

#2

CLARIFICATION PAPER
of
NATIONAL COLLECTIVE
POSITION PAPER
ON THE FUTURE OF VVAW/WSO

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PREFACE

This Clarification Paper is being written for the purpose of clearing up some of the confusion that has surrounded our original position paper on the future of VVAW/WSO. We stand by our original paper and its thrust -- that if VVAW/WSO is to survive as a viable organization, we must consciously focus our work on veterans and GIs. However, we do recognize that the original paper had certain weaknesses, and that we did not always explain our thoughts as well as we should have. These weaknesses have led to some confusion, to the point that we were often amazed that what we had said in our original paper could be so incorrectly interpreted by chapters and individuals. It is because of these misinterpretations and general confusion that we felt the need to write another paper which we hope will clarify some of the major points and answer the major questions that we have heard raised with regard to adopting a veteran and GI focus. This paper contains two major sections. The first is a general discussion of what we see as the major weaknesses of our original paper and some of the criticisms we have received; the second section consists of answering questions that have been asked of us. We feel that it is important to answer these questions in such a way so as to allow the entire organization to be able to read and study our clarifying response to what the adoption of a veteran and GI focus will mean for VVAW/WSO. We hope that what follows will clear up the majority of confusion and answer people's questions with regard to our original position paper.

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INTRODUCTION

We would like to begin by making a brief statement concerning one criticism that was made within the organization. In the introduction to our original paper, we said that there were 3 existing positions within the organization concerning the nature and future of VVAW/WSO. Since that time, we have been criticized for saying that there were 3 positions and we were accused of setting ourselves up to take the middle one so that our position would look more credible. Our response to this accusation is that it is pure baloney! Our position paper flowed out of the discussions and struggle that took place at the Milwaukee Steering Committee Meeting and our experiences at the July demonstration in Washington, DC. At the Milwaukee meeting, there were three positions, and this is a fact whether people recognize it or not. We did not fabricate one position just to make us look good. We are pleased that the position which said that VVAW/WSO should be an exclusively veterans and GI organization has not taken root and is no longer a major point of struggle, but it would be a grave error to discount the existence of this position simply because it did not have overwhelming support. The people who put this position forward did so in an honest way, and we tried to deal with it in an honest way -- both at the Milwaukee meeting and in our paper. We hope that this response to this specific criticism will put an end to it.

In this attempt to clarify our position, we feel it is important to speak to the concept of the united front against imperialism that was put forward in our first paper. We stand by the united front concept and believe it is the correct strategy for revolution in this country. However, we placed a great deal of emphasis on this concept and have since realized that by doing so, we initiated a great deal of confusion. Some people fully accepted the concept of a united front. Some people were not at all familiar with such a concept and were confused as to what a united front means in practice. These people did not necessarily agree or disagree with the concept; they simply were not familiar enough with it to have made a judgment. Other people disagreed with this concept but were able to get past it and to the meat of the paper with no problems and reach the understanding of what we were really talking about. Even though they did not agree with the united front concept, they did agree that we should be focusing on vets and GIs. Other people who disagreed with the united front against imperialism strategy proceeded to disregard the rest of our paper on that basis. These people set up the united front concept as a "straw dog" and it took much struggling to get past this particular strategy in order to deal with the major thrust of the position paper. The thrust of our position does not necessarily rest with the acceptance or the negation of the united front strategy; and it may be that because we placed heavy emphasis on this concept, the central issue of the paper became clouded.

We also are aware that there were weaknesses in our explanation of the united front concept, particularly a lack of clear distinctions between a formalized or developed united front and a developing united front. We believe that, objectively, a united front is growing in the U. S., outside of any plan or proclamation, but it would be an error to focus on its primitive or embryonic stage as opposed

to how such a front can be further developed and strengthened. We feel that the major error with regard to our presentation of the united front concept was that we tended to present the united front strategy as though it consisted of separate, isolated groups of people, i. e. workers should be organized separate from veterans who should be organized separate from students who should be organized separate from women, etc. (A more detailed discussion of "constituencies" will follow). This is not the essence of a united front against imperialism (or a united front against anything, for that matter). Instead, a united front is the uniting of all who can be united for the purpose of directing organized and strategic blows against the common enemy -- whether this be an internal or an external enemy. In the U. S., that enemy is U. S. imperialism. This front will be under the leadership of the working class and its Party; but as to how and when this leadership will develop, or what organizational forms this front may encompass, we cannot say at this time. The answers to these questions will come out of the struggles of the entire anti-imperialist movement, including VVAW/WSO.

In looking at the confusion and discussion that the united front concept has caused, we can see that there were many positive points about the fact that this concept was raised in our position paper. While it is not necessary to accept the united front strategy in order to accept the fact that VVAW/WSO should focus on veterans and GIs, people have begun to discuss what the correct strategy for revolution is in this country and we feel that this is a very good and healthy thing. The struggle that has gone on around the united front concept has led many members to further study and it has enriched the political growth and awareness of VVAW/WSO. We hope that this type of healthy struggle will continue around important questions such as this.

A major point of confusion which has resulted with regard to our original position paper is around "constituency organizing."¹ In our paper we used the term "constituency," and that was an incorrect and unfortunate choice of words which did not adequately represent what we were speaking of. When we talk about focusing on veterans and GIs, we are not talking about constituency organizing; in fact, we do not agree with the tactic of constituency organizing. Constituency organizing forces the organizers into a sort of "tunnel vision," or seeing their particular "constituency" as the most important grouping within a population and separated from other people and other struggles. This type of organizing will lead to isolation and an inability to link the struggles of the "constituency" with the struggles of others. By no means are we speaking of this type of organizing when we refer to a veteran and GI focus. This is because we find it a dead end for the people we are trying to organize, i. e. leading them down a blind alley so that they are unable to really struggle against imperialism. Constituency organizing does not approach organizing people in an anti-imperialist context and must be avoided at all costs.

When we used the word "constituency" in explaining a focus on veterans and GIs, we did **not** mean that we should begin to "divide up" the population and claim a segment of it as ours. We shouldn't be staking out an area, spotting a veteran and then heroically claiming, "That veteran's ours!" Instead, we are talking about

¹Constituency: An artificially defined group of people who are put together not on the basis of common needs, etc, but for the purposes of political representation under imperialism, i. e. a ward or precinct.

the objective fact that veterans and GIs do have specific contradictions with imperialism that are particular to them. These contradictions arise from the serving within an imperialist military which is spreading chaos and havoc throughout the world and here at home, and the contradictions remain throughout the life of a veteran and constitute a real oppression (in the form of bad discharges, job discrimination, the VA and its inability to serve the real needs of vets even though GIs were promised that it would and could, etc). These specific contradictions, which only veterans and GIs face, must be spoken to; VVAW/WSO is the organization which must begin to speak to these contradictions in a consistent manner.

We are saying that there is an identifiable segment of society that has particular and concrete contradictions with the system of imperialism. We realize that every veteran and every GI is also something else, i. e. a woman, a Chicano, a steel worker, a student, etc; and because of this, the veteran or GI also feels a particular form of oppression other than that felt by being a veteran or a GI. However, we are not in the business of "ranking oppression," or stating that since the oppression of being a veteran may be less than the oppression felt by being a steel worker, we need not organize people around their oppression of being veterans. What we are in the business of, however, is recognizing that we have both the ability and the responsibility to try to reach veterans and GIs and educate them to the nature of their oppression and bring them into the struggle against imperialism. Again, this is not "ranking oppression," and therefore, ignoring the oppression that is felt by vets and GIs; instead, it is recognizing the concrete fact that veterans and GIs do face specific contradictions with imperialism because they are veterans and GIs.

Reaching out to vets and GIs and trying to involve them in the anti-imperialist struggle will most definitely cross class lines, racial lines, sexual lines, etc. It is for this reason that it is vitally important to consistently link the struggles of vets and GIs with the struggles of all people. By doing this, we will then be able to lead people to understand that all of our oppression comes from the same place -- the system of imperialism. Our job is to raise the consciousness of vets and GIs around their particular oppression, while broadening that consciousness to an understanding of who the real enemy is. In the majority of cases, this initial reaching out to people and raising their consciousness will come through speaking to their concrete conditions and immediate needs as veterans and GIs. We all are aware that anti-imperialist consciousness does not fall from the sky, and that we have to struggle to build this consciousness. This is not done by making high-sounding speeches which do not relate to the day-to-day oppression, showing people where that oppression comes from, while showing people how the oppression of all people comes from that same place. By doing this, we will be in a position to mobilize people and teach them that the only way this oppression can be eliminated is through the process of fighting back in unity -- fighting back with other veterans and GIs, as well as fighting back in unity with all oppressed people.

A final criticism that we wish to deal with is one which a few chapters in different parts of the country have raised. This is our supposed failure to deal with the question of women and the question of racism. We agree that there was

no specific mention of women or racism in our original paper. The purpose of our first paper was to lay out the general, political reasons why we felt that VVAW/WSO should consciously adopt a veteran and GI focus. We were not trying to deal with all aspects of the contradictions facing vets and GIs, nor were we trying to lay out programmatic approaches necessary to speak to these contradictions. It is for this reason that we felt the questions of women's oppression and national oppression were inherent within our original paper. It is true that we could have spoken directly to these question, but again, this was not the purpose of our position paper.

The oppression of women under the system of imperialism is an important question for VVAW/WSO. Well back in our history, members began to grasp the real depth of this oppression. The awareness of it primarily came through the growing understanding of how male chauvinism and supremacy played a major role in conducting the war in Indochina. Veterans came to understand that they have been taught by society, and further brainwashed by the military into viewing women as inferior, as objects of pleasure, and male veterans were taught that the self-image of being a "he-man," and John Wayne-type was the correct attitude for them to possess. As the organization developed and deepened its understanding of the system that gave rise to the Indochina war and to such chauvinistic ideas, a deeper understanding of the oppression of women and the ideology of that oppression, sexism, also grew.

Although they make up a relatively small percentage, women veterans face many different kinds of oppression that their male counterparts do not face. For example, there is a disproportionately high number of women who received less-than-honorable discharges from the military. Also, the VA virtually ignores the needs of women vets in its programs and in its hospital care. Maternity care is almost non-existent, and the male doctors at the VA have little understanding of the special medical needs of women. A far greater section of women who feel the oppression that comes down on vets are those women who themselves are not veterans but whose lives and welfare depend on what is happening to their veteran husband or family supporter. These women have a very deep interest in fighting the oppression that is coming down on vets and also in the kind of treatment that is offered by the VA. If a veteran cannot get a job because of a bad discharge, his wife or girlfriend is going to be greatly affected by the financial crisis or the fact that the vet cannot get treatment from the VA. Also, the family of a veteran who is going to school on the GI Bill will feel a great financial crunch to the point where the spouse, usually a woman, will be forced to seek the usual assortment of low-paying, demeaning jobs now open to her.

The question of women in the military provides an even greater picture of oppression. There are very few women in the military these days who do not consciously feel the weight of some sort of sexism by the military. Any superficial glance at the military structure and attitudes toward women held by the military reveals the utter degradation and brutality that women GIs face. This sexism is rampant from the job classification that a woman is placed in, through totally inadequate medical care, down to the fact that they are given inappropriate clothing in the winter time simply because to be properly kept warm would not conform with a

"feminine" appearance. We feel that the position of focusing on veterans and GIs will strengthen the ability of VVAW/WSO to attack these conditions and problems -- either by providing these women with an organizational vehicle through which they can fight back against their oppression, or by us providing active support for the struggles that these women will be involved in.

Because the question of racism is dealt with more thoroughly in question #10, we will not go into this in much detail here. We will say that our organization has to become more conscious of the special oppression that faces third world vets and GIs if we are to truly become a multi-national organization and be better able to struggle against imperialism. We have the ability to organize third world vets, yet our success has been limited; this stems largely from our failure to consciously reach out to third vets and GIs and approach organizing them in a programmatic way. We must begin speaking more concretely to national oppression by showing how third world vets receive proportionately high numbers of less-than-honorable discharges, discrimination by the VA (i. e. the VA does not provide any help to those Spanish-speaking vets who are trying to muddle through the bureaucratic red tape), job discrimination against third world vets. At the same time as we are doing this, we must point out how national oppression affects all third world people, and tie the struggles of vets and GIs into the struggles of the national minorities.

It should again be pointed out that the purpose of our last paper was not to deal with all the aspects and forms of oppression coming down on veterans and GIs, but to lay out our position on why this organization must lead these struggles. But, when addressing such specific issues as women's oppression and national oppression, we must say that we believe a veteran and GI focus will force VVAW/WSO to deal in a more thorough and systematic way with these questions. If VVAW/WSO is to lead veterans and GIs to the conscious understanding that only by smashing the system of imperialism will the foundation be laid for the complete elimination of all forms of oppression, then we need all people who suffer the oppression of the military experience to join in our struggle. This will require more programmatic work around these problems if we are to be successful in our organizing and in our ability to reach and educate these people. We believe that by focusing more on the concrete contradictions that veterans and GIs face, this area of our work will be further enhanced and developed.

Again, this portion of this Clarification Paper has tried to discuss what we see as the weaknesses of our original paper and some of the criticisms that we have received with regard to that first paper. We hope that this has cleared up some confusion. In the following section, we are presenting general questions which we have been asked, along with our answers to these questions. We hope that the following will provide a vehicle for further healthy struggle and the resolution of the major questions that are facing VVAW/WSO in the near future.

1. IF WE ACCEPT THE POSITION OF A VETERAN AND GI FOCUS, DOES THAT MEAN WE HAVE TO ACCEPT THE UNITED FRONT AGAINST IMPERIALISM?

This question has come forward in a number of different forms, but the essence is that, "Although I see the need for organizing vets and GIs, and understand that VVAW/WSO is equipped to do that organizing, I disagree with the united front against imperialism concept, and therefore, I cannot agree with the position set forth in the National Office position paper (that VVAW/WSO should have a veteran and GI focus)."

The National Collective does agree with the united front against imperialism concept; we look forward to struggling around that concept with those who disagree. But, we do not believe that accepting the position on a vets and GI focus, or the program that flows from this focus, requires that someone also accept the united front concept. In fact, a strong argument for accepting the vets and GI focus comes not from seeing us as necessarily a part of the united front against imperialism, but from our common experience in organizing (that is, our practice over the past period) and our understanding of the resources that we do have as an organization.

We know that there are 6.8 million Vietnam-era veterans in this country, of which we have managed to organize an infinitesimal part. We know that there are 580,000 Vietnam-era vets with less-than-honorable discharges. We know there are vets issues -- GI Bill, the VA, single-type discharge, etc -- which many of these veterans are affected by directly. We also know that vets, by the fact that they have seen and experienced imperialism in a direct way, both through serving as its tools and through seeing its results here at home, have a special understanding of what imperialism is, and for this reason, are important to organize. For many veterans, the various manifestations of vets benefits or the discharge system are the clearest present example of how imperialism affects their daily lives.

The organization as a whole agrees that there is a large, as-yet-untapped reservoir of vets and GIs, and significant issues to which they directly relate. There is also general agreement that VVAW/WSO has the capability and the experience needed to organize and mobilize these vets and GIs into VVAW/WSO and into the overall anti-imperialist movement.

At the same time, we recognize that veterans and GIs are not only vets and GIs -- they are also oppressed because they are national minorities, or because they are women, or because they are workers or because they are unemployed, or because they are in prison, etc, etc; if we did not concern ourselves with all these specific forms of oppression, we would be making a serious mistake: in fact, we would have failed to bring anti-imperialism to the struggle. But one of the reasons for focusing our work on vets and GIs is because they, as a group, include a wide variety of people, particularly working people, who suffer under imperialism in a wide variety of ways. The one point they have in common is military service, and our work must concentrate on the oppression that results from that service. Through a focus on vets and GIs, we can tie all these various struggles together.

There is no doubt that we have the practice in working with vets and with GIs, and we all realize there is much work still to be done in this area. And we have to recognize that the organization cannot specifically take on all the areas of organizing in the country that need to be accomplished -- we are limited by the number of people, by money, and by our experience. We are not equipped to be the umbrella mass organization to coordinate all struggles. But we are equipped to do a good job of vets and GI organizing. Common sense dictates that we should focus our work on what we can -- and do -- do well: organize vets and GIs (a different area that is related to vets organizing, where we are acquiring the necessary experience) into VVAW/WSO and through our organization, into the anti-imperialist movement.

None of the logic of this argument requires the united front against imperialism concept to be accepted. What is required is a sense of what can be the basis of unity for a mass organization. To make the united front against imperialism -- which is a strategy for revolution -- a basis of unity for VVAW/WSO at this time would be an error, just like making agreement with the principles of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao a basis of unity (for a mass, anti-imperialist organization) would be an error. We do agree, as an organization, on the accomplishment of ten objectives; we do believe in the struggle against imperialism. A person who is gut-level pissed off at one aspect of imperialism has a place in the organization; this individual would, through practice, learn more about the system and would come to accept the struggle against all aspects of imperialism -- it is our responsibility to make sure this happens. If we adopt the focus on vets and GIs, that pissed-off individual would probably be a vet or GI or someone closely connected with vets and GIs, because VVAW/WSO could provide the vehicle for him or her to express anger and fight back against their oppression. This is, we feel, how a militant, effective, organization is built -- by organizing people around their immediate contradictions with imperialism.

While some people in the organization continue to grow politically, through their practice and their theory, and acquire a fuller understanding of the nature of imperialism, we cannot make that understanding a basis of unity for the organization as a whole. Without a constant flow of new members, VVAW/WSO cannot perform its function, and those new members are not going to come from the ranks of the conscious revolutionaries. Certainly, the organization has the right and the duty to weed out bad elements, but this must be done on the basis of their practice (or lack of it), not because they have failed to "measure-up" to a specified level of theoretical excellence. Anti-imperialism, from being pissed off at the VA to seeing the overall exploitation of the imperialist system, is the correct basis of unity for a mass organization. The specific target for our work -- a focus on vets and GI issues -- will provide the common, national-level programmatic unity needed to build the organization and move the overall struggle forward.

2. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "FOCUS?"

The National Office position paper on the future of VVAW/WSO holds that the "focus" of the organization should be on veterans and GIs. By focus, we mean that the central thrust of our organizational work, the center of activity or attention around which we build the organization, should be veterans and GIs. This focus for VVAW/WSO flows from the basic position that the strategy of the organization, the goal we are working towards, should be to build a mass, anti-imperialist organization with a veteran and GI focus and base. To more fully understand what we mean by focus, we must understand its relationship to the base of the organization.

At the Buffalo National Steering Committee Meeting in August, 1974, there was full agreement on the fact that the base of VVAW/WSO is vets and GIs. While there was agreement on the question of what our base is, there was definitely not agreement on what the organization's focus of organizational activity should be. Therein lies a very basic contradiction. There is a direct relationship between the focus of organizational activity and the base of the organization -- that, in fact, the focus of organizational activity will ultimately determine the nature of an organization's base.

The logic of this statement is simple. As we engage in mass work, and as we become more proficient in the practice of our mass work, we will naturally be recruiting more new members into the organization. It stands to reason that the makeup of the new membership we recruit will directly reflect the focus of our work; if we are doing work largely directed at veterans and GIs, it stands to reason that the membership coming into the organization will basically be vets and GIs. If our work is primarily directed at women, the majority of new membership coming into the organization would primarily be women. The same would hold true if our work was directed primarily at steel workers, students, welfare mothers, or unemployed workers. To say that this direct relationship between the focus of organizational activity and the nature of the base of the organization does not exist is to badly distort reality.

A simple analogy might make this point more clearly. If a person goes out to hunt for ducks, he or she would take a certain type of gun, go to a certain type of terrain at a certain time of the year and try to find ducks. Now, chance may have it that the hunter will be sitting in a duck blind in the middle of a lake during duck hunting season and end up shooting a bear. But, it is far more likely that he or she will end up shooting ducks. Particularly as skill at hunting improves, his or her practice improves, they can consistently expect to end up bagging ducks and not bears.

While this is an extreme example, the same relationship would also hold true for organizations. If the organization is to have a membership base of vets and GIs, then it will focus its organizational activities in such a manner that one can logically expect to end up with a membership base of vets and GIs. (By base we mean

both the active membership of VVAW/WSO and that much larger group of potential members, supporters, and sympathizers that identify with VVAW/WSO because of their common oppression under imperialism). There may, in fact, be a number of non-vets coming into the organization -- steel workers, students, unemployed workers, etc. This is good; we need these people. But the majority of new members coming into the organization will, because of an organizational focus of activity directed at vets and GIs, be vets and GIs.

A final point. As will be covered in the answer to question #8, because the focus of our primary organizational activity is directed at vets and GIs, that does not mean that we are narrowly limited to only working around immediate vets and GI issues. If we conceptualize the focus of the organization as a camera lense, we can understand this more clearly. A camera lense takes in a scene and brings certain objects into focus. It does not exclude other objects from the image made on the camera, but it does make the objects focused on stand out much more clearly than others in the same image. The same can be said of an organizational focus. While it does highlight a primary task or objective that work is directed towards, it does not imply that all other tasks are excluded. It is merely a way of delineating which tasks take precedence, which are priorities in our work.

3. DOES A FOCUS ON VETS AND GIs NEGATE THE WINTER SOLDIER CONCEPT; IS IT A STEP BACKWARDS?

This question has already come up in a number of different forms; to reach unity on the answer requires that we all agree on just what the Winter Soldier (or WSO) concept was and is. It is clear that different people historically saw the addition of WSO to the name of the organization as meaning different things. Also, many people in the organization at the time of the various meetings (Palo Alto, Chicago, and Placitas) about the future of the organization had only a limited understanding of the nature of imperialism and the movement to combat it; and while there was a great deal of discussion around the WSO concept, it was on a different level politically than the present struggle around the focus of the organization. The long-range political results were not the center of discussion at that time.

For many people, WSO was nothing more than a way to legitimize the participation of non-vets -- particularly women -- in the organization. As stated in the earliest discussion of the future (minutes of the Palo Alto Steering Committee meeting), "Since a veterans organization by its very nature excludes the participation of non-vets, both men and women, there is a structural barrier precluding further development." For many of us who had strong non-veterans working in our chapters, the status of VVAW "supporter" membership (the role into which VVAW forced non-vets at that time) was an absurdity, and in fact, many chapters were already moving independently to accept non-vets into full membership. The National Office believes that the organization as a whole has no disagreement with this portion of the WSO concept; to return to a strictly veterans and GI organization would be a backward step and, as will be explained in the next answer, is not what the vets and GI focus entails. There is, we believe, unity on the need for non-vets in VVAW/WSO, and that non-vets in the organization must have all the rights and responsibilities of vet and GI members.

There was another aspect of the WSO concept at the Palo Alto meeting -- the idea of a separate organization of which VVAW would be the veterans arm. Quoting again from the minutes of that meeting: "We do realize, however, that there will be a continuing need for a veterans organization. Veteran service programs should and will continue. Similarly, the sense of group identity particular to veterans is a valid basis for organizing groups for political action. At the same time we see the need for VVAW of being part of an organization open to all people, whether they are vets or not, who are commonly dedicated to the struggle of building a new society. An organization of Winter Soldiers could conceivably be created that would be open to all people who are in spirit and in action truly consistent with the goals that we are struggling for. VVAW would be but a part of this organization, not the chauvinistic counterpart to a VVAW women's auxilliary or a VVAW non-vet auxilliary. This concept of such an all more encompassing organization would permit VVAW to grow and respond to the need of becoming an evermore sophisticated and relevant organization for realizing and accomplishing major social change."

This workshop report, which was taken back to the regions and chapters for discussion, speaks directly to the concept of a mass umbrella organization of which VVAW would be one segment. This concept presumeably saw the Winter Soldier Organization which had under its name a VVAW doing vets work and other groupings doing other kinds of work. We feel that this concept was based on some wrong ideas. Because of our limited political understanding of the movement at that time, we did not see that other organizations, doing specific work around specific issues but with an anti-imperialist perspective, were coming into being and growing. We did not understand our own limitations -- many of us idealistically thought that simply raising the banner of WSO would bring people flocking to us. And, while we did understand the need to organize around veterans' issues, we did not try to apply that understanding to other areas of work -- nor did we really see the need to put our veterans work into the context of anti-imperialist work (as indicated in the minutes by our "service work.") This sense of the WSO concept was, we feel, wrong. And the organization, in the next several steering committee meetings, discarded much of this concept.

Rather than forming the new "organization of Winter Soldiers" as seen in the Palo Alto Workshop report, we added "WSO" to "VVAW" -- first, with the idea that, after a year-long trial period, we would drop the "VVAW" (if concrete conditions made that possible) and, by the time the proposal was passed at Placitas, making VVAW/WSO the name of the organization for an indefinite period of time. In short, we realized that we could not set up a separate WSO but that VVAW/WSO was one organization with vets and non-vets as members. This move was a good thing, something that no one in the organization (so far as we know) would now undo. Even more progressive was the sense (never formally set down, but clear from our practice as an organization) that we had to move away from the single issue of the war and begin to struggle against imperialism in its other manifestations -- a sense that grew directly from our expanding understanding of the nature of the imperialist system.

The fact that we did not try to create a separate Winter Soldier Organization shows that we understood, however unclearly, that the organization grew from a vets (and, to a lesser extent, GI) base. This characterization of the organization was again accepted in St. Louis when we reaffirmed the nature of the organization -- "that we are a veterans based organization" -- while taking the progressive step of removing the restrictions (the necessity of being a Vietnam vet) on holding office in the organization. We see no essential disagreement within the organization to this step. Today, the point at which the struggle arises is how best to organize from a vets base in such a way as to strengthen the organization and build the overall struggle against imperialism.

If a veteran and GI focus were a step backwards, that would mean that it would not build either the organization, specifically, or the movement in general. Obviously, we believe just the opposite. Nor do we see this focus as a step backwards in terms of the organization itself (that is, returning to pre-WSO days). We fully agree with the correct parts of the WSO concept -- that is, full member-

ship for non-vets, and the understanding that imperialism is more than the Vietnam War -- and that we must struggle against it directly. We reject the aspect of the Winter Soldier concept which saw the mass umbrella organization; it was based on an incorrect analysis of the political situation (insofar as there was such an analysis) and on an idealistic and incorrect notion of how to organize most effectively. The WSO concept was, in many way, an attempt to bind the organization together when our primary issue (the war) was no longer the center of the attention of the American people, and an attempt to be all things to all people.

A summing up of our mistakes from the past is important in order to avoid them in the future, but the important point is not that the WSO as a mass umbrella organization was wrong then -- the important point is that it didn't work in practice, and that the idea is even more incorrect today than it was then. We see, in a general way, the history of the organization as having come from a campaign against the war with a focus on vets and GIs, to an organization with an expanding membership (that is in terms of vets and non-vets) with local focal points but without a clear national focus, to what we now see arising -- through an understanding of the system and of the nature of the method to organize against that system, an organization with a clear national focus (of veterans and GIs), with vets and non-vets as members, and supporting work around those projects which we understand are part of the struggle against the imperialist system.

4. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF NON-VETERANS IN VVAW/WSO WITH A VETERAN AND G.I. FOCUS?

Some of the opposition to the adoption of a veteran and GI focus has centered around feelings that "we will lose half our membership," i. e. non-veterans and particularly our women members. Other remarks such as, "I am not a veteran, therefore, what is my place in VVAW/WSO if we adopt a veteran and GI focus," have also been heard. We do not want to lose our non-veteran membership; nor do we think that the adoption of a vet and GI focus means that we will, or that we should, lose this membership. In short, the above question can be answered by saying that the role of non-veterans in VVAW/WSO with the adoption of a veteran and GI focus will be the same as is the current role of non-veterans in the organization.

To begin discussing why we do not believe we will lose our non-veteran members, we must begin with the politics of our work and understand its importance. We don't know of anyone who disagrees with the need to organize veterans and GIs. We must understand that a revolutionary situation is building within the U. S. and the anti-imperialist forces are a major part of this growing movement. Along with this, we have to realize that veterans will play an important role in bringing anti-imperialist consciousness to the masses of people. They are in a good position to do this because they have served in the imperialist military and many of them have served in an imperialist war. The lessons of this experience of having witnessed imperialism abroad from a first-hand perspective must be brought to the American people and will be a great benefit in raising the anti-imperialist consciousness of those people who have not yet reached a point of understanding the nature of the system. At the same time, the importance of organizing GIs to resist the imperialist military cannot be overlooked. GIs are forced into the position of providing the imperialist state with its primary armed tool for oppressing the people of the world, including the people here within the U. S. As the state is increasingly backed up against the wall, it will attempt to unleash its military arm upon the masses of people to keep them down and to stop any revolutionary tide. If we have not done our work well, GIs may go along with this plan of the imperialists. The necessity of organizing within the military so that GIs will resist and neutralize attempts by the military to stop the revolutionary movement of the people cannot be stressed too much.

All of us, veterans and non-veterans, can understand the importance of organizing veterans and GIs into the anti-imperialist struggle. And as with all of us, we make political decisions based upon the political importance of doing a certain type of organizing. We must choose our political involvement on the basis of its necessity and work where we are best able to work and where our skills and abilities will best be put to use. We have to face the reality that non-veterans, as well as veterans, may see that their political abilities would be better used if directed toward other areas of struggle. Speaking specifically to non-veterans, if we agree with the objectives and politics of VVAW/WSO, if we agree that the organization needs to be strengthened and built, and if we realize the importance of organizing veterans and GIs into the anti-imperialist struggle, VVAW/WSO is a perfect organi-

zational form for non-veterans to be involved in. The non-veterans in the organization have experience and knowledge about working with vets and GIs, and this knowledge is invaluable.

When speaking of building the veteran and GI movements, we must understand that these movements do not belong only to vets and GIs; i. e. the struggles of veterans and GIs belong to all of us. It is a struggle against imperialism and that is a struggle which all of us must be involved in. Another way of looking at this is the fact that a victory for one segment of the working class and the revolutionary movement, is a victory for the entire working class and the revolutionary movement as a whole. This feeling of unity in purpose and in struggle is the key to understanding the role of non-veterans with the adoption of a veteran and GI focus. All of our membership is needed to build a strong, anti-imperialist movement of veterans and GIs, and the struggle for building this movement belongs to all of our membership. Non-vets are just as integral to building this movement as are veterans.

Along with this, non-veterans have played a very important role in the historical development and growth of VVAW/WSO. Non-veterans have been in the lead of the struggle against incorrect ideas, such as the tendency toward "veteran chauvinism" which once existed in the organization; an attitude which would have held our organization back and might have led us to viewing our work as isolated from other people's struggles. Non-veterans have given a perspective on our work that otherwise might not have been developed as quickly -- a perspective of seeing our particular struggle as directly related to other struggles going on in the U. S. and around the world. Another contribution to VVAW/WSO has come from the ability of non-veterans to see specific areas of work that we, and are, neglected; i. e. working with families of veterans and GIs. This is the understanding that the oppression that is brought down on veterans and GIs by the imperialist system is also suffered by their wives, lovers, husbands, etc.

At the same time, non-veteran leadership has developed on all levels of the organization and this leadership has helped the organization to grow. We cannot afford to lose this developed leadership, nor can we "close the door behind us" and stop recruiting and developing the leadership potential of non-vets with the adoption of a veteran and GI focus; we do, and will continue to, need these people to build the organization. Non-veterans have always been an integral part of the organization (even when they were excluded from official membership by the rules of the organization), and we must continue to recruit them as full and equal members.

In discussing the role of non-veterans in VVAW/WSO, we must also understand that there is a difference between people who understand the political necessity of doing a certain type of organizing, (i. e. bringing veterans and GIs into the anti-imperialist struggle) and those people who join the organization as a result of our organizing. This is to say that not only veterans can organize veterans, nor can only GIs organize GIs. An example of this fact is that without civilians, the GI movement would never have been able to survive. It required the work of civilians who understood the political necessity of doing GI organizing to begin to build the GI movement. When speaking of organizing veterans, the majority of recruiting

that has been done by our membership has been shared by veterans and non-veterans and that both have been equally successful. Many of the organization's DUPs have been organized and staffed primarily by non-veterans whose job was to work with veterans and explain the nature of the imperialist system to them. This work would not have been more effective if a veteran happened to be the person making the initial contact with the less-than-honorably discharged vet.

The reason that organizing veterans and GIs can be done just as well by non-veterans as by veterans is that the day-to-day work of our organization is the most important work that we do. Non-veterans can do this day-to-day work just as well as veterans can, and our practice has proved that both have and can work together to get the necessary work completed. A division of labor along "veteran lines" should not exist in our daily work, but veterans and non-veterans, men and women, should share this work equally. There are times when a veteran may be needed to speak for the organization, and we must all face this reality. For example, in past years, in our work around the war in Indochina, it often made sense to have a veteran who had participated in that war present the organizations' position on the nature of the war. Also, if we are trying to explain to people how the VA screws veterans, it might be good to have a vet who has been directly involved with the VA speak for the organization. However, this is not always the case. Non-veterans can speak about the war in Indochina or about the VA and its inability to serve the needs of veterans with just as much force as veterans. It all depends on the particulars of the situation and having a veteran speak for the organization will be a tactical decision, rather than a policy.

With the adoption of a veteran and GI focus, the role of a non-veteran will be just as equal and just as important as is the role of veterans. This is especially true in our day-to-day work, which is the most essential work that we do as we struggle to build the anti-imperialist movement. Again, the most important thing to stress when answering the question about the role of non-veterans in VVAW/WSO is the importance of organizing vets and GIs into the struggle against imperialism. None of us, veterans or non-veterans, can afford to view the struggle of vets and GIs as belonging only to vets and GIs. It is a struggle that belongs to all of us, and building a movement of fighting veterans and GIs which is guided by a correct political understanding of imperialism is a task which will require the energies and political know-how of us all. We all must recognize our responsibility to building this movement and understand that every victory in the fight against imperialism is a victory for our entire struggle.

5. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUR POSITION ON THE FUTURE OF VVAW/WSO AND A PARTICULAR PROGRAM OF ACTION? (OR, WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF OUR ORGANIZATION?)

Throughout the discussion of the National Office position paper on the future of VVAW/WSO there has been a misunderstanding of what the relationship is between the nature of the organization itself and the particular programs of action, campaigns, etc, it may take up on a national level during a given period of time. In a general sense, the answer to this question lies in defining the differences between our organizational strategy for VVAW/WSO and the organizational tactics we utilize to implement that strategy.

Our strategy as an organization, the overall goal we are working towards from our position is to build a mass, anti-imperialist organization with a veterans and GI focus and base. This organization, and the larger movement of vets and GIs, would be part of the overall people's movement struggling to defeat imperialism. This is the main direction all of VVAW/WSO's work should be oriented towards-its strategic aim.

The tactics of implementing this, however, are quite another matter. Tactics must be seen as a part of strategy that are both subordinated to it and designed to serve it. Tactics are a determination of the best plan of action we should follow. As we have seen in the few years of VVAW/WSO's existence as an organization, the particular conditions affecting our work will vary greatly in relatively short periods of time. These changing conditions present us with new tactical situations that we must adapt our political work to, for again as we have learned through our own practice, we must always apply our political work to the specifics of the time, condition, and place. As a basically anti-war organization up until the end of 1972, we clearly were presented with a new tactical situation with the signing of the Paris Agreements in January 1973. Similarly, we have had to adopt to the new conditions presented us by the unfolding of the Water-gate scandal, the popular disgust with the Nixon administration and now the rapidly developing economic crisis.

Quite correctly our tactics, as embodied in our organizational programs, campaigns, activities, etc, reflected these changing conditions. Before the signing of the Paris Agreements, VVAW primarily did work around the war in Indochina; demanding the US sign the Seven, then the Nine, Point Peace Proposals; demanding that all US military intervention in Indochina be terminated; and demanding that the US cease all aid to the Thieu and Lon Nol dictatorships. With the signing of the peace agreements and a decrease in the level of intensity of the mass struggle around the war, we began moving as an organization into other areas of work in addition to anti-war work. December 1973 saw the National Steering Committee adopt a national program around the war, amnesty and discharge upgrading. Later this was expanded to include demands for decent benefits for all vets and for kicking Nixon out of office. Now as the economic crisis is rapidly engulfing the country we have begun to do more work around economic issues, inflation, unemployment, etc with chapters and regions specifically focusing this campaign at work around veterans and the VA. These changes in our organizational programs, or our national campaigns, are a reflection of the need for our tactics to change according to the ebb and flow of the people's struggle, to adjust to new conditions.

While the object of our organizational strategy would be to build an anti-imperialist

veterans and GI movement with the ultimate goal of smashing US imperialism, our organizational tactics pursue goals that stop short of the destruction of imperialism. The aim of tactics is not winning the whole war, i. e. defeating US imperialism, but to win some of the particular engagements or battles that must be fought along the way. These battles are fought and won by carrying out particular programs or organizational campaigns.

Tactics then, deal with the forms of struggle and the forms of our organizing efforts to carry that struggle out. We utilize whichever tactic is most effective at a given time to carry out the general strategy. If, at a given period of time and under the specific conditions existing at that time, a certain program or organizational campaign would more successfully advance our organizational work towards its overall strategic aim, then that is the tactic VVAW/WSO must select from the various alternatives available. When the National Steering Committee develops the national program VVAW/WSO will follow for the upcoming period, this is exactly the process we are involved in.

Given this general understanding of how tactics must flow from VVAW/WSO's general strategy--are a part of it and must serve it--we can more clearly understand our tasks in developing the future programs of VVAW/WSO. Truthfully, the first real attempt at consciously developing an organizational program that would give consistency and coherence to our work on a national level began at the Yellow Springs NSCM where we basically adopted the national program we are following today (more developed, of course). This was an important step forward for VVAW/WSO; a step forward in understanding the need for conducting our work on the basis of a predetermined plan of action and not allowing ourselves to, willy-nilly, get caught up in whatever activities might happen down the road as a matter of chance.

The basic problem with the process we followed at the Yellow Springs NSCM, and again at the Milwaukee and Buffalo NSCMs, was attempting to develop our tactics, meaning our organizational program, without first having come to agreement with what our overall strategy was. It was this contradiction that has led to so much confusion about what a veterans and GI focus would mean in practice for the organization, what programs would be developed to implement it, etc. We unavoidably confused the question of what our national program should be with what the overall strategy of the organization itself should be. At this time the primary issue we must resolve is our organizational strategy. Questions about whether we conduct a war on the VA or a campaign around the GI Bill, etc are tactical questions. Depending upon the specifics of time, condition and place, the solutions to these questions will correspondingly change. In the course of our struggle as an organization we will utilize many tactics, implement many programs and carry out many different campaigns. The primary question we must resolve, however, is what is the future of the organization: is it to be a mass anti-imperialist organization with a vets and GI base and focus or is it to be something else. Once this question of strategy is answered, we can then proceed to more correctly assess what the best tactical approach will be to attain the strategic goals.

HOW DOES A NATIONAL FOCUS ON VETS & GIs AFFECT LOCAL ORGANIZING?

Let us assume for the sake of argument that VVAW/WSO is united behind a veterans and GI focus. Let us also assume that chapters across the country are focusing their day-to-day organizing efforts on reaching and mobilizing veterans and/or GIs. Would this mean that these chapters would no longer take up struggles, either in their area or of national importance, that are not directly veterans or GI issues/demands? No, of course not.

While the national organization focuses its work on mobilizing and organizing vets and GIs, the particular conditions that face each chapter will dictate how that chapter applies our national focus and national program (whatever our program may be at a particular time). What this means is that we must be realistic and understand that in many cases, local conditions will have an effect on our local work. Among such local conditions may be instances when VVAW/WSO is the only progressive, anti-imperialist organization in the community and because of this, the burden of building the anti-imperialist movement is greater in these places than in those areas where there are several other progressive groups. In practice while the national organization may be raising four particular demands (as we are now doing) and unfolding these demands in a particular way (i. e. possibly around the VA), many times it will be necessary for local chapters to take up the national program at the same time they are facing an important struggle locally. This will necessitate in addition to the national program, developing local programs of action to meet the changed conditions brought on by that local struggle.

An illustration of this is the recent example of what happened in Columbus, Ohio. In Columbus, the workers at a plant owned by the Borden Corporation went out on strike for better working conditions. VVAW/WSO was one of the only progressive, anti-imperialist organization in Columbus and the chapter had been doing some picket line work with the strikers. Then, the workers called for a nationwide boycott of Borden products and the chapter was asked to help spread the news of this boycott. The chapter did this. If the Columbus chapter had a veteran and GI focus, would it be incorrect for them to do this strike-support work? No, quite the opposite. It was, and will be in the future, necessary for the Columbus chapter (or any chapter) to support such a boycott and help spread the word about the strike. Even if the chapter was waging a campaign around, say, the GI Bill, not to have supported the workers would have isolated their campaign and struggles from the workers at Borden's, which is one of the largest industries in Columbus.

To use another example, in Buffalo the chapter is heavily involved in work around the Attica Brothers and their defense. Again, if Buffalo was actively focusing its efforts around vets and GIs, should the chapter drop its work around Attica? No. Ceasing work around Attica would only serve to isolate the chapter, and the struggles of veterans and GIs, from one of the major battles being waged in this country against repression of the imperialist system. Though the Buffalo chapter should continue its consistent support of the Attica Brothers (as should the entire organization) our national organization is not organized as a defense/support committee for the Attica Brothers, nor is the struggle around Attica the thrust of the national organization's daily work.

The key to understanding the position that all local work will not cease if it is not directly related to veterans and GI demands is to see the difference between local work and conditions and national work and conditions. With regard to the Borden strike in Columbus, VVAW/WSO did not become the national boycott/support group for the workers in Columbus. Nationally, VVAW/WSO asked its members and other people to support the boycott, but this did not become the central work of VVAW/WSO. The same is true in the case of the Attica Brothers. Though the struggles of the Attica Brothers have not become the thrust of the national organization's work, we should continue to take up and support the struggle against political repression and expose the nature of the system which uses this type of repression to try to crush resistance. Wherever and whenever time and conditions permit, VVAW/WSO has the responsibility to support the Attica Brothers specifically, and raise the question of political repression generally. This can be done either through using local or national cases.

When discussing this question, the major aspect to be addressed is what actually defines a national organization. Is it just using the same name? No, we believe there is unity in VVAW/WSO around the point that to be a national organization calls for more than just using the same name. The essential ingredient in defining a national organization is the fact that chapters are doing work around the same issues and the same program of action. It also means that nationally, we have the same principles of membership and approach questions with the same political perspective, in our case, anti-imperialism. In other words, a national organization requires programmatic and basic political unity between its chapters.

If the National Steering Committee votes to adopt a veteran and GI focus, we must all understand that this will not mean that all chapters will stop doing everything else and just work on veteran and GI issues; nor should they. What the adoption of a veteran and GI focus does mean is that all local chapters will begin doing veterans and GI work on a consistent, day-to-day basis. It will also mean that chapters will have to analyze their past and present practice and work and re-evaluate which work is most important and how the national focus will affect that work. This analysis may lead to the realization that some projects or areas of work will have to be dropped, while other areas of work will have to begin and tactics to implement a focus on vets and GIs will have to be developed. We would see the National Steering Committee coming up with a national program of action aimed at implementing the focus of vets and GIs in such a way as to allow chapters the ability to adapt the program of action to their local conditions; and this is because the program of action will be the result of the chapters' examinations of their practice, enabling them to make the determination of how a national focus and program can best be implemented within a variety of communities. Again, without this process of adapting programmatic work to the local level based on an analysis of past practice, and concrete conditions of a given area, the words "national organization" become meaningless.

It is necessary for local chapters to realize that what may be successful in their local areas will not necessarily work across the country; that is, applying an analysis based solely on one chapter's local conditions may lead to an incorrect analysis for the national organization. We must always keep this in mind when making decisions which will affect the national organization, and continue to maintain a perspective that all of our chapters are part of the same, larger network of chapters striving for pro-

grammatic and political unity. We feel that chapters that implement the decisions of the national organization will gain immense strength from the fact that the local struggle becomes an extension of the struggle of thousands of others, all guided by the same political understanding, all implemented in a similar way, and all directed at the same enemy. Those chapters that continue to "do their own thing" with no regard for the decisions of the national organization (which are made through the summation of our work by all chapters) not only demonstrate contempt for the national organization and its democratic processes, but will become isolated and weak, leading eventually to defeat for their struggle and their work.

7. ARE VET'S DEMANDS NECESSARILY REFORMIST?

The first point that must be spoken to in terms of answering this question is the concept of "reform issues" in general. The question is--do we struggle to win immediate goals from the imperialist system or do we out-of-hand reject such tactics as liberal, reformist and a waste of time? The answer to it should be self-evident. First of all, we aren't interested in the slimy, opportunistic tactics employed by trotskites. We don't raise pie-in-the-sky demands like calling for immediate revolution. The masses of people living under imperialism have real needs and suffer real oppression. When we raise demands and then try to mobilize people to fight for them we must honestly be trying to win real victories by actually obtaining the goals of the demands.

Secondly, we understand that we are carrying of a life and death struggle against imperialism--that it most certainly isn't any game. Realizing this and to then refuse beforehand to maneuver, to utilize the conflicts of interest (however temporary) among our enemies, to reject agreements and compromises with potential (however temporary, unstable and vacillating) allies is the height of folly. To refuse to struggle for the immediate needs of the people and demand instead something like "revolution now" is like trying to climb a steep, unexplored mountain and to refuse--even before we start climbing--to move in zigzags or to change our course to avoid obstacles in our path.

Our goal is to serve the people, not to make a few sanctimonious statements on their behalf and then use them as stepping stones to some sort of mystical revolution in the sky. But just as importantly, we want to win real victories, not go down to "noble" defeat in a foregone lost cause just because we were too stupid or dogmatic to make a necessary change of course in our political handling of a given struggle. Clearly, the answer to the question of whether we struggle to win "reforms" from the imperialist system is yes. Under certain conditions reforms in general and compromises and agreements in particular, are necessary and useful.

The question then is not a matter of reforms or of compromises and agreements, but of the USE people make of "reform issues." It is the question of whether we build a fighting anti-imperialist movement or a reformist movement. There are no innately "anti-imperialist" issues, nor are there any innately "reformist" issues. The question is the manner in which they are raised, the manner in which they are brought to the people. For anti-imperialists any struggle is potentially a path to a broader anti-imperialist consciousness: correspondingly, we can use the same struggle to sidetrack the people's movement down a dead-end of sterile reformism. The same issue, depending on the way it is politically handled, can either be used to weaken imperialism or it can be used to actually strengthen it.

To a reformist, reforms are everything, while anti-imperialist work (building mass anti-imperialist consciousness, organizing people to fight back against imperialism, etc) is an incidental matter of idle curiosity. This is why when we struggle against the imperialist system with reformist tactics we inevitably find those reforms transformed into an instrument for further strengthening imperialist rule.

To an anti-imperialist, on the other hand, the main thing is building anti-imperialist consciousness and building a mass movement to smash imperialism; to the anti-imperialist, reforms are a by-product of the anti-imperialist struggle. They are tactical victories won in the course of struggle, as a natural consequence of that struggle. They are not the end goal in themselves. The "reforms" we must fight for, whether it's a single-type discharge, or universal, unconditional amnesty, etc, are all just aspects of the larger struggle against the system of imperialism. The goal of the people's movement is to cure the disease, US imperialism, and not to just apply stop-gap remedies to the symptoms of the disease.

In building a fighting anti-imperialist movement we will work on issues in order to use them as a means to developing the larger struggle of actually ending US imperialism. The reformist, on the contrary, will advocate reforms in order to actually renounce struggle against the system, to thwart the preparation of the people's movement to fight back against imperialism and to laud the praises of "bestowed" reforms: "My goodness! LOOK how well the system works after all."

The essence of carrying out struggles in an anti-imperialist, and not in a reformist, manner, lies in who we rely on to wage the struggles and how thoroughly we bring class consciousness to these struggles. The real weapon we have at our disposal with which we can fight back against imperialism is the united, militant mass action of the people. All the various arms of the state, the schools, the courts, the police, the military, etc, all serve one master: US imperialism. They cannot, by definition, serve the real interests of the people. They must, by definition, serve the interests of the imperialists AT THE EXPENSE OF the people. In the interests of building the anti-imperialist movement, in the interests of determining our own initiative rather than reacting to the actions of the imperialists, we then must always wage our struggles against the system utilizing the method of relying on the people; not on the courts, the legal eagles, the "heroes" on the big white horse, the "good guys" in Congress or anything else. Most importantly, we must politically connect the struggles to win these reforms to the overall struggle against imperialism.

As was stated above, there are no innately "reformist" issues, nor are there any innately "anti-imperialist" issues. Anyone doubting the truth of this need only look at the way Eugene McCarthy or George McGovern handled the question of the war in Indochina. Instead of being an anti-imperialist issue, one at the very heart of the imperialist system, McCarthy and McGovern managed to portray it as an utterly reformist issue, one where the solution to the problem was in making the system "work like it's supposed to"; all the people have to do is "vote out a few of the rascals in Congress" and "vote in some good guys" and everything will be all right. Or just look at the way the government tries to sum up the movement that kicked Nixon out of office: again, it's a "My Goodness! LOOK how well the system works after all."

By the same token, we can see how bread-and-butter "reform" issues have sparked some of the most militant struggles yet seen in the US. Certainly the fight for the 8-hour day, for unemployment compensation, for a minimum wage, the right to unionize, etc, were bread and butter issues. But the MANNER in which these

struggles were conducted was anything but reformist in nature. Just look at the fight to build the CIO in the 1930's, the birth of the UAW, the 1914 Ludlow miners strike, or the more recent struggles of the coalminers as proof of this.

In terms of our organizational work we have many examples of how an issue can be raised in a reformist or an anti-imperialist manner. For example, we have utilized discharge upgrading as part of our campaign for universal and unconditional amnesty and a single-type discharge. Unfortunately many chapters approached discharge upgrading in a thoroughly reformist manner. These chapters fell into the error of working through and relying on the system in the hopes of getting more from it or making it work a bit better for us. Chapters making this error were getting caught up in a very legalistic approach, in "counsellingism" and in orienting the primary thrust of their work to winning a given case at the Discharge Review Boards and not in the communities. Such an approach objectively strengthens the system rather than weakens it. Not only is it tacitly admitting the "fairness" and "impartiality" of the boards and their very right to hear the appeal in the first place, but it is making a more serious error by saying that the system will work and that we can trust it to serve the people, that we can get "justice" from it.

Other chapters did not make these mistakes and consciously took an anti-imperialist approach to their DUP work. They saw discharge upgrading as being just one tool out of many to be used in building a people's movement for amnesty and a single-type discharge. Rather than relying on organizing paperwork into Washington and the Discharge Review Boards, these chapters correctly saw that they must rely on organizing people into the streets to fight for these demands if they are to be won. This same analysis could be made of literally every issue VVAW/WSO has ever worked on. They all could have anti-imperialist politics in command or reformist politics in command. It is all in how the issue is raised, how we do our work.

The struggles for better working and living conditions, democratic rights under imperialism, etc, or for decent benefits for all vets, a single-type discharge, an improved GI Bill, etc, are no less struggles against imperialism than the struggles to end the war in Indochina or to force the US to end its support of the dictatorships in South Korea, the Philippines or Chile. It all depends on the political context in which the issues are raised. The goal of our work is not to artificially divide our work into "anti-imperialist" work and "day-to-day" or "reform" work. Rather, our goal is to turn every struggle, every act of resistance into a fight that will enable people to see what the real enemy is, and to understand that the solution to our problems lies in smashing imperialism once and for all. The practical effect of artificially dividing "reform" work from "anti-imperialist" work is to abstract the struggle against imperialism to such a point that it doesn't permit people to see the unity between their own oppression under imperialism, between their own struggle and that of the rest of the people around the world fighting imperialism.

We can't build a consciousness of this unity between the struggles for reforms, for an end to the specific oppression people suffer under imperialism, and the overall anti-imperialist movement in a mechanical "stage" manner: "first we fight for reforms (in a reformist way), and then secondly we 'graduate' to anti-imperialist consciousness." It simply doesn't work that way. Not only does this actually hold the struggle back but it is showing disdain for the people as well. Not only can people grasp anti-imperialist consciousness in the struggle for reforms but they must if our movement is to succeed.

8. DOES A FOCUS ON VETS & GIs MEAN THAT WE RAISE
VETS AND GI DEMANDS ONLY?

No. It has been put forward that with a veteran and GI focus, VVAW/WSO can only organize around demands that reflect the immediate interests of vets and/or GIs, and not around general demands. This came out in practice by saying that with this focus, VVAW/WSO could not call amnesty demonstrations because amnesty was not an immediate demand of veterans and GIs. We think this position is a narrow application of what we mean by focus, and is incorrect.

In organizing against the system of imperialism, we are saying that the focus of the national organization is reaching out to veterans and GIs and mobilizing them into the anti-imperialist struggle. To do this, it is vital to raise demands that are in the immediate interests of veterans and GIs, and showing how only through combatting the system of imperialism can they ever hope for a complete solution to those immediate problems. This is because anti-imperialist consciousness does not fall from the sky one day when someone sees a leaflet about imperialism, and rarely does that consciousness come spontaneously; it must be developed. We are saying that the best way to develop that understanding is by linking up the fight for immediate needs (i. e. decent benefits) with the overall struggle against imperialism by showing concretely how that system is the root of their immediate problems. It is not a matter of exclusively raising demands around immediate needs or exclusively raising more general demands. The idea is to make a fighter for one into a fighter for all. To do this, we must show how immediate demands are integral to the overall worldwide struggle against imperialism. The consciousness of "I'm getting screwed" must be transformed into "We are getting screwed," by linking the immediate interests of vets and GIs to the broader interests of the masses of people--smashing imperialism.

If VVAW/WSO is to LEAD veterans and GIs in the struggle against imperialism, then we must raise broader demands and show how it is in their interests to fight for these broader demands. There are many examples of how the organization has already done this. When building for the July demonstration in Washington, DC, we put forward immediate demands and general demands. In other words, we raised demands which spoke to the particular oppression of vets and GIs, as we put forward demands which are in the interests of the overall struggle against imperialism. Individual chapters have also carried this forward successfully in their day-to-day work. We have pointed out in the past how the Milwaukee chapter has been able to move the struggle of vets forward by building on the immediate demands around the VA while at the same time building the more general movement around amnesty and the continued war in Indochina.

A clearer example can be made from the work of the Inland Empire chapter in California. The reason for this example is the importance of the Gary Lawton case and its effect on the work of the chapter in Riverside (which is the chapter most directly involved in the case). The primary thrust of the chapter's work is on organizing the veterans and GIs in their area. At the same time, some of the chapter's members are actively involved in the Riverside Political Prisoners Defense Committee, doing day-to-day work around Gary's case. While the chapter

as a whole does not do the primary day-to-day work around the Lawton trial, they also do not just raise demands for better benefits for veterans. Instead, they tie the demands of veterans closely to the general question of political repression and in particular, the case of Gary Lawton. This means that VVAW/WSO is not focused nationally on political repression, but the Riverside chapter does tie its focus (vets and GIs) closely to the general question of political repression under the system of imperialism. While Gary's freedom is an immediate demand in the community, it is a general demand of veterans, GIs and all oppressed people.

Again, a veteran and GI focus does not mean just raising demands that are immediate to their needs. To do so would isolate their struggles from the masses of people and eventually lead them and the anti-imperialist struggle to defeat. The question is how to take the struggle for immediate needs of millions of people, move it forward to point out who the real enemy is, and concretely link that struggle up with the overall struggle against the enemy--the system of imperialism. In the broader sense, the demands of vets and GIs are the demands of all working, poor and oppressed people; good, free medical care, good education, a good job and a decent life are the rights of all people. It is because of this that by successfully linking up the struggles of vets and GIs with the struggles being waged by different forces can we completely realize the transformation of a "fighter for one," into a "fighter for all."

9. WHAT IS SUPPORT WORK AND WHAT IS DIRECT ORGANIZING AND HOW DOES ONE DIFFER FROM THE OTHER?

There have been questions in the organization about what it would mean to chapters in terms of "support work" if we finally decided that the focus of this organization was around the struggles of veterans and GIs. In answering this complex question, we must generally define what support work and direct organizing are and what is the difference between them.

By direct organizing we are talking about that organizing which flows from the focus of the organization -- in this case, a focus on the struggles of veterans and GIs. In focusing on vets and GIs, we would be primarily engaged in organizing both these groups. This would be our main organizing task as we would assume primary responsibility for consciously providing leadership and direction to these struggles. The major strategy of the organization would be directly organizing veterans and GIs into VVAW/WSO and the general anti-imperialist movement.

By support work we are talking about the work that chapters would be involved in where we do not necessarily assume the primary responsibility of organizing people directly into the movement. We are all agreed that organizing veterans and GIs (as well as students, unemployed workers, coal miners, etc) is necessary for building the anti-imperialist movement. For VVAW/WSO this would mean, focusing on vets and GIs as DIRECT ORGANIZING, and providing the necessary political support for other anti-imperialist and progressive struggles through our organizational SUPPORT WORK.

We recognize that both support work and direct organizing are necessary for any anti-imperialist organization. The struggles of vets and GIs exist because of the imperialist system -- a system that oppresses all people. By seeing these struggles as an integral part of the anti-imperialist movement, we can determine to what extent we do support work in relation to our direct organizing based on our primary organizational tasks, i. e. our focus, an assessment of our capabilities and resources, and a political determination of our priorities.

By involving ourselves in only direct organizing, we would be isolating the struggles of vets and GIs from the other anti-imperialist struggles going on in the U. S. We can fall into a reformist error in this way by failing to concretely link all of these struggles together by attacking the system. On the other hand, by doing only support work, we would be making the "left" error of negating the actual oppressive conditions facing vets and GIs by denying that these oppressive conditions exist or that they can be fought in an anti-imperialist way.

The correct balance of the two is key to deciding the tactics of implementing our strategy of organizing vets and GIs into the anti-imperialist movement. These tactics are our day-to-day practice, flowing from our programs. In focusing on vets and GIs, our programs (i. e. our four demands) would be around their struggles. To clearly point out what a correct balance of the two would be and how to approach both direct organizing and support work, we can cite the example of the

Chicago chapter around their work at the VA and their participation in the struggle to free Antowyn Cauley.

The Chicago chapter of VVAW/WSO sees that the focus of their work is around the struggles of veterans. In recognizing this, they have embarked on a program around the VA. Their day-to-day practice in fighting for decent benefits for all vets includes leafletting, selling Winter Soldier at the VA, holding periodic demonstrations there, and talking about the oppression of vets at the VA in their general propaganda around their other work. They correctly analyze that the oppression facing the veterans at the VA is a direct result of the imperialist system and link this struggle with the war in Indochina, the struggle for universal and unconditional amnesty and the single-type discharge. Their work at the VA is anti-imperialist work. As a result of this program, they have begun to draw into the organization veterans and non-veterans who recognize this oppression and the need to fight back against it.

As part of its general program, the chapter works with the Committee to Free Antowyn Cauley (a black victim of police repression). The chapter sees as its primary task building the anti-imperialist vets movement. As such, they directly organize around the struggles of vets in their day-to-day work. At the same time, seeing that the system of imperialism must be defeated, they participate in this struggle to free Antowyn Cauley because his struggle against police repression is inalterably linked to repression under the imperialist system. The chapter has not made the error of raising the Cauley work to their primary task. Through their day-to-day work around the struggles of vets, they bring the strength and experience of the vets struggle to the Cauley work, thereby providing valuable support to the Cauley committee.

When the chapter has a demonstration at the VA, in turn, members of the Cauley committee provide support to the struggles of veterans by bringing their experience in fighting the imperialist system and linking their struggles to the fight for our four demands. This committee does not participate in the VA demonstrations as its primary work, but sees how the struggle it is waging is linked to the program of the VVAW/WSO chapter, and how together these struggles must strike blows at the system.

In order for chapters to give support to other struggles, they must be able to provide support that comes from mass struggle. If a chapter is providing conscious anti-imperialist leadership and direction to the struggles of vets and GIs, and is drawing new members into the organization, then the quality of support work takes a giant leap. If a chapter does not do day-to-day work, and is therefore not recruiting new members and not making a meaningful attack on the imperialist system, then the amount of support that it gives to other struggles is weakened and merely token. The stronger the organization, the more entrenched in mass work, the greater the ties with the struggles against the imperialist system, the greater the support it can provide to other struggles. This type of solid support comes from the quality of our direct organizing.

While the example of the Chicago chapter is a good one in understanding the correct balance between direct organizing and support work, there are times when conditions will exist when it becomes necessary to temporarily elevate our support work to a higher priority. This is because at times, a certain struggle will demand immediate support. We can cite an example of this.

In March, 1973, the American Indian Movement took over the town of Wounded Knee. This take-over brought to the fore the oppressive conditions that Native Americans suffer under the rule of the imperialists. Recognizing this, many chapters in VVAW/WSO correctly provided support by collecting supplies, money, and other necessities to send to the Indians so that they could maintain their stand at Wounded Knee. At the same time, chapters educated people in their cities to the reasons for the take-over, linking them up to the war in Vietnam, and attacking the system in general.

It is important to understand that anti-imperialist organizations, regardless of focus, are part of the same struggle to defeat imperialism. This means that while we focus on the struggles of specific segments of society, we are not in isolation, but rather all bound up together attacking the same monster from a hundred sides. In recognizing this, we can determine which support work should be elevated when the conditions are ripe. This elevation should not become a general strategy. That would make us fall into the error of negating direct organizing and bowing to spontaneous movements. If every time a particular struggle came to the fore and VVAW/WSO rushed to support it, we would lose our base and water down the impact of our struggle against the imperialist system.

Let's take a hypothetical example. Over the past few months, various struggles have arisen that could have necessitated elevating support work to a higher priority. We could have decided that we have to drop everything else (as we did during Wounded Knee) and: involve ourselves in the Boston busing struggle; or work around the labor struggles of the coal miners or the steel workers; or support the struggles of the Palestinian people, or the independence movements of Guinea-Bissau or Mozambique or Angola; or work around the energy crisis or the food shortage, or etc, etc. We would have diffused ourselves and lessened our impact on the general anti-imperialist struggle.

There is a limit to our capabilities. We must always keep our focus in mind, and we must always decide carefully what support work we are capable of providing. Understanding the necessity, on occasion, of temporarily elevating the priority of support work, we must guard against negating the necessity of direct organizing by elevating that support work to our primary task. We have, at times, confused support work with direct organizing, turning their priorities upside down and becoming "anti-imperialists in the sky" rather than effective revolutionaries.

The only way we can take a correct path is to constantly understand the focus of the organization, determine what support work we can realistically do, and always sum up our work to see if we are making errors. If we do this, we will advance the impact that we have in the struggle to defeat U.S. imperialism.

10. DOES A VETERAN AND GI FOCUS IGNORE RACISM?

Any focus, whether veterans, GIs, students, workers, women, welfare mothers, etc. does not inherently ignore the question of national oppression and its ideology -- racism. It is the manner in which we take up the political tasks of organizing against imperialism that leaves room for the error of not combatting, or even ignoring, racism. What this means for VVAW/WSO (or any organization or movement) is that unless we take up the struggles of oppressed nationalities for liberation and actively combat the special oppression they face, we will be holding back the anti-imperialist struggle and refusing to deal with one of the major strongholds which maintains and keeps the system of imperialism alive.

When speaking of racism and national oppression in the context of a veteran and GI focus, it only takes a superficial glance at the problems of veterans and GIs to see that national oppression is a cornerstone of the imperialist oppression that is coming down on all third world people. National oppression is one of the key tools used by imperialism to divide people from one another; the ruling class uses this tactic of "divide and conquer" to try to insure that people will not unite and begin struggling together against the system. Our responsibility is to show the imperialists that this tactic of theirs will not work.

National oppression is felt in particular ways by third world veterans and GIs. Of the vets with less-than-honorable discharges, third world vets have disproportionately higher numbers of less-than-honorables than do white vets. Third world vets face a doubly high percentage of unemployment. At the VA, Spanish-speaking veterans face the usual red tape, along with the added burden, in many cases, of a language barrier. On top of this, the majority of third world veterans can't even think about college (many having been forced out of high school to join the military for economic reasons), let alone go to school on an inadequate GI Bill.

Third world GIs face the same kind of double oppression, similar to that faced by the third world veteran. Any brief survey of GIs in the stockade will show a highly disproportionate percentage of black GIs doing time for military "crimes." The worst military occupations are given in higher numbers to third world GIs, as are the worst forms of harassment. The Brass is constantly pitting blacks against whites, regularly fostering racism through special programs supposedly aimed at ameliorating such differences. On top of all this, many third world GIs have been forced to face their own people when the military has been called in to suppress domestic rebellions of people fighting back against their oppression, i. e. the Watts and Detroit uprisings.

When dealing with this special oppression of veterans and GIs, it is not a matter of how many times we say that racism is bad, nor how many times we say that the root of the problem is the system of imperialism. It is a matter of how thoroughly we take up the struggles of third world veterans and GIs in a systematic way to combat the special problems and oppression they face. It is this systematic practice which will enable us to build a strong multi-national organization--

to bring more third world people into our organization. This will happen because we will be speaking directly to these peoples' daily oppression and the concrete conditions they are forced to live under.

Some ideas for building this systematic practice could include attacking cases of institutionalized racism such as inferior living conditions for third world GIs and their families, discriminatory job placement within the military, racist harassment by the use of Article 15's, courts-martial, discharges, etc. For veterans, it might mean fighting for an end to job discrimination, fighting for Spanish VA forms and Spanish-speaking VA employees, or mobilizing vets with less-than-honorable discharges, particularly black and brown vets, to build the campaign for a single-type discharge. This type of work will have to become ingrained in our day-to-day practice, and we will also have to be certain to link these struggles with the overall struggles of third world people, i. e. the case of Gary Lawton.

We believe that a veteran and GI focus not only takes up the question of racism, but actually forces VVAW/WSO to begin playing a more concrete role in the struggle to end all forms of national oppression. It also forces the membership of VVAW/WSO to begin dealing with racist practice and ideas, in the same way that the struggle around women in the organization has led the membership to deal with sexist practices and ideas. Because racism is used by the military and its discharge system, by the VA, by employers, and throughout society, and because a veteran and GI focus means actively reaching out to the masses of vets and GIs, it will be imperative for VVAW/WSO to wage consistent, programmatic struggles against national oppression. With a focus on veterans and GIs, we will have to deal with racism where it actually exists, rather than pronouncing lofty phrases about how ugly it is. As a result, we will have to develop methods of work that speak directly to the oppression of third world vets and GIs in a consistent, systematic way. By doing this, we will be building a multi-national VVAW/WSO and the entire anti-imperialist movement through our work.

11. WHAT DOES A VETERAN AND GI FOCUS MEAN IN TERMS OF OUR PRISON WORK?

To make this answer as clear as possible, we begin with an example from outside prison work -- strike support. Local chapters of VVAW/WSO have, and will continue to, get involved in strike support work around the struggles of workers to improve their living and working conditions. It is quite possible that we would be supporting strikes which our members are participating in, i. e. members of VVAW/WSO who are workers would (hopefully) be playing leading roles in organizing a strike in their factory. These members would not be organizing a strike as VVAW/WSO, but as members of their union or caucus within the factory. A VVAW/WSO chapter could well be helping out on the picket lines or leafletting or helping to keep scabs out, etc. In short, VVAW/WSO would be doing strike support work.

In many ways, our present prison work is comparable to this (though there are significant differences which will be discussed later). We would not go into prisons in order to organize, though we may well have members in those prisons. We support the work that those members are doing (as we would do with strike support). At the same time, we recognize that our organizational form, which did not grow out of the prison struggle, is not the best, nor the correct form to organize prisoners into -- even if that were possible -- in just the same way that we would not organize the workers in a factory around their demands, say for higher wages, through VVAW/WSO.

At the time when the organization decided to have a National Prison Project (at the Yellow Springs Steering Committee Meeting) there were some ambitious plans for what the project could and should become. As the organization saw it, the prison project office would act as a clearinghouse for information from the local work being done by chapters and regions, and it would also serve as a research and resource center. It would also publish a newsletter for prisoners and provide news for Winter Soldier. The chapters and regions were to be doing day-to-day work around the conditions in prisons -- things like organizing prisoners and their families around specific demands of the prisoners, trying to persuade prisoners to form VVAW/WSO chapters in prisons, doing correspondence, performing minimal service-type activities (getting together transportation to prisons, DUPs, providing literature), etc. This general program never materialized and in summing up that experience, we can see several reasons for this.

First, we did not understand the nature of organizations in prisons. We now know that there are several types of organizations in prison: first, there are the large organizations which generally constitute a power block, i. e. the Muslims, Black Culture Clubs, White Unity Clubs (they go under different names) which are directed toward in-prison politics and survival. For the most part, these groups have no relationship at all with outside groups. Second, there are the tightly knit political groups -- often along the line of study groups. Because of the preponderance of informants within prison, and because these groups deal in clear revolutionary politics, they are small and secret. The third general type of organization in prison is the social club (for lack of a better term) and this is the area where VVAW/WSO came in. These groups are seen as official organizations (that is, recognized,

or trying to be recognized, by the prison administration). They have something like regular meetings (giving the prisoners a chance to get together as a group); sometimes, depending on the restrictions at a given prison, they may have outside speakers, conduct general educational programs, etc; and sometimes, they achieve some kind of political unity around specific issues within the prison.

The important point here is that it makes little difference what the name of that group is -- in a number of prisons where a VVAW/WSO chapter had started, and was later repressed by the prison administration or simply ceased to exist, the same group of people have regrouped as Jaycees, the 7th Step (an inside/outside coalition of prisoners and ex-prisoners directed toward finding jobs, etc) and similar organizations. In short, becoming a VVAW/WSO chapter is simply a vehicle that prisoners use to educate and organize themselves. There is no way that there can be consistent support for the programs of the organization, and in almost every case, the chapters have been destroyed by the prison administration or ceased to exist for reasons of apathy. While we certainly have no trouble with the idea of VVAW/WSO's name being used as this kind of tool or vehicle for general unity, we must understand that these are not -- and never were -- chapters in the same sense that outside chapters are. They simply do not have the same level of programmatic or political unity as our outside chapters.

Second, many prisoners who join the organization are not (and do not see themselves as) members in the same sense that outside members are. This partly comes from prisoners inability to conduct consistent practice with the organization; but more importantly, few, if any, prisoners who have joined VVAW/WSO see us as their primary organization for accomplishing their goals. They also belong to other organizations (as well as ours) which can deal with the immediate problems they face. Also, a large number of the prisoners who are on our mailing list are there because they are interested in receiving Winter Soldier and "Inside/Out" -- both of which contain information they are not likely to get from other sources.

Third, and most important, is what the practice of VVAW/WSO as a national organization has been with regard to prison support work. Overall, there has been little. Where serious prison work was attempted, it faltered in most cases, or it grew into a coalitional effort in which VVAW/WSO played less and less of a leading role. In most places where prison work was begun, there is now some correspondence with prisoners, but that is the extent of the work. In a few places, there is continuing work around VVAW/WSO projects in prisons, such as discharge upgrading. There is also a good deal of work around political prisoners, defense committee work, or defense committee support work. While this is an area of our work which may grow from prison work (i. e. Leavenworth), it is a different kind of work and working with political prisoners in prison is not the same thing as prison work.

The major lesson that we have learned during the last year with regard to our prison work is that it is impossible for us to ORGANIZE prisoners. You simply cannot organize people through the mail, especially when trying to get mail inside a prison. We have done a good deal of educational work with prisoners, and in some cases, we have been able to inspire a prisoner into seeing that he/she must organize the other brothers or sisters within the prison. But we have not done prison organizing. That requires direct and consistent contact over a period of time

and the eventual mobilization of people which we are not in a position to do. Organizing has to be done by the prisoners themselves, and even though we do have VVAW/WSO members in prison, they are not necessarily trying to organize other prisoners as VVAW/WSO or into VVAW/WSO. (Just as VVAW/WSO members who are involved in organizing a strike are not doing it under the guise of VVAW/WSO).

At this point, we see that the majority of work now being done around prisons comes from the prison project office. (This is not including defense work that is going on around the country with regard to political prisoners). The work of the prison project office consists of a constant stream of letters, mostly with highly politicized prisoners who are trying to do organizing (where possible) inside their respective prisons. We feel this is an important aspect of our work. We have obtained a great deal of information as to what is going on inside the prison system and a better understanding of that system and its relationship to imperialism. At the same time, we have been able to help prisoners through discussions around political questions and the sharing of our practice as an organization with the theory that prisoners often have in abundance. We have maintained an extremely useful and, we think, progressive political relationship with hundreds of prisoners across the country.

Second, we do communicate with an even larger number of prisoners through the mailings of Winter Soldier and "Inside/Out" (which attempts to look at the specific problems of the prison system and put them in an anti-imperialist context). This is the basic means of communication with most of the prisoners now on our mailing list, and we feel it is an extremely useful educational tool which prisoners relate to very well. As prison repression increases and the divisive tactics of administrators grow more brutal, we can see this publication playing an increasingly larger role in point out the true nature of the enemy and the need for unity in struggling against that enemy.

Third, we can and do provide a minimum sort of "service" in terms of giving information to prisoners. We receive a lot of requests about VA benefits, the GI Bill, discharge upgrading, SPN codes, etc. from prisoners who look to us as being able to provide this type of information. Also, we are beginning to develop good relations with many of the veterans groups which exist inside prisons. There is a growing number of such groups inside prisons, and their goal is to organize prisoners who are vets. These groups have asked us for help, for information, for guidance, etc. and have in return, shared their work experiences with us. There are some very interesting campaigns being waged (though still in the beginning stages) around the GI Bill, the lack of VA benefits, etc. and demands such as "Make the VA come to us with medical treatment" are being raised. We have done our best to inject an understanding of imperialism into these campaigns and we believe we have been able to direct several of these projects away from reformism to a revolutionary understanding of the nature of the system.

Finally, we have built up a good reputation within the prison movement. We feel that we have done this through our practice -- both the practice of the organization (the DC demonstration, VA take-overs, etc) and in terms of our publications which prisoners think very highly of. Also, prisoners have given us their respect for our honesty in being up front about our abilities and our limitations with regard

to doing prison work. All of this has led to the fact that there will be prisoners who will want to work with the organization once they are released from prison and some of them will want to become involved in our prison support work. We should not discourage this. At the same time, it is clear to people in prison that prison support work is not the major thrust of our organization's work; people understand this and have related to us on that basis.

In summary, while we do have a number of "members" in prisons, we do not have a prisoner base (in the same way that we have a base among veterans and GIs). This is because the practical and realistic relationship of prisoners to VVAW/WSO is far different than the relationship of people who are outside. Our practice since the formation of the national prison project has demonstrated that we are not equipped to handle prison work on a large scale, nor can we realistically create a network of VVAW/WSO chapters in prisons. We have learned a great deal through the prison work we have done, both about the work we are able to do and about the nature of the prison system. Because of this, we see a real need to continue doing the work we are now involved with, particularly because there is such a void within the prison movement that we have been able to help fill. We are gaining contacts in more prisons, and we hope that these contacts will continue to grow so that we can reach and learn from more people. If local chapters have the people-power, the skills and the energy to do prison support work, we would encourage them to do so. However, we have learned from the experience of the organization that coalitions (with groups such as the National Lawyers Guild) may be the best way to proceed. At this time, we see no cut-back in our prison support work. We want the prison newsletter, "Inside/Out" to continue and we want our prison contacts to continue. However, we do feel it is time to look at the National Prison Project as it was originally set up and realize that some of the ideas contained within this project have proved themselves to be unattainable. We have to examine our past practice in an objective and realistic way, learn from our idealistic expectations and from what we have been able to do. If we do this, we can then move forward with a healthy understanding that we can play an important role in providing support for prison struggles. We cannot organize the prison movement, but we can help it to grow -- through our contact with that movement, through our ability to provide educational materials and ideas, and through our ability to support this vital struggle.

12. HOW DOES BUILDING THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST VETERANS AND GI MOVEMENTS PUSH FORWARD THE OVERALL STRUGGLE AGAINST IMPERIALISM?

Ho Chi Minh stated that imperialism is a two-headed monster; it sucks the blood of the people of the colonies with one head, while at the same time it sucks the blood of the working class of its own country with the other head.

There seems to be no question in the organization around the importance of organizing veterans and GIs. It is universally accepted that veterans and GIs have seen both heads of the imperialist monster. While there is a question around the tactics of organizing vets and GIs, we clearly understand that it is important to do so. Why is this so and will it push forward the anti-imperialist movement?

In answering this question it is important to understand the role that vets and GIs play in an imperialist country. The military is used by the imperialists both internally and externally. They are used as strikebreakers and riot cops internally, and as a force to dominate other countries. GIs are the backbone of the military. We can clearly see how GIs were used in both of these instances by looking at several examples. GIs, national guardsmen, state militias were used to squash workers rebellions such as the Ludlow, Colorado miners in 1914; they were used to squash rebellions of blacks in Watts in 1965 and Detroit in 1967; they were used to break up the veterans Bonus March in 1932; and they were used at the anti-war demonstrations at the Pentagon in 1970. In addition to the internal use, GIs were used as tools to try to crush independence movements in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, the Dominican Republic, Lebanon, etc. etc.

It is a necessity for the anti-imperialist movement to organize GIs to insure that the military is neutralized and incapable of carrying out its imperialist functions. Organizing GIs must be seen in this context. GIs must be organized around the understanding of the role that they play in an imperialist system and around the oppressive conditions forced on them while in the military. The organizing of GIs must be done on these two inseparable bases. Avoiding reformism and avoiding "anti-imperialism-in-the-sky" is the only way this can be done successfully. By involving ourselves in the day-to-day struggles of GIs, we can make this important, vital link between the oppression of GIs and the oppression that the military forces on all the people of the world. By doing this, we are striking a decisive blow against U. S. imperialism and for the overall struggle in building the anti-imperialist movement.

In building the anti-imperialist movement, we must also recognize the importance of veterans and the role that they play within an imperialist country. Traditionally, veterans have been called upon to support wars of imperialism. After the first world-wide imperialist war -- World War I -- veterans organizations such as the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars became important in fostering imperialism. These organizations were built on the ideology of "100% Americanism," "America, Right or Wrong" and "I Am A He-Man," which have historically been used to hype reactionary patriotism. After WWI, these veterans groups

were used by the reactionaries to try and squelch the growing discontent of veterans who were coming back to the U.S. and finding it difficult to get jobs, while at the same time beginning to understand that WWI was not fought "to make the world safe for democracy."

This oppression of veterans is nothing new. Today there are approximately 6.8 million Vietnam-era veterans and 42 million veterans of all wars. The Vietnam-era veterans are chronically unemployed, suffer from over 580,000 less-than-honorable discharges, find it difficult to go to school and support families, etc. As such, veterans are a significantly visible force in America. While veterans are also black, women, workers, students, etc, they all have in common the fact that they have served in an imperialist military and as such, have seen the two heads of imperialism.

It is the duty of anti-imperialists to organize these veterans. Potentially, veterans have the ability to reach the broad masses of Americans as they did during the Bonus March in 1932. At that time, thousands of veterans from across the country came to Washington, DC to demand bonuses that were promised to them for their WWI service. As the demonstrations went on, the demands became broader and linked up with the struggles of all Americans, yet focused on the struggles of veterans. While the military broke up the Bonus March, the organized action of veterans gave impetus to the rising worker rebellions during the depression years of the 1930's.

In organizing veterans today, we must follow this lead set by the examples of the veterans struggles in the 1930s and learn from the lessons of the Bonus March. We must organize veterans because of their common experience in the military, because of the common oppression of being veterans and we must show the obvious links between this oppression and the oppression of all the American people. We can do this only by building an anti-imperialist movement focusing on the struggles of veterans. We can do this only by involving ourselves in the day-to-day struggles of veterans, by avoiding reformism and by avoiding "anti-imperialism-in-the-sky" where we abstractly toss about the ideas of imperialism without linking it up to the real oppression veterans face.

In doing this, we have taken a force which has been both historically revolutionary and historically reactionary and introduced this group into the current anti-imperialist movement. And by organizing veterans in an anti-imperialist way, we will have dealt a major blow to the imperialist system.