

## Dramatize GI Bill Cut, July 4th

# VVAW Seizes Statue of Liberty

On the evening of June 8 members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) occupied the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor to dramatize the struggle of veterans and spread the word about the upcoming July 4th demonstrations in Philly. Fifteen people took part in the takeover, including vets from all branches of the service and one non-vet member of VVAW who had been a war resister.

They began arriving on Liberty Island in small groups at around two in the afternoon. Closing time for the statue is 6 PM, the last boat for New York City leaves at 6:15. They waited around until closing time and then announced that VVAW was taking over the statue. They asked that everyone please leave in an orderly manner, assuring people they weren't about to hurt anyone, steal any property or damage the Statue of Liberty Museum in any way. The park employees were very cooperative and VVAW let them change into their street clothes before escorting them off the island.

Immediately the vets set to securing the entrances of the statue and letting "the outside world" know about the takeover. They hung two banners from the bronze lady's crown: "Extend and Expand the GI Bill" and "We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years—Let's Get Them Off Our Backs!" One telephone line was kept open throughout the night to keep in constant communication with supporters in New York and for passing information to the media. They also built a large barricade on a sixth floor landing inside the statue to slow up the police when they arrived.

VVAW released a statement about their seizure which read in part:

"We members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the

War have seized the Statue of Liberty in opposition to the Memorial Day cutoff of the GI Bill which has made 3.7 million of our brothers ineligible, forcing thousands of us onto the streets with no jobs to be found and no income to survive. We will not starve! Everywhere vets are mobilizing against these attacks.

"While the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars have approved of these cuts, while the newspapers have tried to maintain a wall of silence around this outrage, we will not remain the silent victims of those who attack us. Just as we fought against their bloodsucking war in Indochina, we are now fighting these attacks on our very lives. And we are rising up not to beg but to demand that the GI Bill be extended and expanded, learning from the veterans who 44 years ago this month did the same thing, gathering in Washington, DC, in the famous Bonus March.

"And this latest attack is just one more reason why we are marching in Philadelphia on July 1-4 under the banner 'We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years—Let's Get Them Off Our Backs!' demanding Jobs or Income Now and expressing our resolve that We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War! . . .

"On to Philadelphia July 1 to 4th!"

Towards morning, the police cut off the telephone link with the island. The cops tried to coax VVAW off the statue by telling them a deal had been worked out whereby the vets wouldn't get busted if they split the island by 10:30 AM. Maybe so, said the vets, but they'd have to confirm it with a trustworthy party. A little later, police arrived at the island to arrest the VVAW members. They were forced to break their way through the barricade. VVAW pointed out that

if they'd wanted to, they could have held off the cops at the barricade for hours.

### Masses Applaud Takeover

When the people who'd seized the statue arrived on Manhattan, they were met by other vets who had been leafletting crowds of tourists and passersby. As they were led to the paddy wagons, they began chanting "We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years, Let's Get Them Off Our Backs!" and were met by a hearty round of applause. The police tried to claim that the applause was for them but, except for a few of the tourists, most people had been won over to support of the action. The vets were charged with "refusing to abide with closing hours" and "refusing to comply with an injunction," which a judge had issued in the middle of the night. They were released on their own recognizance.

The action had an electric effect on vets and others in New York. Many more people began asking for information about the Philly demonstration and bought buttons. One man, who had been with VVAW when they took over the statue in 1970 but had later drifted away, came forward again to find out about Philly. When VVAW set up a table at a VA hospital a few days later, they were greeted with clenched fist salutes and salutations and again were bombarded with questions about Philly and about struggling around the GI Bill.

In covering the action, many reporters from the bourgeois press were sympathetic to the vets' demands. But when the news hit the papers or went out over the TV, there was little or no mention of the Philadelphia demonstration, only of the demand relating to the GI Bill cutoff. On the other hand, Philadelphia Mayor Rizzo's crowd is using the Statue of Liberty play to jump up and down about how the Rich Off Our Backs—July 4th Coalition, which includes VVAW, shouldn't get permits for the demonstrations July 1-4, claiming that issuing permits will be like issuing a license to grab Independence Hall or something.

The differences between the Statue of Liberty seizure and what the Coalition plans to do in Philly are quite clear to people—in spite of the authorities' efforts at spreading confusion and claims that "It's unpredictable." The vets in the New York action were all aware of what they were doing. They didn't bother with permits and just grabbed the statue in a small action to dramatize the struggle against the GI Bill rip-off and help build for July 4.

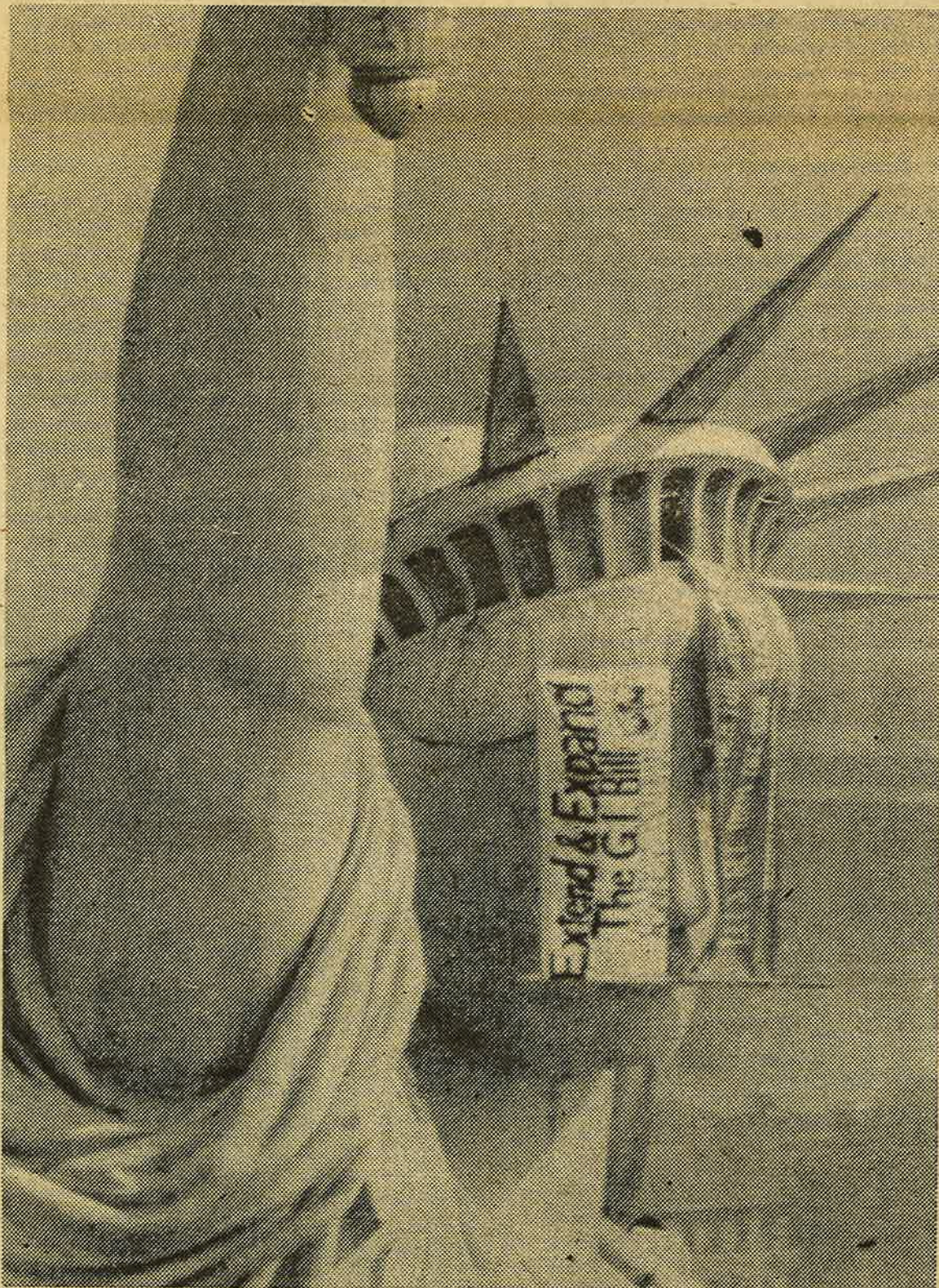
It is also quite clear to the hundreds of thousands who have received the Rich Off Our Backs—July 4th Coalition publicity what its plans are. The coalition's series of demonstrations will involve thousands of people over five days in mass, militant and disciplined struggle at various sites. The coalition has asked for permits and everyone knows that the city is just shucking and jiving, fishing for any excuse to deny the streets to the Coalition. They're not worried about the Coalition grabbing a building at all. It's the demonstrations that have them uptight. ■

## Southern July 4th Conference Held

Workers and students from Houston, Atlanta, Birmingham, and Gainesville, Florida, gathered in Birmingham May 15-16 to make plans to join their class brothers and sisters in Philly July 1-4. In workshops and in general sessions the people spoke out about their hatred at the way the system has abused them and of their determination to stand up and fight in Philadelphia. There were lively discussions about how to mobilize more people to go to the demonstrations and about how to continue the struggle when everyone gets home.

The conference in Birmingham was looked forward to not only by active fighters in the South but also by workers elsewhere in the country. When plans for the South-wide meeting were announced in earlier regional conferences in Philly and Cincinnati, the news was greeted by the cheers of all. The Birmingham conference emphasized the importance of the two demands, Jobs or Income Now! and We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War! and how the working class must take on the whole system.

A big question was "Why have a demonstration July 4th around the Bicentennial?" One of the speakers answered it very well when they said, "I used to know a fighter who started out punching with his head down. When he started to pick his head up, so he could see what he was fighting, he became a pretty good fighter. That's what we're doing with this demo—we're picking up our heads to see exactly who our enemy is and what it's going to take to bring him down." ■



Members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War unfurl banners right off the top of "Miss Liberty's" hat. One says "Extend and Expand the GI Bill," the other, "We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years—Let's Get Them Off Our Backs!"