

NATIONAL OFFICE REPORT

This is the 15th National Steering Committee Meeting of VVAW/WSO. There are many important tasks to be accomplished here in order for us to move forward in building a fighting veterans movement. Primarily, we must consolidate and deepen our national program, while at the same time, rid ourselves of our baggage. To sum-up where we are, the following report contains a brief historical sketch -- putting the current struggle in its proper perspective; a sum-up of trends in our work around the national program and methods for moving that program forward; a report on our GI work; and a brief statement on some of the things which must be accomplished at this NSCM.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Historical Review of the Two-Line Struggle

VVAW/WSO has a long history of struggle, both internal in developing our understanding, and external in putting that understanding into practice. As the movement against the war in Indochina reached broader sections of the American people, veterans returning from the war were inevitably involved in the mass struggle to end that war -- that is where the old "VVAW" was formed. However, "VVAW" was not a consciously anti-imperialist organization; it did not identify the enemy as the system. It had an undeveloped line on the war, but even more fundamentally, opposition to the war was the basis of unity for the organization - period.

Masses of vets and GIs began to IDENTIFY with "VVAW" and literally thousands sent in membership applications. At its height, "VVAW" received over 15,000 membership forms. This was a reflection of vets' mass outrage at the war. It did not reflect a common understanding of the causes of the war and did not reflect an understanding of the NEED for organization. As masses of vets united with "VVAW" and the overall anti-war movement, struggle within the organization also deepened. Although these thousands of vets and GIs identified with the overall purpose of the organization, they did not actually take conscious leadership from it.

People learn from struggle and this was true for the membership of "VVAW." As members consistently engaged in struggle against the war, their understanding of the true nature of that war grew. Internally, this meant a long struggle between the line that the war was a "bad mistake" and the understanding that the war was an outgrowth of the system of imperialism. Throughout the years of this intense struggle, many vets and GIs joined the organization and many more dropped away.

After the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement, the addition of "Winter Soldier Organization" to our name and the change in the conscious nature of the organization, many chapters and members left. But because the organization changed with the changing conditions in the world, because the nature of the war was exposed more and more, and because members began to understand the enemy we were fighting, VVAW/WSO continued to grow and involve new people in the struggle.

We are again facing a great period of change. As in 1973, when the organization changed to meet new conditions in the real world, so today we are changing to meet new conditions. The war in Indochina is over. The people of Indochina have

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

been victorious on the battlefield and US imperialism has been dealt its greatest blow in many years. We are proud to have been part of the struggle and we have learned many lessons from that struggle. Now we must move ahead under new conditions. The war in Indochina is no longer the main battle line. Now, because of the increasing crisis of the system, the ruling class is moving towards a new war and at the same time, heightening attacks on working class people in the US; thus, the new battle line is arising -- the struggle of American working and poor people against a new war and against the attacks brought down on them by the ruling class.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

What does this mean for VVAW/WSO? It means that we must take up the day-to-day struggles of the masses of veterans and GIs. We must bring out the understanding that vets have about the nature of fighting a rich man's war, and bring that understanding to the masses of people. And we have begun to do that through our fighting national program. Although there are weaknesses in that program (as discussed later in this report) overall it rightly reflects the needs and desires of veterans and GIs. The program has laid the basis for this organization to move ahead, to lead new struggles again involving thousands of people.

And as was true in previous years, there has developed an intense struggle in VVAW/WSO. This struggle is not something imposed on us from without as certain people would have us believe. This struggle arose precisely because the real world was changing and this organization had to change with it if it was to stay a fighting organization. That is and has been the basic contradiction between the faction and the majority of the organization -- those people who saw the changing conditions and knew that VVAW/WSO had to change with them, and those that wanted to hold onto the past, to relive again and again the anti-war movement.

At the last national meeting, a group arose to represent those that wished to hold onto the past. At first there were some honest people in that group, not agreeing with the position of the "vets and GI focus" but not clear on where we should be moving. However, as the struggle deepened and intensified, this group's real character emerged. It is clearly a faction, opposed to implementing the national program of the organization that was passed unanimously at the St. Louis NSCM, and has actively organized to split and wreck VVAW/WSO. As we pointed out in our paper on the faction, we no longer consider these forces as part of VVAW/WSO. That they have organized their own national meeting, that they have had their own national leadership for some time and that they have publically attacked VVAW/WSO and vets and GIs in general, lays out most precisely that they must go.

The organization is moving ahead. Breakthroughs in our work have begun and our understanding of the fighting program has deepened considerably. Yes, it is true that the organization is smaller than a year ago, and yes it is frustrating to have waged such fierce internal battle for so long -- a struggle which interfered with our mass work. But it is because of that struggle and the changes we have made in our understanding of what VVAW/WSO is that the solid foundation for involving masses of veterans in struggle has been laid. Each day brings new vets into the streets and into struggle. As we consolidate and deepen our program, the mass movement of veterans grows larger.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

It is this that the faction does not and cannot see. They have their roots in the old movement. That is who they turn to in the struggle. While VVAW/WSO is reaching out to the masses of vets, the faction reaches out to the "movement," its cronies of many years.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

This is clearly evidenced in the pamphlet published by the faction, "In a Time of Struggle" -- a pamphlet distributed in bookstores and to movement organizations. The net result of this type of mentality is that "movement" organizations will rally around the paper, as many of them have the same thing in common -- holding back the revolutionary struggle of the masses of people in the US. This pamphlet means absolutely nothing to the great majority of veterans. At most, it can be used by opportunists to confuse vets. But while this movement-oriented pamphlet flows from a basic fear of joining in mass struggle, looking on from the sidelines, the majority of chapters in VVAW/WSO have been actively going out among veterans and uniting with them around their day-to-day needs.

Many of us have been in the movement for a long time and can easily fall prey to weighing heavily what other movement organizations are saying about us, reasoning that, "If all these people are saying these nasty things about us, then it must be true." Well, we reject this and we can see concretely that relying on the "movement" cannot build the fighting veterans movement. We must rely on veterans and our unity with their struggles to build the veterans movement. It is what the masses of veterans think about us that is important and not what a bunch of "movement" organizations may be saying.

This does not mean that we will not work with other organizations. We can and should continue to work with a wide variety of groups, but we must remember that our responsibility is to unite with veterans.

A good example of how we can make the error of relying on the movement organizations rather than on the people is to look at our work within the National Council for Universal and Unconditional Amnesty (NCUUA). For two years, we assumed that by working on the NCUUA Steering Committee (representing a really diverse assortment of organizations), we could win people over to understanding that amnesty can be an anti-imperialist issue. But time and again, the NCUUA National Office subverted the good political line of NCUUA by constantly tailing behind Congress and lobbying efforts. This error could have been avoided had we a better understanding that we had to put forward our political views on amnesty, out to the masses of people in this country rather than to assorted movement organizations and their leadership.

As long as chapters continue going out to veterans, engaging in their day-to-day struggles and learning from them, then we will not fall into comparing ourselves to the movement organizations. Instead, we will unite with the masses of vets and they will help us decide what's best for building a fighting vets movement.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Where We Go From Here -- Broaden and Deepen the Program

With all the internal and external struggle that VVAW/WSO has been through in the past six months, most chapters have still devoted their energies primarily to working among vets and implementing the national program. There have been some real successes in that work and we have begun to acquire a body of experience which can provide guidelines for future work. We see the primary task of this NSCM as broadening and deepening that program, using the experience that we have collectively gained.

There haven't been any "miracles" in our vets work over the last six months. And there won't be any in the future, either. There were places where, when a fighting vets movement did not fall from the skies in a couple of weeks, the members of a chapter were demoralized and quit. The organized fighting vets movement will never be built unless we get out and build it; and in most places, that's just what's happening. Chapters are growing, and the new members are exactly the people needed to build the vets' struggle further -- they are people coming into the organization because they understand their oppression as veterans and understand that the only way to deal with that oppression is to fight back against it.

Key to our work has been uniting with vets struggles and, in some cases, giving leadership to these struggles. Recent campaigns such as around the cases of Joe Blanco in Chicago and Jose/Rosario in New York City have demonstrated that vets will follow the lead of an organization which is visibly and consistently taking up their struggles and showing how to fight back. Not all vets who have related to these specific actions have joined VVAW/WSO, nor should we expect that they will in the future. But they will relate to the organization and look to us for carrying our common struggle forward. Actions such as these and similar campaigns have been more successful than the pre-set demonstrations around a series of dates, because the actions grow directly from the anger and militance of vets involved in daily struggles -- it is not necessary to drum up enthusiasm. These campaigns did not fall from the skies but are the concrete results of a period of consistent work. Only through getting out where vets can be reached could the New York City chapter understand the rising anger around late checks, or can any chapter learn about growing struggles. The use of WINTER SOLDIER and leaflets on a consistent basis has provided a tool for many chapters, but it must be seen as a tool, not as an end in itself.

As more and more chapters take up the national program consistently, a couple of major errors have appeared in our work. Often the problem is raising the level of unity of a chapter too high; when chapter meetings only discuss theoretical matters up in the clouds, and not the practice of the chapter, vets who are interested in fighting the VA or unemployment stay away from these meetings. In fact, we often see meetings as the primary place where work is done, and that is a real mistake. One chapter found itself involved in a spontaneous struggle where vets were fighting the VA; instead of uniting with that struggle, the chapter tried to persuade the vets to come to a meeting to build struggle, not seeing clearly enough that the struggle was right there and already in progress.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Practice has certainly proved that bold, direct action is needed in dealing with administrators. Vets understand our militant resistance to various VA attempts at repression. But we have to avoid the mistake of seeing the VA workers as the enemy; instead, we should be trying to unite with them as much as possible. And we have to understand that going into the VA or unemployment offices with the sole intention of bouncing a guard off the nearest wall misdirects our work -- the guards are the instrument of the VA and unemployment offices (and, in a larger sense, of the system), not the enemy itself.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The more important danger in our work, however, is seeing the struggle in the VA or wherever in isolation from the larger struggle. Some vets at the VA have already begun to see VVAW/WSO as a kind of "service" organization (the demos or takeovers or jamming the bosses have won gains, and they want us to do the same thing for them around their specific case). While it's certainly a good thing that vets see that we can help them win victories, that's only part of our work. We have to unfold the nature of the VA -- and the system which stands behind it -- from the specific struggles we're involved in. To fight for one's own interests is a beginning; through that struggle and with a growing understanding of whose interests the VA serves (and how we were used as cannon fodder in the past), the individual joins in other struggles -- around the VA or elsewhere. That's the process through which we are building the fighting vets movement. Gains can and must be won from the VA, but in the long run, the VA cannot serve the needs of vets; when we leave the impression that we're into reforming the VA, we're misleading the masses of vets.

A key to avoiding this error is to bring out the danger of war as part of any campaign around the VA or unemployment. We know, from experience, what the war in Vietnam was all about -- and it wasn't about anything in the interests of the masses of vets or GIs. The same system which uses cutbacks to attack vets through the VA, and attack all working people through unemployment, speed-ups, layoffs, etc needs another war in order to try to pull itself out of crisis. Unemployed workers are prime candidates for the military which will be forced to fight the next war. Vets will certainly be under all kinds of pressure to get back into the military. The danger of war, unfolded around our understanding of the war in Indochina, should be tied into the day-to-day work, and will help us avoid the narrow struggle just directed around the specific problem with the VA or the unemployment office.

The major work of this NSCM must be the further development of the national program, as a result of summing up the demands we are now using. We need to develop specific demands which can be used around the country. We need to deepen our understanding of the relationship between unemployment work and VA work. And we need to understand how the program should be implemented. In the past, some chapters have seen the program -- and particularly the five demands which made up the program around the July 4th demo last year -- as god-given commandments to be followed to the letter, leading to a rigid approach to working in a spontaneous vets struggle. Instead, the program and its implementation must be geared to the concrete conditions in a particular community. There must be flexibility in the program and investigation of local conditions. The demand "Decent Benefits for All" which has served as the general demand in our War on the VA,

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

needs to be sharpened; more specific demands -- No More Late Checks, Open Disability Hearings, for instance, which grow from the developing areas of struggle need to be included in a national program.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

There are three major areas of work for VVAW/WSO in the coming months. First, the War on the VA must be intensified. We are getting a variety of practice around this campaign, which must be summed up.

Work on specific cases has proved successful and chapters should be looking for other cases which expose the VA for what it is. The individual case does put a face on the enemy -- rather than the vague concept of the "VA" in general, it provides the specifics for people to see vividly and concretely. There has been a tendency in some chapters to try and go for the whole VA. Working on these individual cases can, in addition to putting a face on the War on the VA, also show the masses of veterans that in unity there can be victory.

Our collective practice around the VA also points to areas of work which should not be primary -- methadone clinics (as bad as they are, work around them does not often help build the vets movement) or geriatric VA care. This is not to say that work can't or shouldn't be done around these areas, especially when there is a spontaneous struggle growing there; but they should not be the focus of chapter work.

The War on the VA is primarily our responsibility. We should call for support from and go out and unite with vets organizations, as well as asking for support from other progressive organizations, but it is our task to move that fight forward. Another major area of work is unemployment and, in most places where that work is successful, it is done in conjunction with the Unemployed Workers Organizing Committee (UWOC). With the crisis of jobs, and the high percentage of vets hit by that crisis, VVAW/WSO has a vital role in bringing unemployed vets into the struggle for Jobs or Income. And, as the economic "experts" tell us that the economy is bottoming out at the same time as unemployment increases, it clearly shows who is bearing the brunt of the depression -- the whole working class. That's why we say Fight! Don't Starve! Working with UWOC avoids the problems which some chapters have faced -- only relating to unemployed vets and having no way to deal with non-vets. The exact relationship of the two organizations in a given community still needs to be summarized. Practice up to this point, however, shows there is a place for both working in unity.

At this time, we see that chapters should be doing both VA and unemployment work as much as possible. To completely drop one or the other would be a mistake. Which area of work is primary depends on local conditions. The ideal situation combines both areas -- for instance, vets in a GED program going to school on the GI Bill (and getting inadequate benefits) because they can't find work.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The final major area of work is around wars of aggression -- We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War. This should not be seen as a separate area of work -- it's not like we do VA work one day, unemployment work the next, and danger of

war work the third. Instead, the danger of another war should be part of both the other campaigns, and our work and proaganda around these campaigns should reflect our awareness of that danger. Most of the membership of VVAW/WSO has the understanding of how war is a necessity in order to try to pull the system out of its crisis. In general, vets have a special credibility when we talk about the danger of war and the way we, and the rest of the working class, were used in the last rich man's war. We have to use that credibility to maximum advantage. The issue of amnesty and the right to resist wars of aggression should be part of our propaganda effort around this larger issue. From the "anti-war movement" we have learned the futility of a moralistic approach to the danger of war; our approach must be class-oriented -- that is, whose interests does war serve, and who ends up as the cannon fodder for the rich man's war.

While these are the three main areas of work for the next period of time, we have an immediate task in working with the Good Contract Committees in the Post Office, supporting their work and helping to organize such committees where they don't exist already. The primary thrust of this work is not to "recruit" vets working in the Post Office into VVAW/WSO, but to help build their struggle. Because of the large percentage of vets hired by the Post Office, however, we should be informing them about local and national activities of the organization with the aim of involving as many of them as possible. Work which has been going on with anti-police repression coalitions should also go forward. We have had some success in bringing vets from the VA to work in these coalitions, if not necessarily into VVAW/WSO.

The national program is closely tied to the methods of work we use in order to implement it. Even the best program, put forward in a bad way, is not going to win victories. At this time, work with specific cases, agitating around them and winning gains through that work provides the best method of work. While one such struggle is being waged, chapters should involve vets who have united around the specific case in other struggles -- this is the key to turning the fighter for one individual case into a fighter for other cases -- that is, a fighter for all.

Getting out to vets is essential. Public meetings where vets discuss their problems (often sponsored by the VA or various community groups) serve as one good place to present alternatives to the reformist bullshit from the VA and their frontmen.

Just talking to vets, whether through regular paper sales or tables outside the VA or unemployment offices has provided a clear idea of what specific demands vets are ready to move around. In St. Louis, there has been some success in talking to vets, finding out what issues are primary, and drawing up a petition which is taken back to the VA (a good program in places where there are not yet enough forces to confront the VA).

Jamming VA administrators and the lackeys who run the unemployment offices, particularly when they are forced out into the open where people can hear them, is another method which has been used successfully both in VA and unemployment work. Basically, these administrators are scared of the anger of the people (and with good reason!) so they always try to slink away into offices where they are not

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

exposed to the public. Drafting them out where the people immediately see through the drivel they are putting out serves as a real way to unite masses of people and point to the nature of the real enemy -- that is, the system which these blithering idiots serve.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Regular picket lines, while they have not been entirely successful in terms of bringing more vets into the organization, have provided a visible and consistent presence -- they demonstrate that we are not just a one-shot deal, and that we will be around when the fight starts.

Alone, WINTER SOLDIER will not organize vets, though there have been cases where individuals have come around to chapters off reading the paper. Primarily, it must be seen as a tool, a vehicle for getting out our position around a number of issues and showing how those issues are tied in with the struggles of vets. Over the past months, the paper has built a regular readership, especially where the paper is sold regularly. But it can't be the primary tactic for organizing, and should not be used that way.

In order for WS to reflect the work of the organization, it must have input from chapters. That includes writing the stories of a particular action or campaign, as well as sending pictures, etc. This must be done as soon as possible after an event. A story in July about an action in April means much less than if it was printed close to the event.

Some chapters have been good about sending action reports, general work reports, sum-ups of activities (to say nothing about dues and paper sales). On the basis of these reports, we wrote up the summary of VA work for the May Newsletter which many chapters told us was helpful. Also useful was the analysis of the Joe Blanco campaign in Chicago in the June Newsletter. An outline of the campaign, analysis of strengths and weaknesses, a copy of the leaflet all combined to give other chapters a real sense of what should -- and should not -- be done. This is a primary purpose the newsletter can serve if we get the necessary material.

As our work around the national program grows, we see an even greater need for coordination -- of chapters letting us know what is happening so that we can pass the word along to other chapters. Our work is moving forward; we have the nucleus of a vets movement and we're growing. The program needs to be improved, but in its essentials, it has proved out to be correct. It's now our task to push the work ahead.

G.I. Work

VVAW/WSO's GI work has made significant progress during the past 6 months. Since the St. Louis NSCM, we have been implementing the Draft Program for GI Organizing. This is the first time that our GI work has been carried out within the framework of a single, general plan and it has already allowed the organization to achieve some real gains. While we feel that we still have a long way to go and much to learn about the nature of GI work -- for truthfully, our work is still at a very primitive stage -- the Draft Program for GI organizing proposed at the St.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Louis NSCM does provide a solid basis for conducting our GI work and learning how to best improve it.

From practice based upon the analysis of the Draft Program, VVAW/WSO's GI organizers have learned a lot about how to build the GI movement around the day-to-day struggles facing GIs. In Hawaii, the chapter has begun making some really important breakthroughs working with GIs in a campaign for payment of a promised re-enlistment bonus (VRB). Similar progress has been made at Ft. Lewis, WA and Ft. Meade, MD, in work around the working and living conditions of GIs, democratic rights and the need to oppose the use of the military in further wars of aggression.

Perhaps the most visible evidence of the progress VVAW/WSO has made with its GI organizing was the Armed Forces Day actions organized around the country. It has been over 3 years since the old GI movement made any effort to spark struggle around Armed Forces Day demonstrations. Our actions this past May 17th proved that the GI struggle is far from dead and that GIs are more than willing to unite and fight around the demand for an end to all wars of imperialist aggression. The Armed Forces Day actions on May 17th marked a real leap forward for GI struggles and pointed to the great potential that exists for building a fighting GI movement.

However, in terms of making any major revisions of the program or more specifically, focusing our work around one of the various categories of GI organizing, we feel it is still too early to fully sum-up the Draft Program. So far, our practice has demonstrated that the Draft Program is, in essence, correct. But we still do not have enough experience to make any major determination of how to further proceed with improving our GI work. Rather, we feel that we should continue to work under the basic guidelines laid down in the original Draft Program, allowing individual projects to concentrate on that particular area of work that seems best suited for building the struggle of GIs under the particular conditions of each military installation.

Given this general understanding, there is a primary area of work on which we should all be focusing our GI organizing. That is developing the struggle around resistance to wars of aggression. Given the great danger of a major war erupting and the fact that preparation for a new war is perhaps the primary feature of military life today, it is critically important that work around resistance to wars of aggression be at the very heart of our GI organizing -- while at the same time, continuing our work of organizing around the day-to-day struggles of GIs, such as UCMJ struggles, living and working conditions, etc.

Along with work among active duty GIs, VVAW/WSO's work among Reserve and National Guard units will become increasingly important. The most important aspect of Guard and Reserve work is organizing among those units which would primarily be used for strikebreaking and as riot cops. A current example of this is the possibility of Guard and Reserve Units (as well as active duty GIs) being used as strikebreakers in the US Postal Workers struggle.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Reserve and Guard work is far less developed than organizing among active duty GIs. A programmatic approach to Reserve and Guard work, as well as an expansion of existing practice, is needed to improve our work in this area for the future.

A question the NSCM must take up is that of VVAW/WSO's relationship with a number of other groups doing GI work. With some of these groups we have had strained relations ever since the October, 1974 National GI Conference which VVAW/WSO sponsored. A few of them have repeatedly attacked our organization, red-baited our members and done all they could do to discredit us and prevent us from working with GIs. In one city, a GI organizing project went so far as to organize a "movement" boycott of VVAW/WSO, declaring that VVAW/WSO "could not organize GIs" in that city! Given the fact that some of these groups have consistently demonstrated that they seek absolutely no unity with VVAW/WSO, but rather only seek to discredit us, we feel that there is no reason whatsoever to continue relating organizationally to them.

In addition to dealing with this situation and our relationship to other GI organizations, this NSCM must begin to deal with a number of questions regarding our chapters in Japan and Okinawa. Given the extreme isolation of these chapters, there have naturally been numerous problems in trying to fully integrate them into VVAW/WSO's organizational life. Moreover, it has been very hard for these overseas chapters to grasp the ins and outs of the internal struggle that has been raging in the organization for over the past year. It is important that the NSC address these questions and try to figure out ways of dealing with them. A final question regarding the Asian chapters of VVAW/WSO that this meeting must deal with is their relationship to the Pacific Counseling Service (PCS) -- a GI organization that sponsors and funds the projects in Asia. In the past, this relationship has been very unclear and nebulous. We feel that it is important to clarify the situation for the future.

Tasks for this NSCM

The National Collective puts forward the following positions or issues which we believe must be dealt with at this NSCM. For the most part, the reasons are contained in the earlier section of our National Office Report.

1. The National Program must be broadened and deepened. This will come through the summing-up which must be the priority of this meeting. Various workshops and discussions on the floor should all be directed toward this goal. In a real sense, the program is what we are.

We have prepared a pamphlet -- which is intended for mass distribution -- around the National Program, and hope that it can be used as a basis for discussion. This is a draft pamphlet and needs input and criticism from all.

2. ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ are fighting the National Program and holding back our important work. They must be expelled. People in those chapters, interested in doing

work around the struggles of veterans and GIs should be allowed to return to the organization under the leadership of the regions involved, but the so-called "leadership" of the "anti-imperialist caucus" has proved itself dangerous to the struggle and should not be re-admitted to the organization under any circumstances.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

3. We believe that the Principles of Unity and Statement on Imperialism should be dropped; our task is to unite around the program and to make sure that the organization is open to the masses of vets who want to fight back. While drawing up the definition of imperialism was a good thing, and discussing it in chapters was worthwhile, we do not believe that the organization should adopt the definition as an organizational definition.

4. We recommend that we withdraw from the National Council for Universal and Unconditional Amnesty. The New York NCUUA National Office has perverted and misdirected the decisions of the NCUUA steering committee and has done its utmost to lead the amnesty struggle into the halls of Congress and up a blind alley. After two years of participation within NCUUA, we can see that it has become a dinosaur on the road to extinction. Our time would be better spent working locally to win universal and unconditional amnesty.

(See Attachment for characterization of National Council for Universal and Unconditional Amnesty (NCUUA))

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~