



# WINTER SOLDIER ORGANIZATION, INC.



## NATIONAL OFFICE

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January 14, 1975

To: The Officers of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (NAARPR)

From: The National Coordinators of Vietnam Veterans Against the War/Winter Soldier Organization (VVAW/WSO)

On the evening of June 14th, Gary Lawton was invited to speak at a meeting sponsored by the Southern California Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression. He did not attend. Instead his wife, Chukia Lawton, attended the meeting and handed Angela Davis a letter from Gary explaining why he couldn't participate. Since that evening VVAW/WSO has discussed the letter from Gary and the remarks he made about the Alliance and Angela Davis. In various internal documents the National Office of VVAW/WSO presented the letter from Gary to Angela and commented on the nature of it. These comments raised serious questions about the nature of the NAARPR. The National Office of VVAW/WSO stands by these remarks and will go into them more deeply in this letter.

In the September issue of WINTER SOLDIER, our national newspaper, we reprinted Gary's letter with an explanation of why it was written. This explanation pointed out several issues raised in Gary's letter concerning the practice of the Alliance in regard to Gary's case and the case of Ruchell Magee. We stated in that introduction that we felt the issues raised were of interest to political prisoners around the country and that these people should be aware of the Alliance's practice in regard to these two cases.

In October, you, the officers of the Alliance sent an open letter to the chapters of VVAW/WSO implying that we were playing a role similar to that of the government in criticizing Angela Davis, the Communist Party USA, (CPUSA) and the NAARPR. We feel that we should comment on sections of your letter that grossly distort the true nature of our remarks.

One of the co-signers of the Alliance letter pointed out over the telephone that the source of the material for your letter was a VVAW/WSO publication, a prison newsletter called "Inside/Out". This is not true. The quotes from the Alliance letter were taken from an internal document of VVAW/WSO -- this document being the National Office Report to the 13th National Steering Committee Meeting of VVAW/WSO, held in Buffalo, New York in August of 1974. An internal document we might point out, is not a public document. In spite of this obvious fact the letter written by the Alliance freely quotes it, thus exposing the real source of your attack on VVAW/WSO. We condemn you for using this internal document, but as a result we feel it necessary to respond to your attack.

The only public statements we made about Angela Davis and the Alliance were in a letter written by Gary Lawton, with our introduction, printed in the September issue of WINTER SOLDIER. Apparently, The Alliance and Angela Davis do not care to deal with

the criticisms contained in this letter, because Gary's letter had not been responded to. Instead, you have chosen to deal with our internal documents rather than a public letter.

When the Alliance was first formed in May of 1973 VVAW/WSO members participated in its first conference. At that time we felt that it was important to do so because we could see that such an organizational form would be a giant step forward in defending political prisoners throughout the country. While we had questions about its formation we believed these to be secondary to the main purpose of uniting many defense committees and organizations. At that conference one of our members of the National Office, Barry Romo, was elected as a member of the Alliance's National Executive Board and he participated in at least two meetings of that group. The nature of his election was one which we questioned as he was not notified of either his nomination or election to that body until the meeting was over. We felt at the time that this too was questionable, but were willing to let that stand aside as we felt the Alliance was important. Subsequently, the National Office decided that he should no longer be a member of the National Executive Board; nor should any member of VVAW/WSO. As a result, at the Second Annual Conference of the Alliance, which we attended as observers, nobody from VVAW/WSO was put forward in nomination. This was done because we felt that the Alliance was no longer working in the best interests of political prisoners. We did not make this decision lightly, but only after looking at the practice of the Alliance.

We agree when you say that it is necessary to defend political prisoners. However, we disagree with the thrust of the work being done by the Alliance. We firmly believe that the best defense for political prisoners is to rely on the strength of the people of this country and to consistently expose and actively organize to fight the imperialist system which is the cause of political repression. Nowhere in Alliance literature we have seen is this system identified. We have received every issue of THE ORGANIZER, the newsletter of the Alliance. While the newsletter gives a wide variety of articles on various political prisoners it also never points out that imperialism must be done away with in order to free political prisoners. We have searched in vain and could not find anything resembling this. Will ignoring the causes of political repression help to free political prisoners? No!

We read with interest the speech of Angela Davis at the Second Annual Conference. As a co-chairperson of the Alliance, and as a leading member of the CPUSA, we believe that she should have attacked the system, pointing out that imperialism is the reason for political repression. Nowhere did she do this. In fact, her speech began by stating that Congressman John Conyers of Michigan was "truly representative of the people's needs and desires." She further stated that people in the US were coming to understand the "crimes of the thugs who run our country." She stated that they now believe that Richard Nixon is a liar! What a perfect opportunity to attack the system, and yet she chose instead to congratulate a Congressman and accuse one man of being a liar! Because Conyers voted to hold Nixon in contempt does not make him a "brother" as she stated. We might point out that George McGovern, while calling for the withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam was also one of the major proponents of continuing to repress the American Indians at Wounded Knee. Does that make him a brother? Was Richard Nixon, as despicable as he is, the sole culprit for the continued oppression of the people of the world? Of course not! Then why didn't Davis raise this point -- that the system is what oppresses all of us? And this was the keynote address of the Second Annual Conference of the Alliance!

July 4th demonstration that was held in Raleigh, North Carolina. Somewhere between 6 to 8,000 people attended the demonstration. In terms of it it could be summed up as a highly successful mobilization in the struggle to free political prisoners. We feel, however, that in spite of the work that went into its organizing, the Alliance again failed to identify the imperialist system as the cause for racist and political repression. Flowing from that, it failed to show the thousands of people there that it is necessary to fight imperialism in order to finally free all political prisoners. An example of how this worked out in practice at the Raleigh demonstration can be cited by the reports that were in REVOLUTION and THE GUARDIAN. In both papers they reported that there was "tight discipline" between the police and the demonstration organizers. While the safety of the demonstrators is very important, it should be clear that the police, with whom the organizers were very cooperative, are the same people that carry out the repression of all people. From the reports we have received this was never even pointed out at the demonstration.

On July 4th, the same day as the Raleigh demonstration, VVAW/WSO held a rally of about 3,500 people in Washington DC. This rally in Washington followed three days of intense struggle and fighting spirit of several hundred people. The main characterization of our demonstration was that we went to DC with winnable demands also, and yet clearly identified the system of imperialism as our enemy. Rather than relying on bourgeois legalism, we carried out our demonstration in a revolutionary way. The demonstration was marked by battles with the police. While battles with police don't necessarily mean that a demonstration was revolutionary, it clearly showed those who participated and those who read about it that we were serious about raising our demands and we were serious in fighting the system that oppresses us all.

The Raleigh demonstration was called as part of the Alliance's campaign to pinpoint North Carolina as the country's number one disaster area in terms of political repression. We agree that North Carolina is marked by incredible racial and political repression. We think the Alliance has clearly listed the many offenses against Black and other people in that state. But we do not feel that North Carolina should be the focal point of a National Alliance's work. The uniting factor in the Alliance is to free all political prisoners and this cannot be done by isolating North Carolina from the rest of the country. While we can state that the Alliance also documents other cases of political repression, we see the thrust of your work directed at one section of the country. We believe that this is a very serious error. How does this relate to the real oppressive conditions that exist in other parts of the country? What about the repression in Detroit with the fascist SWAT teams; the recent Operation Zebra in San Francisco; the continuing repression of the American Indians in the North Central states; the repression in Atlanta, in Dallas, and in Riverside, California? The National Alliance should see the repression in all sections of the country as equal to that in North Carolina and should put this forward; not isolate the struggle in North Carolina from the rest of the country.

Before we begin to respond to some of the charges made in your letter concerning the Leavenworth Brothers Offense/Defense Committee, LBODC, and the Riverside Political Prisoners Defense Committee, RPPDC, there are several points in your letter that should be cleared up. The first deals with the point that VVAW/WSO is assuming the role of the government by making criticisms of the Alliance. We think this is pure crap. It is true that in our National Office Report we called the Alliance the

brainchild of the CPUSA, and it is true that we said there are honest elements in the Alliance. However, we certainly didn't make these statements with the same political perspective as that of the government and we feel it is opportunist of you to attempt to make this implication. We would like to briefly comment on the role of a communist party in mass organizations and not from the government's point of view.

We believe that it is the duty of a communist party to actively build and work in mass organizations. We believe that a 'brainchild' of a communist party is not a bad thing. In fact, we believe that a communist party should initiate mass organizations when necessary. That is one of the party's functions. We also believe that a communist party should actively put forward an independent line in that mass organization and actively participate in the leading of that organization. If, in fact, this is what the CPUSA is doing in the Alliance, then we think that the independent line of the CPUSA is either bankrupt or it is hiding under a cloak of opportunism. If the CPUSA was putting forward a Marxist-Leninist line then they would be calling for the overthrow of the system, not congratulating it at every turn, or failing to identify our enemy.

With regard to the charge claiming that we implied the groups in the Alliance were dominated by the CPUSA, we would like to say that nowhere did we ever say that the CPUSA dominates any of the independent organizations within the Alliance. We severely criticize you for implying this in your letter. We have worked with many of the organizations that comprise the Alliance and we will continue to do so. Our differences lie with the political direction of the Alliance's work, not with the independent organizations within it. The politics of the Alliance is what is at question here, and specifically the roles of Angela Davis and the CPUSA. Is the Alliance putting forward a political line that is in the best interests of political prisoners in the United States? Is the Alliance actively organizing people to fight the system of imperialism? Is the Alliance building the strength of the mass movement? We believe the answers to these questions are no!

There are two ideologies: bourgeois and proletarian. Proletarian ideology should be the guiding political line of the Alliance. In putting forward its political line does the Alliance attack the system or does it pay lip-service to the real struggles of the mass movement and in effect, turn that movement over to the liberal politicians and the would-be reformers? We believe that the Alliance is doing the latter by not pointing out who the real oppressors are. This is our summation of the Alliance's work during the past year and a half.

The second point in your letter that requires clarity is your comment, "If you have criticisms of the CPUSA, take these up with the CPUSA." Considering that Angela Davis is a member of the Central Committee of the CPUSA and also signed the Alliance letter, we believe that she knows better than to agree with this statement in such an off the cuff way. The fact is that we have, in the past, tried to raise specific criticisms with the CPUSA and we were given the most backhanded responses to the point of total unresponsiveness. Here we will try to recapitulate that experience.

In October of 1973 three members of VVAW/WSO attended the World Congress of Peace Forces meeting held in Moscow as part of the American delegation. At that conference, one member of the organization was raped. She was treated in the Soviet Union as a rape victim is treated here in the United States. She was asked if she enjoyed it, and if she encouraged her attacker. As we stated in our letter to the CPUSA

On November 3, 1973, due to the extremely sensitive nature of the situation, applications it held for the Congress we did our best to assure that the incident was not publicly disclosed." Upon return to the United States we wrote letters to the CPUSA and the American Secretary to the World Peace Council explaining what had happened. We demanded an apology from the World Peace Council and that the incident be brought to the proper Soviet authorities. In addition we asked for a return of her travel expenses. The letters were very principled and straightforward.

We received a reply from the American Secretary of the World Peace Council who stated, "I am sure that anyone who was part of the planning and arrangements would regret, as I do, that such an incident could occur." There was no apology; there was no mention whatever of bringing the incident up to the authorities in Moscow, and there was no concession that any official responsibility was involved in the way the woman was treated by the Soviet police officials.

As far as the CPUSA was concerned, they did not even answer our November letter. In December of 1973, at our National Steering Committee Meeting, we voted to censure the CPUSA and to make public the facts around their lack of concern over the incident. A copy of this censure was sent to the CPUSA. Helen Winter, a leading member of the CPUSA responded on January 29, twenty days after the letter of censure was formally sent to the CPUSA. Her reply simply mentioned that the CPUSA was not a responsible organizing body of the congress in Moscow. She never brought up the censure resolution of the VVAW/WSO National Steering Committee; only stating that she would bring up the "matter" with Gus Hall. We have never heard from the CPUSA again on this censure. A national organization sends a letter of censure to a national 'communist' organization and there is no response whatever! The CPUSA washed their hands of the entire incident. This is inexcusable. We do not believe that the statement in your letter, signed by Angela Davis, is valid considering the CPUSA's past practice around criticism.

We would like to briefly respond to the comments you make in your letter concerning the LBODC. In your letter you state that we 'attack' you because charges of racism were levelled at members of the LBODC. Members of the LBODC, (who are also members of VVAW/WSO), did report to us that charges of racism were made to them by people who they felt were extremely close to the CPUSA. Our members on the committee feel these charges are not justified. This charge set up a dynamic within the LBODC which resulted in dividing committee members from one another until the point was reached wherein personal threats on some of our members lives were made. We do not view a 'criticism' which results in threats as principled criticism. Nor do we view 'criticism' which effectively held back the work of the committee as constructive. If racism was apparent on the part of certain members of the LBODC, then that should have been struggled with and raised in a principled manner by the people who felt that racist ideas/actions were present in other committee members. Criticisms which become divisive can only hold back the struggle and divert the real purpose of the committee -- to free the Leavenworth Brothers.

Later in your letter, you say that this was seen by National Alliance officers who have worked with the LBODC, (Carl Braden and Lennox Hinds). The LBODC pointed out in a letter to you that if this racism was seen, officers of the Alliance did not bring it up with the committee members, (at least not with those members who were accused of being 'racist'). If the leadership of the Alliance did see racism at work within the LBODC, then we would expect this to be raised by them on the spot. It is the responsibility of leadership not to retreat from struggle, and to correct mistaken ideas when and

where they arise. This was never done. We feel that if the Alliance did have criticisms concerning racism within LBODC, it would have been more productive and principled to raise these criticisms with members of the committee rather than to wait until you publish a letter making these charges. To recognize incorrect ideas or practice and not deal with them until many months later in a public letter is seen by us as being opportunist.

In another part of your letter you state, "We are dismayed that you would hamper this effort, (to build the Alliance) not only by discouraging a local group from affiliating with the Alliance (as you say you did with the Leavenworth committee) but also by issuing this statement." By this, we assume you are referring to our National Office Report where we report that VVAW/WSO members on the LBODC opposed the idea of affiliating with the Alliance. The members who did oppose this affiliation did so on the grounds that they had honest questions as to the nature of the Alliance, its relationship to the CPUSA, and the practice and politics of both organizations. We feel it is a good thing that questions such as this are raised within a committee such as the LBODC before a decision to affiliate is made. It just may be that everyone does not agree with the importance of building the Alliance, in its present form. VVAW/WSO does not see itself as having a responsibility to build the Alliance, and if our membership has questions about the nature of the Alliance, then we feel that is a good thing. As you well know, the LBODC did decide to affiliate with the Alliance. We also assume you are aware that this decision to affiliate was made at a time when two people who had strong doubts about the affiliation had to leave town. The LBODC members knew that these people had questions and criticisms, but with no warning, they decided to hold a vote on the affiliation without having first struggled out the pros and cons of such an affiliation. We see this very undemocratic process of affiliation as manipulative on the part of the committee members who felt very strongly that the committee should affiliate with the Alliance. Even if the people who opposed the affiliation had been outvoted and the affiliation made anyway, we strongly criticize those people in and around the LBODC who pushed for this vote at a time when other members were absent.

In your letter you almost ignored the major point of the current struggle and that is the letter written by Gary Lawton to Angela Davis. The major reason we decided to publish Lawton's letter in WINTER SOLDIER was because this letter raised major questions concerning the movement to free all political prisoners. Your brief response treated Gary's letter as if it were a footnote. You made three statements concerning the letter that were totally misleading and circumventing the issues raised in his letter. You stated in your letter, "Even the letter from Gary Lawton criticizing Angela was addressed (sic) to her as she spoke in Gary's defense..." The fact is that you mislead people by saying that she was speaking in Gary's defense, as if that were the reason for the public meeting called by the Southern California Alliance, where she spoke. That meeting was called to raise money to send people to the North Carolina demonstration.

You further state that "Carl Braden also spent several weeks in Riverside this past spring working on Gary's case, and is again in Riverside now as these words are being written." It was pointed out to us by the RPPDC that in fact Carl has never come to work for Lawton as a representative of the National Alliance, nor has any Alliance money been spent on sending Carl there. While Carl has been in Riverside and has helped on the case, it has not been done by the Alliance, but by Carl as a member of the Southern Institute for Propaganda and Organizing.

The third point you raised concerns Gary's questions about the support Davis has given to Ruchell Magee. You quote from a letter written by Ruchell stating that Angela Davis has given him a lot of support. We will not go into the contents of that letter as we can produce letters written by Ruchell that give a different perspective. We will not use Ruchell here to make our points. It should be noted however, that Gary has been in contact with Ruchell and as a result has questions of Davis to which she has not responded.

The above points are all that are briefly discussed in your letter. Gary did not write his letter just to get his name in WINTER SOLDIER, and he did not write the letter to the four co-chairpersons of the Alliance; he wrote the letter to Angela Davis because he wanted her to answer his specific questions. He also wrote the letter to Davis to tell her in no uncertain terms what he thinks of her role in the struggle to free all political prisoners. As we have stated, Davis has refused to respond. Throughout the years of the Lawton case, Angela Davis, while pretending to help Gary, has never been in personal contact with him even though the history between the Southern California Alliance and the RPPDC has been marked by constant duplicity on the part of the SCAARPR. After Gary's letter was written, Davis found the time to meet with individual members of VVAW/WSO in southern California. If she could find the time to meet with them, then why couldn't she find the time to talk to Lawton? Riverside is but a telephone call away. She has never done this because she doesn't want to. She has used the Alliance to attempt to give a very incomplete response to Gary's letter under a safe cover as co-chairperson of the National Alliance.

Enclosed with this letter is a response to your attack on VVAW/WSO written by the RPPDC. We think that this response outlines the history of the relationship between the RPPDC and the Alliance, Angela and the CPUSA very well. We believe that it sums up the role played by these groups and this individual in attempting to undermine the efforts to free Lawton. Gary is a leading figure in the continuing struggle to free political prisoners. To answer his letter in the manner that was done by the leadership of the Alliance and the CPUSA is an attack on Gary. VVAW/WSO has continually supported Gary and the efforts to free him from the racist frame-up charges that stem from his work in organizing the minority community of Riverside against the oppression of the system. We will continue to support him until he is free. And this support for him will be there when he is attacked in unprincipled, opportunist methods as used in your letter.

You attacked VVAW/WSO in your letter for criticizing Angela Davis. You state that she "voices the aspirations of all Black people", and you unblushingly compare her to Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. You further state that VVAW/WSO attacks her just as the government does. Angela Davis and the struggle to free her was a struggle that won over millions of Third World and white people to her defense. Her trial and defense were worthy of mass support; support VVAW/WSO gave throughout the country. We believed that the struggle to free Angela Davis was a struggle of all progressive people in the United States. It is for this reason that we single her out. She is a major figure in the US and because of this, she is responsible to those millions of people who fought for her freedom.

The hopes and aspirations of all oppressed people are to cast off the burdens of imperialism. Chairman Mao Tsetung stated, "Countries want freedom, nations want independence, and people want revolution." We believe that these are the aspirations of all oppressed people. We do not believe that the Alliance in its present form is working

toward this goal. We believe that Davis, as a well known figure in the United States, and as co-chairperson of the National Alliance for the Liberation of Political Prisoners has a responsibility to voice these aspirations. We believe that she is not doing this.

Your letter implied that Davis has spent almost all of her time working and organizing on behalf of political prisoners. We do not believe that time factors are the gauge of one's political analysis. When she doesn't identify the imperialist system; when she doesn't actively organize people to fight the system, then she doesn't voice the aspirations of all Black people as you claim. Instead she voices the reformist line of the CPUSA. For only in overthrowing the system of imperialism will all Black and oppressed people be free. When criticism is directed at her it is opportunist to say that it is the work of the government. By stating that VVAW/WSO plays a role similar to that of the government you are saying that Davis is above criticism and, in fact, she is not. You are ignoring the criticisms being made, negating the very essence of criticism and holding yourselves above it. Your letter's implication that VVAW/WSO is an agency of the government is a slanderous attack. The four co-chairpersons of the Alliance are responding to Gary's letter in an outright opportunist fashion. You have taken our organization's documents, perverted them with lies and distortions and have published an attack in a devious and dishonest way.

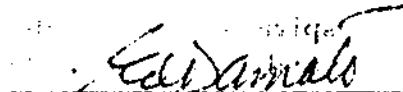
On many occasions we have heard Angela Davis and members of the Alliance call for unity. We agree with this, but we feel that unity must come from principled struggle around issues arising in the mass movement today. We do not believe that unity is achieved by glossing over differences. It is not in the interests of the mass movement to unite with opportunists, reformists and others that actually hold back the movement. If a reformist, opportunist line is put forward then that line must be struggled against in order to achieve principled unity. If that line is not beaten down then it must be exposed to the masses of people who will then decide which line is correct.

Once again we state that our differences with the Alliance are with its leadership, with its political outlook and with the CPUSA, a leading force in the Alliance. Our differences are not with the affiliate organizations and groups in the National Alliance. It is our hope that these organizations and defense committees comprising the Alliance will begin to re-evaluate the political direction of the Alliance in an effort to insure that its work serves the real interests of political prisoners throughout the country.

In the Struggle Against Imperialism,



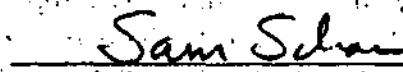
Brian Adams - National Coordinator



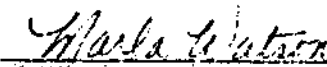
Ed Damato - National Coordinator



Bill Davis - National Coordinator



Sam Schorr - National Coordinator



Marla Watson - National Coordinator



Pete Zastrow - National Coordinator

"FREEDOM FOR ONE IS NOT ENOUGH, FREE US ALL, SAY ON!" - GARY LAWTON