Desafio*, Mayday, 1971, p. 9)

Clearly a solid action, clearly carrying out the development of militant, anti-racist struggle, but subject to all the limitations of this kind of reactive politics which the Ft. Dix work had. By September, however, the party's united front relations with the coffeehouse people had led to a great leap ahead.

Two stockade rebel leaders were being brought up on charges with possible 10-year sentences. Fort Hood United Front (FHUF) argued that the rebellion had been correct and justified, and that Priest and Harvey should be freed. Denied permits for a demonstration in the base town, the United Front had to decide either to call illegal actions to free Harvey and

Priest or to drop the campaign and go back to coffeehouse-as-usual activities. A picnic was called at a nearby lake to bring together many GIs to decide on a course of action. Dozens of leafletters announcing the picnic were harassed by city cops, and two Challenge sellers . . . were arrested.

At the picnic, people decided to have a motorcade back into town, and taped signs saying "Free Harvey and Priest," "Smash the Brass" and "Fight Racism" to their cars. As we proceeded, asking other cars to turn their lights on and follow us, the motorcade grew to over 30 cars. Cops following front and rear decided to move in and make some arrests to intimidate people. The whole motorcade came to a halt as people got out to challenge the cops' actions and pull them off one motorcyclist they were beating and handcuffing. The cops responded by pulling out riot shotguns. A few miles further on they pulled over the lead vehicle for 'improper use of the horn.' This time when the rest of the motorcade halted, there was a mass bust as people fought back against the racist cops. Altogether, 32 were arrested and warrants issued for two more persons arrested the next day. (**Challenge-Desafio**, Oct. 16, 1971, p. 11)

The army dropped its charges against Priest and Harvey! 60 GIs attended the next hastily called FHUF meeting, and the level of struggle rose. Within two months a militant demonstration of over 200 GIs, GI wives, and veterans was held, with mass arrests again following, around the slogans; *Avenge Attica/U.S. out of Vietnam Now/Free all political prisoners.*

There were still plenty of weaknesses in FHUF. There was still widespread drug use. Racism had not been dealt with effectively by organizing black GIs into FHUF in a mass way. Blacks had led in militant action in response to the beating of a fellow GI by attacking the MPs, burning the battalion commander's office and car, and confronting the riot police. Yet few of these militant fighters had been involved in FHUF, reflecting the racism which still divided the GIs.

Nevertheless, the liberal/pacifist/revisionist political line (reflected in SMC-led demonstrations once a year) had been broken by the militant actions around the stockade rebels and by the militant anti-imperialist demonstration. A militant, ongoing approach to the struggle became the dominant attitude in FHUF.

This transformation laid the basis for a long-range project around racist base housing (tenants' organizing), and for a sharp action on Armed Forces Day, May 20, 1972. (Armed Forces Day had been initiated some years earlier by CAMP News as a kind of GI Mayday, where GI projects, organizations and supporters would demonstrate their collective strength on the same day throughout the country.)

Armed Forces Day at Ft. Hood demonstrated precisely the kind of serious ongoing work that was necessary to develop a fighting GI movement.

Organized Servicemen Abroad Intensify Drive Against Racism

By THOMAS A. JOHNSON

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 18 — The founder of a confederation of groups of militant black soldiers in Germany said today that organized servicemen, blacks and whites, had moved from a "position of conciliation to revolutionary, defensive and violent stands" because of continued racism in the armed services.

Samuel Berry, a former sergeant at the Patton Barracks in Heidelberg, was the final witness in the last session of an ad hoc three-day hearing on "racism in the military" held by the Congressional Black Caucus in the Rayburn Office Building.

Mr. Berry, currently a political science student at Bowie State College in Maryland, told the hearing that "the level of intensity and potential for violence" had heightened in recent years and that groups of black and radical white soldiers "are poised and ready to raise the level of the struggle to a defensive, violent stand."

Rally at Heidelberg

He said this was the result of "frustrations" over attempts to end racism and the groups' feeling that "military officials will only act favorably if we act as a group in an unfavorable manner."

While a noncommissioned officer in a signal battalion attached to Seventh Army headquarters in Germany, Mr. Berry founded the Unsatisfied Black Soldier, the first of a succes-

sion of extra-legal groups that protested discrimination in promotions, assignments, housing and recreational facilities.

A protest rally on July 4, 1970, brought nearly 1,000 soldiers, most of whom were black, to the Heidelberg University campus. Radical white groups have since been formed, and a number of underground soldier newspapers — some published with the help of radical German student groups — have flourished.

Mr. Berry, who said he had kept in close contact with these groups since his discharge a year ago, said there were 20 black organizations in 10 German cities allied with "all segments of progressive thinking people."

Representative Ronald V. Dellums of California, who shared the chair at the hearings with Representative Shirley Chisholm, of Brooklyn, listed 10 recommendations made during the hearings that the caucus would seek to implement.

These included pressing legislation that would give federal courts jurisdiction over suspected military offenders; advocating more black officers in command positions; promoting the evaluation of the following: military equal opportunity programs and training procedures, military regulations that have had negative effects on racial minorities, and the punishment of black G.I.'s for expressions of black pride.

At the rally GIs spoke of building a fight against the Army's system of 'justice'-especially pre-trial confinement and the Article 15 system which gives tremendous arbitrary power to company commanders. These demands also hit at racism, since both pre-trial and Article 15s are used especially against black GIs.

A GI wife told of efforts to build a Tenants' Council to fight for better housing conditions and an end to discrimination in rental. Cam Cunningham, a lawyer who worked with the Front, pointed out how the GI movement against military injustice had hampered the ability to make war—and how

only a general strike could prevent imperialist wars completely.

The militant spirit of this march contrasted sharply with the 'Peace Now' picnics which organizations like the SMC try to push on GIs. GIs had voted to bar SMC from speaking at this rally on account of their past record of selling out GI struggles. (At the last Fort Hood demonstration, 100 GIs and vets were jailed, while SMC members ran away.)

May 20th showed that the rulers' plans to rebuild the Army are off to a bad start. (Challenge-Desafio, June 29, 1972, p. 11)

In the Oct. 11 Ft. Hood report, the success of the FHUF activity was prefaced by a self-critical note.

We made two sectarian errors vis-a-vis FHUF. The first was not to enter the group at all. ("It's a bunch of pacifists.") The second, after we started to work within FHUF, was to regard many people there as 'the right' because they put forward liberalism, wanted to ally with SMC, etc. But we found that we were really overestimating the hold which revisionist ideas had on these guys. It turned out that virtually everyone there, including the civilian 'movement' people, was open to our ideas... the main barrier to the work was our own sectarianism, not the liberalism and pacifism which it proved possible to defeat in struggle. (Oct. 11 Ft. Hood Collective internal, PLP)

The right-opportunism which the National Committee had pointed to as being masked under the sectarianism the report referred to had taken a decisive blow. Nevertheless, opportunism continued to crop up in its more usual form, that of failing to build the left in the process of mass struggle. The failure to win people into PL, not just to being militant, can spell the end of any organization which is fighting back.

The main question now is building the party within FHUF. Defeating racism, nationalism and drugs should go along with this. There is clearly plenty of good center leadership. But building PL will be key to sustaining and improving the kind of united front actions we have been able to pull off. This is even more crucial since our collective has diminished—one member ETS'd, one gone to Nam. *Ibid.*

Our failure to carry out this crucial task meant that, when the rest of the party was moved out of Ft. Hood, the FHUF began to retreat from its militant position.

RACISM—THE FORT HOOD EXPERIENCE

Despite our efforts to build FHUF into an anti-racist fighting organization, the failure to win black GIs into the organization (with a few exceptions) meant FHUF had a serious weakness. Congressman Stokes came to Ft. Hood as part of the ruling class' efforts to pacify black rebels on posts around the country. The usual scenario would be that angry blacks would raise case after

case of military racism, Stokes would listen, and then after he left the post those outspoken GIs would be harassed and isolated by the post commanders, despite promises of immunity. In a case at Ft. Dix, a Muslim was given extra harassment for 7 months, and his discharge as a CO was delayed this long, after he had sharply challenged racist practices at the post. Needless to say, his letters to congress brought only the usual formal response and no action. At Ft. Hood,

Nov. 14 a member of the Black Congressional Caucus, Congressman Stokes came to Hood to 'investigate racism.' We (PL) put forward that congressmen are no good, etc., but the FHUF nevertheless decided to sponsor his visit. About 80 GIs, mostly black, showed up. In general, people had quite a lot of faith in the congressman. Some friends of ours put forward again at this meeting that he was a fraud—but this was a minority position there. But we also put forward that whether or not people trusted Stokes, there was a need for an **organization** to fight racism at Hood—and this met with general approval. That night Peoples' Justice Committee was formed—composed mostly of black GIs. Though virulent nationalist people had spoken loud and long at the earlier meeting, it turned out that among the people who were serious about building an organization nationalism was not that strong. So 1) PJC does not exclude white GIs and 2) will work together with the United Front. At this stage it is just getting organized but we think it has considerable potential.

The next day Congressman Stokes made a really foul statement in which he praised the base commander for being 'sincere' and moving toward the solution of racial tensions. Result, most people involved now have greater respect for PL's position since we have, in effect, been proved right on this issue. FHUF and PJC put out a joint leaflet in response to General Seneff's statement about how he was working to correct racist inequity. This was a pretty good leaflet, with a class line on racism. (November 28 Ft. Hood Collective internal to PLP)

This auspicious beginning did not bear fruit over the ensuing months, largely because the FHUF failed to fight racism in terms of bringing the two organizations into either tight working unity or into one organization. The anti-racist ideology of FHUF did not get translated into practical day-to-day working alongside militant black GIs. Most FHUFers did not go with PLers to the PJC meetings. This failure accentuated nationalist sentiments in PJC. It also tended to isolate PJC from the broader movement going on. Eventually PJC degenerated into a small inactive clique. A large measure of the responsibility for this unfortunate development rests with the party's failure to win PJCers—as well as other black GIs—into FHUF, and with our failure to convince mainly white FHUF members to participate fully in PJC.

Achieving this would have welded the objective anti-racist struggles on post into organized rebellion.

Despite these weaknesses (party-building and racism), the Ft. Hood actions electrified the GI movement, which in its organized aspect tended to be small and agitational. It did not traditionally take militant actions. Ft. Hood stood as a refutation to every right winger who claimed that GIs wouldn't fight back or couldn't be organized to fight back stateside; it stood as a beacon to serious GI fighters everywhere of what could be accomplished. The importance of the party organization in making this kind of transformation possible cannot be overestimated.

FORT DIX, PHASE 2

Having absorbed the lessons of Ft. Hood, the party sent two PLPers into the service at Ft. Dix in late '71. They rapidly began developing barracks-based practical and ideological struggle. This is the basic core of any broader movement.

Basic training is a peculiar period of army life. It is not designed to train you in any traditional sense of gaining skills. Its purpose is to intimidate you into subservience and instant obedience to the brass and lifers who want you to betray your class interests. You are supposed to have no time to think independently. You are a cog, not a person. The favorite drill sergeant expression is that if the army wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one. You can be courtmartialed for getting a sunburn, based on the regulation against damaging government property. Even supposedly useful training, such as first aid, is carried out in such a way that your obedience to the instructor in every minute detail is primary over the learning of first aid.

Accompanying this general degrading attack, used to demoralize the fighting spirit of the GI, is the effort to channel resentment against other GIs. Competition between platoons, with loser having to do extra details, makes unity difficult even within the same company. High school rivalries seem like proletarian solidarity by comparison. Drill sergeants make cheer leaders look like pikers, as they constantly ask "Who's the best," building a small group mentality.

One of the tactics used by the brass is to try to draw the most rebellious GIs into phony position of responsibility, like platoon or squad leader. These "leaders" often become a target for attack by the other GIs, and the drill sergeants often bear down on them also, driving a rift between the GIs. These "leaders" often become miniature Drill Sergeants for basic training. They later wonder how on earth they were tricked into that kind of position.

For example, in one company, all four platoons had to take 2 miles of punishment running. The platoon leader behind a PLPer's tried to run over stragglers from the platoon ahead, castigating the stragglers for being no-good, weaklings, etc. The platoon leader deliberately tripped the PLPer, who promised that he would pay for that later.

Usually such an incident would be used to incite platoons against each other, develop "unit price," and maybe have a little brawl to cool down the spirits. Instead, however, the PLPer went throughout both his platoon and the other platoon explaining why what the fellow had done was the brass's dirty work, that what was needed was unity among the GIs against the brass and drill sergeants. So when the PLPer called out the platoon leader for a fight, he had almost unanimous backing from the GIs. (He also lost the fight, by the way. But he made the point.)

The small group mentality can be defeated through the development of an off-post, post-wide center. The prerequisites for such a center are continual barracks level struggle.

The barracks level issues include immediate harassment of all kinds, counter-attacks against which can lead to confrontation with the brass. A common tactic the drill sergeants use is to try to intimidate all the soldiers by picking on one or two scapegoats and harassing them half to death as examples to any other "fuck-ups."

In one platoon, the senior drill sergeant made the totally false claim that one of the scapegoats had been encouraging people to go AWOL, and that he would give him extra duty for this. If we let the SDI get away with this, we would all have been more scared. So a PLPer got together with the scapegoat and wrote up a statement saying, "We, the undersigned have not been encouraged to go AWOL by S.H., and we have not heard him encourage anyone to go AWOL." The whole platoon signed it. When the SDI came up to give him extra duty, five of us confronted him with the signed statement (totally illegal—tantamount to mutiny). He was stunned. He backed off, stumbling down the stairs muttering how he hadn't really meant that he would give him extra duty. The fellows gave a cheer at this success. They exclaimed how, if we stuck together, there wasn't anything we couldn't do. Similar actions around a racist insult, more time for chow, sexist attacks on a GI's wife, formed the essential groundwork for building a GI movement. These practical mass activities were complemented by the illegal distribution of Challenge in the barracks, and by sharp ideological confrontations in the propaganda classes.

WHEN THE BRASS TOLD HOW KOREANS were brutal to prisoners of war in the Korean War, a PLPer stood up and corrected him in the question and answer period. When the fairness of the UCMJ was explained by the battalion commander, the PLPer would list the systematic ways the UCMJ is arbitrary, capricious, and designed to put GIs at the mercy of the company commanders. When the XO gave a lecture on drug abuse, the PLPer condemned the army as the real pusher, and received widespread cheers and applause. When the company commander asked for volunteers to debate the seemingly innocuous issue of whether the Revolutionary War of 1776 was justified, the GIs pushed the PLPer to the front to explain why it was justified—and he did, pointing out that rebellion is right, including in Vietnam

against U.S. imperialism, and inside the army, against the brass. In one of the last classes on subversion, in which communists were depicted as sneaky amoral creatures out to screw GIs, the PLPer got up and declared that that's not how communists were, since he was one and he wasn't like that. The commander got so flustered that the PLPer was able to speak for about five minutes on the party's line, while the 200 GIs in the class cheered and laughed at the commander's beet-red face. The company commander ended the class early, declaring the PLPer under arrest!

Although there were errors made in some of the barracks level activity, by and large the two PLers built a broad base of support and respect for communist activity. The basis was laid for us to link up with the local storefront, which we had just found out about. We brought as many of our active duty friends around as possible, although there was considerable turnover given the character of basic training.

The storefront activists were a motley crew, dominated by Philadelphia Resistance. Among themselves there was constant bickering, sleeping around, drug use, and general instability. Politically they argued for GI militancy, and black separatism, while in practice they neither attempted to develop on-post actions nor any fights against racism.

Nevertheless, following the Ft. Hood example, we felt that we could win over those GIs who did come to the counseling center, and that over time even some of the Resistance people might come around.

WE BECAME VERY ACTIVE IN TRANSFORMING their newspaper, Fragging Action, into an organ of struggle. This change made the paper popular among GIs, and, most importantly, well-distributed by GIs. Through the paper, many militant GIs were able to express themselves and their ideas and their struggles to other GIs. Putting out the paper was a center for organization, from the writing and editing of articles, to the pasting up, to the distribution at Port Authority and on post. The weekly meetings at Fragging Action provided good forums for struggling over the program of struggle, although the discussions were frequently dominated by the internal bickering of the Resistance people.

In March, 1972, we organized a major demonstration at the post gates, including a dozen GIs and several hundred civilians. Three of the GIs spoke. The demonstration caused a general panic among the brass, since the base itself had been clandestinely leafleted. Many leaves were canceled, the nearby AF base put all its personnel on restriction, and hundreds of raw trainees were put on riot duty.

Thanks to PL efforts, the storefront activities began to take on an active-duty GI orientation, both in its newspaper and in its actions. Not that Fragging Action ever achieved a predominantly GI character like the FHUF did. The reasons included the constant turnover of basic trainees, insufficient cadre with free time, and weaknesses of the party cadre in consolidating those

GIs ready to fight back closer to and into the party. If Fragging Action was ever to advance, it required the development of a core of militant black and white GIs.

As we moved towards this goal, the Resistance people panicked. It had been good for their consciences to come out and counsel soldiers, but the potential fighting organization of GIs and civilians scared them. They quit squabbling over who was sleeping with whom long enough to hold a special meeting to "expel" PL from the storefront organization. The anti-communist slanders were carried out and voted on when no PLers could attend.

Since most of the active duty GIs who had begun to get involved with Fragging Action had looked to PL as a leading force, they were disgusted by this move, carried out by the Resistance civilians and a couple of token GIs. In response, PLP wrote a letter calling for our "reinstatement," exposing all the lies which led up to the expulsion.

The reasons given for being kicked out were that PLP had done nothing to build the office or the paper, and that even if it had, it had only done so to build itself! On the face of it, a bald contradiction which a four year old could see through.

In our letter, we made some self-critical remarks about some minor sectarian errors, and then proceeded to say:

We think it would be a mistake and weaken the GI movement and this office if we were forced to leave, especially when these courtmartials, stockade hearings, demonstrations are all coming up. Our main work has been to build Fragging Action, this office, and the GI movement at Dix, concentrating on the fight against racist harassment and the war. In the short time we have been at Dix, and hampered by being stuck in basic training companies, we have helped organize a GI Union meeting of 20 GIs and Airmen; helped build for the February 26 demonstration at McGuire Air Force base; contributed articles for Fragging Action; solicited articles for Fragging Action from other GIs; helped put out and pass out Fragging Action; brought and helped with meetings of GIs on base where it was not possible to get some GIs down to the office; worked on the beginnings of this campaign against the racist stockades; and have helped build for Martie's court-martial, among other things. In short, we participated and helped build this office among GIs, always stressing the necessity to fight racism in concrete ways and issues.

It is absolutely true that we are in PL and want to see socialism become a reality in the country and the world. When we talk of socialism we mean workers' power... We believe that any gains workers and GIs make through militant struggle will be taken away by the bosses if it is not consolidated by workers' revolution.

Communists have always helped build organizations which fight against the in-



West Germany. Black and Latin GI's march to protest the burning of a KKK cross by racist lifers.

justices of the ruling class...and which include people of different political persuasions, as does this office...It has been true throughout our history that when these coalition groups have excluded Communists, they have been weakened as effective organizations of the people (e.g., the CIO).

Our expulsion was not reversed because the GIs we worked with had not been won close enough to see the need for developing GI leadership of the storefront; they preferred to tell the Resistance people to go to hell. Which they did, by the way. The next three issues of the paper were non-struggle, poorly distributed, and the final issue was nothing more than a piece on life in North Vietnam—a revisionist, non-struggle, boring paper which might have been useful as toilet paper if it had been distributed significantly.

While the united front lasted, it was a valuable resource in which to build the GI struggle. When it fell apart, the active duty GIs formed the Servicemen's Action Movement, including activists from several different companies at Ft. Dix. SAM participated in several barracks' based struggles, built for two national demonstrations, and plastered Ft. Dix with stickers calling on GIs to join SAM. But then the entire SAM was shipped out to different posts, and the organized GI movement ground to a halt at Ft. Dix.

RED GIs IN GERMANY

The class struggle inside the army in Germany sharpened up in the period covered by this article. Housed in Nazi barracks with the swastika still visible, U.S. soldiers had and have plenty to be angry over. Rotten living conditions, a high degree

of racism by the German police and German businesses, and frequent wasteful maneuvers in the field laid the basis for rebellion. GIs coming in from Vietnam brought with them the rebelliousness which characterized that theater.

In some areas, GIs actually took over and held entire posts for periods of hours. Usually they were hit by no reprisals, since the brass feared stirring up even more rebellion. Most of these actions were anti-racist, and led by black GIs. After such an action, the brass would try to transfer the most active GIs to try to divide nascent organizations, as in the case of the Darmstadt 53, who were not prosecuted in the end, but sent all over the world.

When class struggle sharpens up, all of the contradictions intrinsic to capitalism sharpen up. Racial antagonism, egged on by the brass, increased, although inter-GI racist attacks were much more infrequent than brass-GI confrontations, which often involved black GIs and white officers.

Recently much publicity was given to the burning of a cross, KKK style, at a post here. It seems there was such an organization of racist lifers. But the publicity tried to shift the blame on to white troops in general. When you carefully read the reports in Newsweek, Time, etc., about "racial incidents" in Germany, you almost always find that black GIs, often with white allies, are clashing with predominantly white MPs or NCOs or officers. The magazines make this out to be a racial clash when it's really a class struggle of working class black GIs against the brass and their cops. (Letter from a GI in Germany, *Challenge-Desafio*, Nov. 22, 1970)

Drug use was also widespread, as GIs looked to escape the rotten conditions the Army forced them into. What was lacking here, as elsewhere, was an all-Germany mass multi-racial organization of GIs, led by communists, to fight on the many issues affecting GIs' lives directly.

PLP's work in Germany began with a continuation of the sectarian weaknesses mentioned in other sections. It nevertheless was bold and militant. The work began by 6 GIs marching in the German Mayday demonstration, with a big banner saying "GIs say... Same Enemy, Same Fight, Workers of the World, Unite." A number of other GIs joined the march. Shortly afterwards, the party led a militant defense of a black GI who had defended himself against a lifer, by barricading the barracks from the MPs who wanted to take the GI off to pre-trial confinement. The army transferred the PL member immediately, sabotaging the beginnings of an anti-racist organization at his post.

Our failure to consolidate contacts from these initial struggles, or from our independent party agitation in Berlin and other towns, was an indication of sectarian weakness.

All except for a couple of guys, most of the people we brought into the group did not stay for long, as we did not offer them a plan for fighting their daily problems. We spent most of our meetings discussing RRIII, which is good, but we needed a plan for reform struggles.

... In July, 1971, we found out about a group in Heidelberg called "FTA with Price." Because their newspaper had an article about an SWP politico's trip to talk to black GIs and an article about the ASU, we figured that they were trotskyites of some sort. This was intensified by reading an article in the *Militant* that they were working with the German YSA—which we found out later to have been a lie. We immediately assumed them to be enemies. We made some half-hearted plans to go to their coffeehouse, but we never did. It wasn't until over a year later that we found out that they weren't trots at all, and joined with them to form *Fight Back*.

The main reason I believe that we lost contact with... people is that we had nothing to offer them, beside working directly with the party. Even though they have liked **Challenge**, they were not ready to join a communist group. This had been the failure of the Ft. Dix group. This was compounded by our failure to follow up contacts effectively—when we would sell the paper publicly in Frankfurt, they would be sold at the rate of one per minute. However, we took names of interested GIs rarely. (GI work history, PL German Club leader report)

The need for an all-Germany mass GI organization was apparent. We took the steps to found it in September 1971. The paper of the Germany-wide organization was called **Fight back**. Monthly all-Germany meetings were held to discuss the political line of the paper and to produce it. The

paper mushroomed, and the brass panicked, throwing dozens of agents into work against **Fight back**, as can be seen in the current lawsuit. **Fight back** was an organ of struggle, a real organizing tool.

As the paper grew and morale continued to decline, General Davison, chief pig in USAEUR, instituted an "anti-drug" crackdown to attack all GIs who wanted to fight back. Posters were torn down from GIs' rooms in middle-of-the-night Gestapo raids. "Associates of suspected drug users" could be restricted to their company area, and have all personal, non-army possessions confiscated and placed in the supply room. Along with the door to his room. Numerous cases of arbitrary intimidation, aimed at stifling dissent, were reported. There was massive resistance to these attacks, which were doing virtually nothing to stop drug traffic, of course.

Fight back took the attack head on. Simultaneously attacking the use of drugs, and pointing to the government as the real pusher, and attacking the government for using phony anti-drug policies as an excuse for political repression of all dissidence, **Fight back** called for massive resistance to Davison's attack:

GIs in USAREUR have been subject to a new overdose of harassment and repression under the pretext of the Army's "war on drugs." The very idea of the Army conducting a campaign against drug abuse is absurd. The Army itself creates and perpetuates its problem of drug addiction and abuse.

The GI who joins the Army in the belief that he will find fulfillment and a position of responsibility in the service of his country finds himself hopelessly trapped in the insanity of the green machine. He is no more than a cog in their machine....

In this situation the supposed "anti-drug campaign" is only another instrument to further terrorize GIs into blind submission to Army power. The removal of doors, confiscation of posters, black lights, incense sticks and civilian clothes, restriction to base and arbitrary piss tests only worsen the desperation and hopelessness of GIs' situation and therefore make him even more prone to drug addiction.

The only productive approach to the drug problem is to understand the reasons which create it and to change the situation responsible for it. (**Fight back**, p. 10, March, 73)

After two pages of solid examples of specific abusive attacks, including beatings, midnight shakedowns, kicking down of doors, **Fight back** concludes,

When officers and NCOs can beat EM, make them strip, can deprive them of all rights and privileges, can tell them in fact they have no rights, when they can purposely engage in other dehumanizing tactics, such as armed guard or confinement, restriction, removal of doors and all this with no

charges against the men in question, then some change is badly needed!!!!

FIGHT BACK!!!! p. 3, *Ibid.*

The army's response was to try to destroy **Fight back**, by shipping out all the PLPers and several other activists they knew to be involved in the paper's production. Through legal maneuvers, one of the paper's leaders managed to stay longer in Germany, and the secondary leadership was strong enough to carry on publication and distribution of the paper.

The enormous GI resistance to Davison's war on drugs forced Davison to back down. The mechanism was a Lawyers' Military Defense Committee lawsuit, backed up by a strong GI support group. **Fight back** reports:

At Butzbach, more than 50 soldiers have joined together to form the Committee for GI Rights. They have agreed to circulate petitions to their congressmen and in all likelihood also to bring a lawsuit in a federal court to enjoin the Army from going ahead with its "program of unjustified oppression." The lawsuit will be coordinated by ... the Lawyers' Military Defense Committee (p. 7, *Ibid.*)

The battle was won, as anxious justices peered over the lawyers' shoulders to the spectre of massive GI rebellion, with an organized core in **Fight back**.

The united front strategy, initiated at Ft. Hood and used to the best effect at Ft. Dix and in Germany, was also applied somewhat less successfully in this period. Nevertheless, several other struggles were launched.

At Aberdeen Proving Ground, barracks level activity by the active duty VVAW chapter there—initiated by a PLER—was able to pull off a couple of actions.

Army machine operators used their power over production to gain concession from the brass.

Most regular personnel at APG get one afternoon off a week for "Physical Training." Actually this is free time. When a new master sergeant took charge of a machine shop here, he cut out PT time.

The junior enlisted men in the shop got together and decided to "take it easy" on their job. After several weeks they got together again and went in to see the sergeant. He wanted to know what the problem was. The men let him know and they got their "PT" time back. (**Challenge-Desafio**, 9/21/72)

This slowdown tactic spread to several other units at APG through the VVAW chapter.

An effort was made to move to a higher level of struggle, fighting to implement the article 15 campaign (see ahead). By confronting the commander with about a dozen GIs, the CO was forced to agree to a monthly grievance meeting and to give that group a representative on the battalion race-relations council. A key factor in developing this unity was the multi-racial character of the active duty VVAW chapter initiated by the party.

In Washington, D.C., PL helped invigorate a local project, and succeeded in launching several on-post struggles against harassment. The GI alliance provided a center for activist GIs to get together from several local bases, to coordinate activities and to put out a newspaper called **Open Sights**. The D.C. GI Alliance succeeded in several minor struggles, and participated in several demonstrations, including an anti-war demonstration and a regional "Free Billy Smith" demonstration at the Court of Military Appeals in D.C.

In this case, as well as in the major cases, the one weakness which stands out above all the rest was the failure to build the PLP by recruiting GIs into it. Thus, when attacked and transferred, the activity we initiated inevitably waned. Only recruitment from the army itself could resolve this problem in a reliable way.

SHARPENING MASS ACTIVITY: THE BILLY DEAN SMITH CAMPAIGN

Although we had engaged in struggles around specific issues, local grievances, as well as in demonstrations against the war, we needed something more, an issue or a set of issues or a set of concrete reforms to solidify our base. The first of these was the Billy Dean Smith campaign.

ALL CONTRADICTIONS OF MILITARY LIFE came to a head in the case of Billy Dean Smith. GIs had fought mightily against the war—Billy Smith had organized and spoken out against it in Vietnam. He had gone AWOL many times to avoid combat patrols against the NLF. GIs had rebelled against racist lifers and brass—Billy Smith had attacked racism sharply in his company. Billy Smith stood for the militant armed fight against the brass, which black soldiers like himself had taken the lead in initiating. Racism meant that 40-50% of the front lines were blacks, served up as cannon fodder for U.S. imperialism. But this cannon fodder preferred fighting the brass to fighting their Vietnamese brothers and sisters. This is the movement which Billy Smith symbolized.

Just as Davison in Europe tried to intimidate militant GIs through his "war on drugs," the brass as a whole sought to intimidate GI militants throughout the world by lynching Smith for the fragging murders of Smith's commanders.

The military understands the force of example. They use it from the day a recruit enters the service, singling out individuals to use as scapegoats. The frame-up of Billy Dean Smith was no more an accident than Ike's murder of the Polish immigrant worker Pvt. Slovik in World War II. The execution of Smith was to be the grand lesson to GI dissidents—don't fight racism, don't fight the war, don't fight harassment—don't fuck with the green machine. An account of the lynching would have made excellent basic training material for the class on the UCMJ.

Thousands of GIs, veterans, and students saw the crucial significance of this case and the propaganda attached to it. The slogan became, "Free Billy—Free Ourselves." His incarceration



Ft. Ord, Calif. GI's show solidarity with Pvt. Billy D. Smith as he leaves a preliminary court martial.

tion and trial was in reality a trial for all of us. To defend him was to defend ourselves.

FLP decided that the Billy Smith campaign would be the main mass campaign we would be involved in, always stressing the crucial role of racism in the MVA (in addition, of course, to the barracks-based fightbacks, participation in storefront/coffeehouses, and independent party agitation). Many organizations fell into step, both before and after the PL decision, although the party was the first organization to publicly advocate and carry through nation-wide efforts at organizing to stop the racist frame-up. We organized the activity through our activity in GI organizations, veterans' organizations (VVAW), and SDS.

In every post throughout the world where we had cadre, leaflets, petitions and demonstrations appeared. In every united front from the GI Alliance in D.C., to the Ft. Devens United Front, to the Fight back organization in Germany, to the Ft. Hood United Front, and many others, PLP raised the fight for Smith's life as a life and death matter for all of us. In virtually every case, the united fronts took up the campaign as a priority issue.

Five East Coast GI organizations united for a demonstration in early July, 1972 to demand freedom for Billy Smith. As the D.C. GI Alliance leaflet said:

You know how the army always tries to harass and scare you and keep you guessing. They hope the guys will get jumpy at each other—blacks against whites, married against single, etc. Then when a man

speaks up, they try to silence him, because he might pull the jumpiness together into a big pounce on the brass.

That's Billy Smith. He's a pouncer. He spoke out and organized against his racist CO and the Army's being in Nam. He's being charged with fragging two officers because of this—and the only evidence is a grenade pin which came from a different type of grenade. He's been sitting in pre-trial confinement at Fort Ord, California for over a year now.

The army does not believe in justice for Billy Smith. They want to lynch him to provide an example to other militant GIs who won't take the Army lying down.

There's always a fight going on between us GIs and the brass and lifers. Billy Smith is one of us. He's in the slam, framed up. On the other hand, take Lt. Calley—a convicted murderer of Vietnamese people, running around free, a railroad scab before he joined the Army—perfect officer material. We GIs are the Billy Smiths—harassed every day, used to make money for the brass and the bosses—and always intimidated. The brass is doing it 100 times over with Billy Smith. We're always jumped on when we try to fight back. His fight is our fight only bigger... his life hangs in the balance. We should support him 100%. (From "Support Billy Smith" leaflet, DC GIA.)

The East Coast activity was initiated by the

party. Naturally there were many other sources of support for Smith. VVAW fought nationwide on the issue. Many student groups, including SDS, did also. The Billy Dean Smith Defense Committee in California coordinated much of the activity both legal and demonstration-type there. Perhaps as significant was the role played by CAMP News, the central paper of the GI movement. It kept trial developments, analyses, and reports on actions in its front pages.

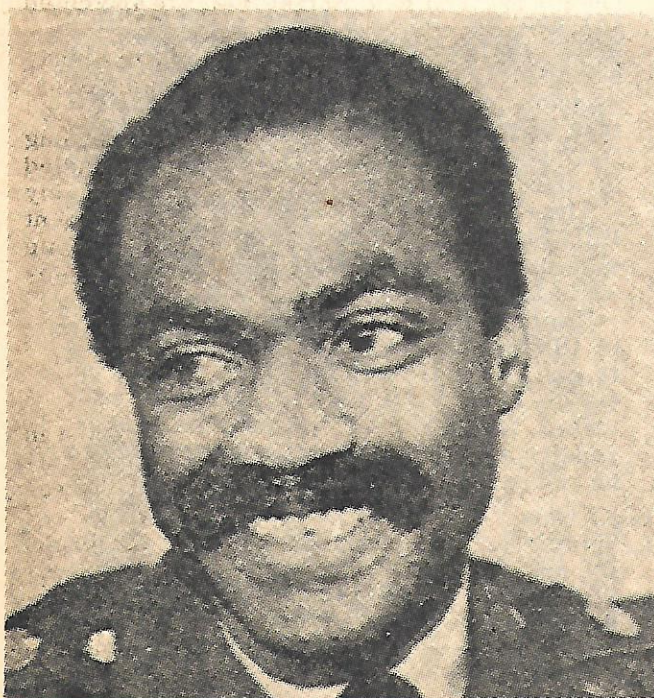
As a result of these activities, the trial was conducted in an atmosphere of watchfulness and a high level of consciousness. Naval rebellions against racism were much in the minds of the military top dogs during the trial.

On the day of his trial, VVAW and SDS staged a sharp action in Monterey. VVAW held a trial of the army as the trial of Billy Smith began. **Challenge-Desafio** reports:

...we had a rally and a spirited march up to the Fort Ord gate, demanding the freeing of Billy Smith. About 300-400 people were on the march, including some people from the mainly black working class and Army community of Beaside, who joined us as we passed by...

At the trial of the Army, there was testimony on all aspects of racism in the military: 17 GIs died of an epidemic of spinal meningitis at Ft. Jackson, S.C., and it "just happened" that they were all Puerto Ricans. A Filipino veteran told how he was consistently used in training classes as an example of a "gook of a slant-eyed Asian."

A black WAF veteran told about the combination of racism and sexism—she was pushed for hitting a woman who repeatedly



Billy D. Smith

called her nigger, while this woman got off....

Many of the speakers on resistance in military pointed out that these fraggings and killings of officers were often not conscious political acts, but a matter of sheer survival... Oct. 5, 1972, p. 11

VVAW raised the same issues at the Republican Convention.

AS THE KANGAROO TRIAL PROCEEDED, prosecution evidence was shown to the world to be shoddy and trumped up. When the star prosecution witness took the stand, he declared that he was sure that the person who had thrown the frag was **not** Billy Smith! At that point, with the world watching, the Army threw in the towel. It feared the massive rebellion which was threatening had they tried to get a conviction after their efforts to use a GI's drug problem to frame up Smith failed. Commenting on the freeing of Smith, **Challenge-Desafio** reports:

The Armed Forces feared an increase in militant actions by enlisted men if they gave Billy a heavy sentence. With the current revolts of sailors on the USS Constellation and other ships, this is the last thing that the Brass wants.

These are the reasons Billy Smith was freed, not because of liberalism by the Army or the "compassion" of the lifer officers of the jury...

...A black man named Alfred Flint is now serving a 30 year sentence in the main Army stockade at Leavenworth, Kansas. He was convicted of killing a major, on evidence equally as worthless as the evidence in Billy Smith's case.

The reason one got acquitted and the other got 30 years is not the skill of their respective lawyers (they both had competent, dedicated civilian lawyers); it had very little to do with the individual attitudes of the officers trying them, virtually all of whom have highly racist attitudes towards militant black GIs. The difference was that Flint was tried in Vietnam with no movement or support to back himself up with while a world-wide movement had developed around the defense of Billy Smith. The party brought to the fight the political line of fighting racism as a key to the struggles inside the army, and the organization which made possible many militant, spirited demonstrations as well as educational work among tens of thousands of GIs.

LONG-RANGE REFORM—FIGHTING RACISM AND HARASSMENT BY REFORMING THE UNIFORM CODE OF MILITARY JUSTICE

Through the work around the Billy Smith case, the party concluded that a long-range anti-racist focus required a struggle to reform the entire UCMJ. As a reform struggle, such an endeavor allowed for a long term commitment to the reform itself, and it could involve people on many

levels of struggle. The best kind of struggles, although not the only ones, would be against particular racist abuses of the UCMJ. Within those struggles, the structural reform of the UCMJ could best be advanced.

While calling for structural reform in judicial procedures, the reform plan called for a weakening of military's arbitrary kangaroo court power over the GI. It was modeled on a case in Vietnam, where courtmartial boards were made up of genuine peers. Virtually every case which involved charges against a GI by an offended officer was thrown out! Naturally, such a change only came about and was maintained because the military at that post was swept with dissension, mutiny, and demoralization. Only a terrified command would yield this much of its authority. And it would yield it only so long as normal military discipline could not be maintained, or so long as no organized movement emerged demanding it.

Civilian courts are racist and often filled with kangaroos also. Nevertheless there is a facade of justice, due process, and the "technical" assumption of innocence until proven guilty. These supposed rights are generally denied members of the military. The article 15 is non-judicial punishment. It requires virtually no evidence. If the commander wants to discipline a GI for some violation, he simply writes up an article 15, asks the GI to sign it, and can give the GI extra duty, loss of rank, restriction, heavy fines, and a loss of privileges. The GI does have the rights to refuse to sign the article 15. Then he will be court-martialed, and the penalties are likely to be much harsher, including time in the stockade. And the courtmartial is really not a much better situation. Although there are rules of evidence and so on, the jury is made up of officers, the class enemy. (Because of pressure, courtmartial boards now include up to 1/3 EM—almost always lifers.)

Article 15s and courtmartials form a crucial link in the racist subjugation of black GIs, as can be seen by the overwhelmingly black population of Armed Forces stockades. Naturally, the UCMJ is also a stone around the neck of white GIs.

The clear contradiction between elements of the UCMJ and the federal court system forms both a rallying point for many GIs and a danger of bourgeois co-optation. In his typical wish-washy, non-substantive fashion, McGovern said:

We should model the military justice system to the greatest extent possible on the Federal court system. Members of the military juries should be selected at random, not by command choice. The summary courtmartial, which does not provide adequate safeguards, should be abolished. All of these measures would represent a fundamental realignment of the system of military justice on the system of civilian justice. They would virtually eliminate the possibility of command influence on the judicial process. ("George McGovern Speaks to Servicemen," campaign lit. '72)

It is crucial for communists in the struggle for UCMJ reform to point to the pitfalls of bourgeois democracy, and win people to a revolu-

tionary perspective. Nevertheless, the UCMJ is the most blatant fashion that the "involuntary servitude" character of the military manifests itself, and it is the key way that racist attacks are carried out in the armed forces.

The campaign began at Ft. Hood with a petition:

We, the undersigned GIs of demand that Congress completely change Article 15, UCMJ, taking the power to impose punishment out of the hands of the Commanding Officers and putting it into the hands of enlisted people.

We propose that a board be established composed of 3 EM, grades E-1 through E-9, who would be elected every 90 days in company-wide election. That board would decide on all cases that are not decided by commanding officers. The board would hear both sides of a case, allowing the accused to defend himself before making its decision.

Article 15 is now used to intimidate and harass GIs. It violates the Constitution of the United States by denying GIs due process of law. It is used in a racist way against Third World GIs. It gives company commanders absolute power to punish EM under their command who they don't like.

A democratically elected board would change the present system of intimidation and harassment to one of fairness and justice. (Reprinted in CAMP News, 9/72, p. 8)

PLP decided to urge all other projects and organizations to pursue this campaign actively. We also decided to try to modify the petition to exclude E-8 and E-9 as total lackeys of the command structure. We also called for court-martial boards made up only of elected EM, not appointed EM and officers.

While we managed to get thousands of signatures, and initiate specific agitation campaigns, this project was not fully carried out largely because by early 1973 PL was no longer sending cadre into the service, and our forces dwindled as people ETSed. The campaign was extremely well-received among GIs; had we had sufficient forces, this issue probably would have become the central demand of a nation-wide GI movement.

BROADENING OUR MANEUVERABILITY— PLP JOINS LEGAL ORGANIZATIONS

Virtually all of the organizations we worked in were illegal in some way, and certainly not officially recognized army groups. But as the result of multiple rebellions in the army, loss of discipline, the prevalence of mutiny, the brass instituted two new organizations—race relations councils and junior enlisted men's advisory councils. These groups were new, and the brass had little experience with that kind of democratic form. The vague regulations surrounding the councils made it possible for us to use those forms both as vehicles of struggle and forums for our ideas.

THE RACE RELATIONS COUNCILS WERE both post-wide and on the unit level. The post-wide council's main activity was to conduct race relations classes, and deal with any major racial problem on post. In the race relations councils, the brass were vulnerable. The ground-rules were supposed to encourage frank and open discussion (for example, you wore civilian clothes—nevertheless, the brass and lifers stood out like sore thumbs).

There could be no retaliation for what you said in the class. The instructors were junior officers, who had volunteered for the job. They were, in one way or another, vaguely opposed to racism in some abstract kind of way. Their attitudes were modified by a required nationally administered course. At the instructors' course, the brass stressed "identity" and "cultural differences" as what was important, rather than militancy and unity. They used Carmichael's book **Black Power** as the required text.

The stress was for whites to "clean up their own backyard"—and stop being so racist. No talk of united struggle against racism. This suited the white brass and lifers fine, since they weren't about to even clean up their front yard, and had no intention of changing their racist attitudes and practices in the first place. Occasionally an instructor would point out the hypocrisy of the army in holding race relations classes while racist job divisions still existed in the service. This was about as far as the junior officer instructors would go.

But the classes could obviously be turned around from a moral lecture to a fighting discussion. A PLPer at Ft. Belvoir attended the course, and was able to raise dozens of important issues of army racism, from the UCMJ to the need to support rebellion and mutiny in the Naval fleets. Most importantly, the PLPer was able to show how army racism is a threat to all GIs, something which was hotly contested by the instructors.

The hot discussion was good. It could all have been for naught, however, if the discussion hadn't led to practical activity. After all, one of the purposes of these sessions was to get angry GIs to vent their feelings, and be pacified. In this case, however, on the third day three of the GIs in the class circulated a petition supporting the soldiers at Walter Reed in UBAD (United Blacks Against Discrimination) who were facing court-martial for militantly demonstrating against racism in the job allocations there, and a second petition attacking the racist behavior of the local police. The first was sent to UBAD. The second was sent to the post newspaper, with a covering letter. It was published, much to the brass's consternation, and they followed it up by claiming that it wasn't true.

The failure of the two instructors, one black and one white, to sign the petitions exposed their wishy-washy, hypocritical stand on racism when it came down to doing something. Their excuses—"clean up your own backyard first" and "not authorized to do this"—just didn't ring true to the people there. The circulation of unauthorized pe-

titions like this is illegal, and can be considered mutiny. But it was possible to carry it out in the context of the class because the brass were weak there. Out of this activity, 2 GIs got involved in the anti-racist movement at Ft. Belvoir.

The unit level race relations councils were less structured. They were voluntary, so those who volunteered generally wanted to do something about racism. In fact, in HHC 11th Engrs at Ft. Belvoir, the race relations council would carry out its mission by making its minutes exposes of racist lifers. When an aggrieved GI would bring an issue to the council, the council would check out the story, talk to the lifer, and, if warranted, write him up in the minutes. One lifer was transferred as the result of this activity. One second lieutenant, when he heard that he was about to be exposed, pleaded with the EM who chaired the council (an E-5) not to do it to him.

The council let him off the hook, but after that he had to knuckle under to whatever the council told him to do.

Clearly there were weaknesses in the council, but it provided a good forum for combatting racist practices. It was a legal place to develop the struggle. Efforts to move the council to put on official anti-racist programs dealing with current issues, such as psychosurgery, was not approved, but it was possible to conduct ideological struggle around those issues anyway.

The Junior Enlisted Men's Councils were supposed to be a mechanism for the commander to keep his ear to the ground for rumbles among the GIs. They generally failed to meet regularly, and there was often little sentiment to build them since they were only advisory. But those GIs who did volunteer to work on the councils—or were elected in some cases—were interested in improving conditions for GIs, and were well aware of the intractability of the brass. In Germany, the GIs wanted a PLPer to be their elected representative on the council, but he refused, arguing that the councils only built illusions. Later on, another PLPer was elected to the post and was able to use the council for broader anti-brass organizing.

The fact that the army created these loose JEMCs and RRCs was a sign of weakness. They represented a form of concession, although they also represented a simultaneous co-optation effort. It is up to communists to become part of these groups, taking advantage of the brass's weaknesses, exposing their duplicity, push the councils for all their worth in terms of reforms, and raise the party's line openly. Many GIs are simply not prepared to work illegally. By combining the illegal newspapers, demonstrations and confrontations with this legal activity, the party can most effectively broaden its base. Just as we had to fight sectarianism to enter the coffeehouse/storefront aspect of the GI movement, so it was another defeat for sectarianism when we actively entered and tried to build these official army organizations into fighting forces against the brass. An example of how the two forms of struggle can work together was a confrontation with the commander of a company over



U.S. troops are used against the postal worker's strike, March 25, 1970.

the right to wear safety shoes. At the JEMC meeting, a petition signed by virtually the entire motor pool was presented. The commander temporarily backed down, and it was impossible for him to make reprisals without completely destroying the council system, even though the petition was illegal. The presence of many other council members made any such action out of the question.

Without independent party agitation and party-building, of course, such activity is worthless, just as it is worthless to elect a city councilman from the party unless that legal form is seen a way to build the revolutionary movement which can overthrow the whole city council system by violence.

FT. LEWIS—BREAKTHROUGH IN PARTY-BUILDING AND FIGHTING RACISM

The army section had learned through struggle what concretely building united fronts meant, and what it meant to build a multi-racial organization. This work reached a peak at Ft. Lewis, which was the last arena of struggle in the army for PL in the current period.

An active-duty Pler arrived at Ft. Lewis in early 1973. He built an active-duty chapter of VVAW, and worked with the Shelter Half, a GI coffeehouse. Simultaneously he began the unit

level struggle which is the guts of any GI movement. This level of struggle proved crucial in building a base for post-wide anti-racist militant struggle.

VVAW grew rapidly. It became a force to be reckoned with by the brass. Realizing that a long range anti-racist fight was central to the growth of the GI movement, VVAW and PLP developed a 7-point plan to smash racism in the army. These points were:

- 1) No bad discharges
- 2) No riot control
- 3) Fight racist UCMJ
- 4) Fight racist medical care
- 5) No job discrimination
- 6) Ally with all other anti-racist groups
- 7) Build international solidarity.

As VVAW took concrete actions around these points, the brass flipped out.

In April of 1973, the commanding general of Ft. Lewis attacked the VVAW chapter by name in front of 17,000 troops. The general repeated over and over again that the troops should use the chain of command, human relations councils (a good place for us to be also, and win over more GIs to VVAW and PLP!), and that in any event the army was an equal opportunity employer and not at all racist like VVAW claimed.

The attack was prompted by months of anti-racist activity and the recent struggle in the 864th Engineering Battalion led by members of PLP and VVAW.

In the course of this struggle, some important reforms have been won. A number of GIs (largely minority) have been promised better jobs; various GIs have been given leave previously refused under pressure of point 5. The CO was forced to cancel threatened Article 15 punishment for 15 GIs (about 55% minority) involved in these actions. Some GIs previously refused permission to go to school have been granted permission now, and NCOs will not be allowed in our rooms when we are not there. The struggle was aimed at relieving the super oppression of minority GIs, but the militant leadership of minority GIs and communists has in fact helped the situation for all GIs.

... The brass has emphasized that the one thing they don't want is 'mob scenes' like the confrontation that won these things in the first place... We will not be fooled! We will continue to build VVAW and PLP to expand the battle against racism and eventually to rid ourselves of these boss parasites and their brass flunkies! (**Challenge-Desafio**, May 3, 1973, p. 10)

It was precisely out of confrontations like this that VVAW won its demands and grew in respect among GIs. Most important of all, however, was that in these struggles the line that racism hurts white GIs as well as blacks was clearly shown.

In the 411th Transportation Company, VVAW sparked another confrontation, this time with a racist named Major Ford. He tried singling out a black GI for special harassment and confinement for trumped up charges. A miniature Billy Smith. Newbold and 15 friends had confronted Ford around a series of grievances. Ford had called the MPs, the equal opportunity officer, and anyone else he could think of to try to stem this anti-racist tide. The brass had been forced to give in on three demands, and had to answer 6 others in 72 hours. As a result of the attention this action received, the post command decided to hide its own racism and investigated the racist behavior of Major Ford! Simultaneously other VVAWers were defeating an effort to railroad an anti-racist white soldier out of the service with a bad discharge.

VVAW UPPED THE ANTE IN THE STRUGGLE by launching a broader struggle against racism in the Madigan Hospital. It began with a mass leafleting campaign **on post**. The MPs were called to arrest the leafletters. But the response of the GI families was tremendous:

... even hustling GIs off to the MP station didn't stop the flow of support as lower ranking MPs gave clenched fist salutes after reading the leaflet. Really incensed by this time, the brass spent the rest of the night trying to coerce the residents of the housing project to give up their leaflets for "evidence." Only three surrendered their leaflets out of over 200 families in the project.

... As the leaflet pointed out, the military plans to cut back already inadequate medi-

cal care because of the present budget squeeze. Racism will be used to prepare the way as more and more minorities are forced into the armed forces... Dependents recently have been denied dental care at military facilities. The use of drugs instead of real treatment for nervousness or hypertension, special officer wards, long patient lines, overworked staff, not enough doctors, and an attitude fostered by the brass that GIs and their dependents are always faking are common malpractices.

Racism will take many forms as the brass prepares to cut medical service to release funds for "essential" projects like imperialist weaponry. (**Challenge-Desafio**, 9/6/73, p. 11)

Letting the outrage settle for 3 weeks, the brass finally pressed charges against two of the leafletters, trying to hype up a strong racism and anti-communism:

Since the pressing of charges, the brass has been fanatic in its efforts to stop VVAW and PLP. In Leroy's (a defendant) company, the well known racist and lunatic Major Ford has directed his lackeys to spread out-and-out lies about GIs' legal rights. His subordinates told the company 1) it is illegal to read "that communist paper" being circulated in the company (**Challenge**, of course); 2) it is illegal to go to VVAW meetings or have VVAW leaflets; 3) if you know any members of VVAW or PLP you have to turn them in and 4) it is illegal to associate with communists. These statements are in direct violation of the UCMJ. (**Challenge-Desafio**, 9/20/73, p. 11)

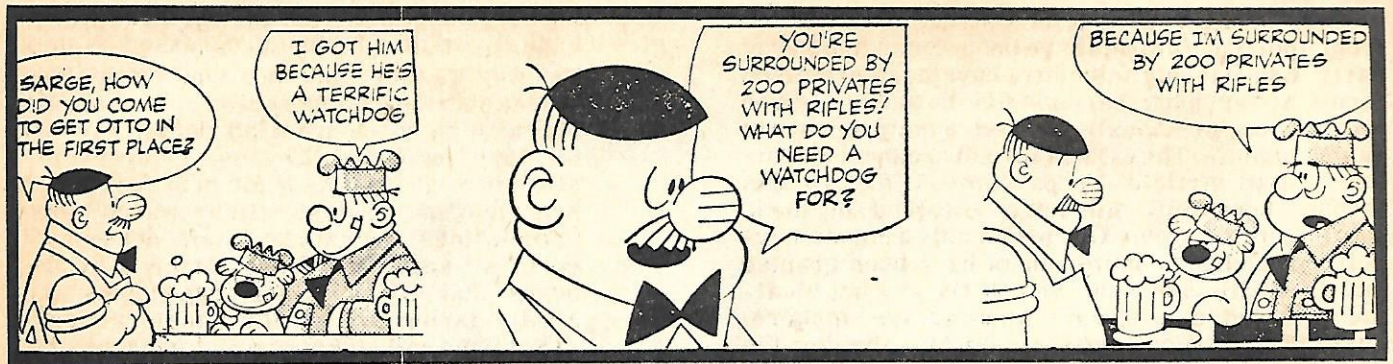
Often the kinds of struggles that VVAW had initiated here end in transfer, repression, and double talk. But because the struggle had been developed in depth, we find in a letter from a GI friendly to PLP:

Since the arrest of Dave Schop and Leroy Bullinger exposed the brass's fears of VVAW, the struggle has sharpened up considerably. The brass are being handed defeats on many fronts.

Madigan Hospital—after being assailed by GIs for months—finally acknowledged that patient lines were indeed too long and found a way to have them shortened. The waiting period, although still too long, has been reduced....

In Leroy's company, the statement made by Major Ford forbidding any form of dissent were exposed as the lies that they are. The day after Leroy filed an article 138 against Major Ford, the pig was forced to apologize to the assembled company for his statements. The militant history of GIs, uniting—black, white, and Latin—to fight the 411th Brass and the potential of future rebellion, led by VVAW and PLP, caused this quick retreat. The following day Major Ford was relieved of command...

These small victories are adding up. GIs are responding to anti-racist and com-



munist ideas and will soon send the brass scum back into the sewers that they came from. (**Challenge-Desafio**, 10/4/73, p. 16)

Although the courtmartial became an important aspect of the struggle, it was no longer primary like it had been at Ft. Dix. The organizing continued on many levels. In fact, the courtmartial was used to hold a press conference attacking not just the repression, but the conditions at Madigan Hospital. Furthermore, the same day that the courtmartial began, 50 GIs of all races were signing an illegal petition demanding an end to the 6 AM harassment formations in the PLer's company—and winning.

The packed courtroom, the ongoing struggle, the wide base of support all contributed to a real victory in the courtroom. The PLer got only 2 weeks of confinement (compared to the 6 months PLers had gotten hit with two years earlier at Ft. Dix!) The other man received 2 months, but that included time for an additional AWOL charge.

Many gains for GIs were made during the course of the struggle in the Schop/Bullinger and anti-racist campaign:

Many GIs who have never been involved in anything boldly stepped forward to fight back and assume leadership.

Scores of GIs from all over the post donated money for the defense of Dave and Leroy. VVAW collected over \$200.

Because of their "never say die" attitude, members of the VVAW were granted permission to distribute 500 of the "racist medical care" leaflets on post. Such a decree is a first in the history of Ft. Lewis.

We were able to bring 50 black, white, Native American, and Latin GIs to the trial, validating PLP's line on racism. These united GIs fought back to defend comrades who have been in the forefront of the anti-racist struggle at Ft. Lewis. The leadership, militancy and solidarity showed everyone understood that racism hurts us all. (**Challenge-Desafio**, 12/13/73, p. 14)

The rapid growth of VVAW among active duty GIs, and the militant stand that the chapter took, scared the hell out of the national office of VVAW, controlled by the revisionist Communist Party. Invoking their sacred principle of unity (just confess to believing that the sellout by the NLF leadership is a good thing—you don't actually have to

do anything to be in VVAW, according to these believers in unity with the bosses—just confess to the Almighty Revisionist that you think sellouts are all right), the national tried to expel the Ft. Lewis chapter because not everyone there agreed with the 8 points of bullshit unity. There again, PL was faced with anti-communism, and an effort to split us off from the militant center. This time, however, the base of support was strong. At the Washington State VVAW meeting, a letter denouncing the national's efforts was adopted and signed by all the relevant state officers of VVAW. They defended the right of all militant fighters to be in VVAW, including real communists in PLP. As far as they were concerned, the national office could go soak its head in the Volga River.

OUT OF THIS STRUGGLE, PL GREW IN TERMS of GI members, which represented a breakthrough over our previous work which had been woefully lacking in bringing new comrades into the party. Largely because of the growth of the party center inside VVAW, the mass struggle was the sharpest and most successful of any of our previous work, including even the work at Ft. Hood, which had never delivered a decisive blow against racism or recruited people to the party, despite its militancy and mass involvement.

RACISM OVERCOME

Our success in building a genuine multi-racial GI organization of militant GIs, fighting in their own interest against racism, stands as a refutation of widespread liberal and revisionist sentiment that black and white cannot unite against racism (or in any struggle against the bosses, for that matter). Despite the good intentions of many people who worked in coffeehouses, who helped build GI organizations, and did some work against the brass and the war, many of them fell prey to one of many forms that racism takes. In general they failed to unite with black GIs, who were, in practice, fighting the brass the hardest. These racist weaknesses were also true, although to a lesser extent, of many PLPers in the service. Nevertheless, the final breakthrough at Ft. Lewis demonstrated that the party, operating in a democratic centralist fashion, can root out even these deeply ingrained prejudices and build multi-racial unity. The lesson applies to students, workers, community organizers, as well as to GIs.

THE LESSON WHICH STANDS OUT STARKLY from the GI work of the party is that, unless the party itself is built in the process of these reforms struggle by the bringing in of fresh blood into the party's ranks, the army can relatively easily turn around struggles, isolate party members, and generally defeat the GI movement through repression, transfers, and discharges. Party recruitment of course requires a serious political and personal relationship with the rank-and-file GIs. The success or failure of recruitment to the party is a large measure of the success or failure in correctly building a base for revolution among the masses.

The effect that the party had on the movement against the brass was tremendous. The transformation of the GI movement at Ft. Hood; the militancy and strength of the struggle at Ft. Dix; the international Germany-wide unity achieved in USAEUR; the agitation and struggle at dozens of other bases, which was not as sharp as some of these actions but which kept GI resistance bubbling; and finally the greatest success, over a year of strong, growing, united anti-racist struggle with multi-racial unity and the growth of the revolutionary party of the working class; all of these activities stand as testimony to the vital necessity of a revolutionary party which can evaluate its practice, carry out its line, and self-critically change as the class struggle requires.

Without an organized party apparatus, these struggles certainly would not have progressed as they did. And make no mistake, many of these actions electrified the GI movement, rank-and-file GIs everywhere, and many sections of the civilian population. For the party was able to significantly up the ante in the class struggle in the army.

Despite our small numbers, our impact was great. The objective conditions of class hatred and rebellion were present throughout the armed forces in the period studied. GIs knew they were being used, that they and their families and their class had nothing to gain and a lot to lose in the war. They lacked revolutionary leadership to carry forward that rebelliousness to revolution. But to the extent that PL was able to play a role, it did provide that leadership; thus its impact was great.

The role of coffeehouses, USSF, CAMP News, and other mass phenomena of the GI movement was important and should not be underestimated. But the party's leading role in some of the sharpest struggle was key to many of the advances of the GI resistance. And perhaps even more important than this, many revolutionary cadre were steeled in class struggle, and contributed their experience to the growing understanding of what is required for our party to become in practice the vanguard party which the working class requires in order to make socialist revolution.



GI's support hospital worker's strike.