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FIGHTING PROGRAM FOR VVAW/WSO

The world is in great turmoil. In country after country, people are throwing off the yoke of imperialist domination and seizing control of their own destinies. The United States is being hurled into a deep crisis, as the ruling class fights a losing battle to retain control of the system as the system itself collapses under the weight of its own contradictions. As the crisis deepens, the imperialists are trying every method at their disposal to force it onto the backs of the working class, attacking living and working conditions, forcing speedups, throwing workers into unemployment, cutting back on social welfare programs, stirring up racial divisions and using open repression against the rising people's movement. Because of this crisis, the working class is on the rise, taking up the fight against the attacks on them by the imperialists, and leading the way toward the overthrow of this bankrupt system.

The Strategic Need to Build the Anti-Imperialist Veterans Movement

Veterans are also facing attacks from the ruling class. Because the majority of veterans are working-class people, they are facing the common contradictions that face the entire multi-national working class. At the same time, veterans are facing peculiar contradictions within the system of imperialism. The unemployment rate of veterans is higher than for the class as a whole. The services at the VA hospitals are deteriorating and cutbacks are being made in already understaffed situations. Bad discharges, job discrimination, lack of job training and layoffs have placed veterans squarely in the fight to smash imperialism.

It is the task of VVAW/WSO to build the mass anti-imperialist veterans movement, to take up and lead the rising struggle of veterans around their immediate contradictions and show the way forward to smashing the system of imperialism in unity with the entire anti-imperialist movement. It is our task to not only raise the consciousness of veterans but to lead them in their fight, to point out the real enemy, to organize them in a revolutionary way and unite their struggle with the overall struggle against the system.

We think the struggles of veterans is potentially revolutionary. The ruling class has always, and many times successfully, tried to co-opt veterans, using various tricks and appeals to backward ideas to do this. It is the task of VVAW/WSO to convert the 'potential' to the real and not leave veterans to the wiles of the reactionaries. The imperialists have always been afraid of the men and women they have used to fight their wars, and rightfully so. We want to turn their fear into real terror by building a strong anti-imperialist veterans movement. Just appealing to veterans to 'repudiate their veterans' privileges' will not do this, nor do we want to see decent health care, decent education, decent jobs, and a decent life just as a special gift for veterans, but as a right of all working and oppressed people.

VVAW/WSO needs a fighting national program to meet this task. The program must identify the central or key demands of veterans, the central areas of attack, and provide the basis for consistent work so that the organization will lead the fight. Our program must direct the greatest blow possible and therefore must concentrate on how to mobilize veterans, not in a way that acks as a gimmick to sucker them into attacking the system, but in a way that clearly shows that only by smashing imperialism will their, and all working and oppressed peoples', needs be met. This means that our program has as its basis the taking up of the immediate oppression of veterans in concrete ways. The program is what we are offering the masses as a tool for defeating the system, meeting their demands; a plan of action for people to unite with and take up. The program cannot be just a series of demands by themselves, as any demand can be reformist or revolutionary; and the program cannot be a series of dates isolated from day-to-day work.

National Demands

At the Buffalo NSCM, VVAW/WSO adopted the current program. At the time, all that it encompassed was four demands and several dates for nationwide actions. We think this program has to be tightened up and fleshed out so that it will be more effective. Actions must still be held on the remaining dates, the next one being the second anniversary of the signing of the Paris Agreements, January 27th. Every level of the organization should be mobilizing on those days. This program proposal is meant to deepen the work started by the Buffalo program, a means by which more programmatic unity can be developed and VVAW/WSO's blows against the system strengthened.

It is important to analyze the demands that form the core of the current national program. We think the four demands are sound in and of themselves, but that the way in which the demands are raised has become critical to seeing their realization. First, we do not think that every demand must be raised at every action, or that they are raised isolated from other demands. In differing conditions and in differing contexts, it may be necessary that one or more of the demands are not put forward. If unity with other groups can be made around just one demand, that is just as important to put forward as the other demands. Also, the target of an action may mean that one of the demands plays a more important role than the others at that time. Mainly, it is important to not be mechanistic in raising these demands.

We think that the demands are unfolded in a dialectical way, in a way that goes from the particular to the general. Understanding the nature of imperialism does not fall from the sky. It comes from engaging in struggle against the system. This leads to the question of how to build the movements around UNIVERSAL, UNCONDITIONAL AMNESTY and IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENTS/END ALL AID TO THIEU AND LON NOL. We think the most successful way to win these demands, to build a real movement behind them, is to build the anti-imperialist veterans movement. This means that the key demand must be found to build that movement, the demand that unites with the immediate concerns of veterans that can be used to unfold the other demands.

We say that the key demand, at this time, is DECENT BENEFITS FOR ALL VETS. We say 'at this time' because the situation is rapidly changing and that this demand may no longer be key if the conditions change drastically, i. e., if the U.S. government should renew bombing in Vietnam. However, this demand is key at this time because it provides the way to develop the vets movement in a dialectical way. Veterans are pissed off at the VA and have a basic understanding that the VA is part of a wider system. By seriously taking up this demand, not as a gimmick but leading the fight to win it, we will show the masses that we mean serious business, that we are not just poverty pimps. It is clear from past practice that most vets do not immediately unite with the other three demands. Practice has shown that the amnesty demand can be brought forward very well from the demand for a single type of discharge. The demand around Indochina can be unfolded from the understanding of the amnesty question.

The main danger in the fight for DECENT BENEFITS is the right error of making it a demand separate from the rest of the working class and oppressed people, to make it purely an economist struggle. This means that it is being put forward in a reformist way, not exposing imperialism, not directing the peoples' wrath at the system, and raising it in isolation from the overall struggle against the system. It is the task of the lackeys of the ruling class (VFW, American Legion, etc.) to channel the anger and just demands of

vets into isolated pockets, isolating vets from their brothers and sisters and never exposing the system, never fighting it. Our task is to do just the opposite. We must lead vets to taking up UNIVERSAL, UNCONDITIONAL AMNESTY, SINGLE TYPE DISCHARGE, and IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENTS/END ALL AID to joining the fight to smash imperialism.

Also, the demand around Indochina has certain weaknesses. The primary weakness is the failure to link the war in Indochina with the worldwide crisis of imperialism and the rising danger of inter-imperialist war. Particularly, we see the rising area of contention is the Middle East and that the situation there clearly has the potential for developing into world war for the control of Europe. The failure to point out that the crisis of imperialism can lead to a war for redivision of the imperialist areas of domination and tying that to the continued conflict in Indochina isolates what is happening in Indochina from the nature of the crisis. VVAW/WSO must take up this aspect more concretely. By doing so, we will be more effective in bringing the demand around Indochina to the people.

It is also imperative that VVAW/WSO take up a new demand around the economic crisis in the United States. We believe a demand around jobs must be added to the national program. As much as the ruling class tries, it cannot undo the contradictions of the system. Overproduction and inflation have forced the imperialists to take measures to safeguard their rates of profit. Fundamental to their attack on the working class is massive unemployment. Among the unemployed, veterans are some of the first laid off, particularly because they have no job seniority. Already the ruling class is scurrying around trying to defuse the question of jobs with "public" employment programs. The organization must join with other forces that are organizing for jobs and bring unemployed vets into the struggle. Changing conditions and determining which is the key demand could very well make this demand the key one in the near future.

While the national organization will be putting forward five demands (under this program) conditions at the local level will necessitate the raising of other demands. Particular conditions in each area dictate how national demands are organized around and at the same time, particular conditions means raising demands that the rest of the organization may not raise. For example, some chapters have raised a demand around bi-lingual forms at the VA because in their areas there are large numbers of Latino vets in need of these kinds of forms. Also, supporting the demands of other organizations or struggles is a key element in not isolating the anti-imperialist vets movement from the overall struggle. An example of this is working on the Tyrone Gayton Committee in the Bay Area, where VVAW/WSO plays an important role in developing the campaign against police murders and brutality. Another is the support organized for the Puerto Rican Independence Day celebration in New York.

The question of national oppression and VVAW/WSO's approach to it is a key link in building an anti-imperialist veterans movement. There is a sound material basis for uniting Third World and white vets in VVAW/WSO. The road to this unity is for the organization to take up the fight against national oppression and show the masses that we mean it when we demand an end to racism and oppression. At the same time, by winning over Third World vets to the common struggle, that is, fighting for the same demands that all people are fighting around, is the solid foundation of multi-national unity. Some chapters have had the beginnings of multi-national unity around attacking the VA, a step that we feel is the best possible way for VVAW/WSO to become truly multi-national.

The practice VVAW/WSO has had around the oppression of women has been somewhat more consistent than that around national oppression, but we have still not programmatically taken up this aspect of combatting imperialism. Within the struggle of building the

anti-imperialist veterans movement, we must investigate the conditions that women vets face as well as the problems that face families of veterans. This question is more clear in terms of GI work, but there are women vets and families of vets that can be organized around the national program. Not seeing the veterans movement as separate from the rest of the anti-imperialist movement, the organization should link up with progressive womens' struggles going on and actively support them, as in the case of the Farah strike.

Campaign Around the Conditions of Veterans

The most important part of our program must be to actively see where vets are and then go out to them, not wait for them to come to us. We think the key to this is an active campaign attacking the entire VA system-- the hospitals, administrative offices, drug programs, job training programs, GI Bill, vet reps on campuses, community vet programs, federally funded rip-offs, and poverty pimps. To make it more clear, the following is a listing of what we see as targets in this campaign:

1. VA Hospitals.
2. VA Administrative offices.
3. Unemployment Centers.
4. Vocational Training Centers.
5. Colleges.
6. Discharges.
7. Community programs (drugs, home loans, job fairs).
8. National Guard and Reserves.

A campaign around the entire VA system is many-sided and can attack from all or any of those sides. The list of targets covers every condition or local situation so that all chapters can be engaged in this campaign. Where there are several such targets, and where conditions in the chapter permit, the campaign can be developed around as many of the targets as possible.

One of the prime targets is the VA hospital system. This system, the largest of all hospital systems, concentrates all the aspects of the contradictions that vets now face. It is also the place where vets can be most easily found and approached on a consistent basis. The majority of vets already realize that the VA stinks. The hassles, poor treatment, discrimination, red tape and so forth are well known by the masses of veterans. VVAW/WSO must go into the VA and actively organize in the hospital, working with the patients, uniting with the VA workers, and doing work with the outpatients around the conditions of the VA and bring these people into the anti-imperialist struggle. We cannot lay out here the details of how this can be done, but there are many chapters complementing a campaign against the VA, and their summations provide an excellent basis for waging this campaign. Along with the VA hospitals are the VA Administrative Offices (Regional VAs) that sometimes exist in a hospital and sometimes not. These offices are filled with career bureaucrats and an even larger number of honest people who think they are helping vets. It is vital to reach these honest workers and get them to support our campaign. Also, there is a large daily influx of vets to these offices trying to clear up their benefits from red tape or some other conditions (like a bad discharge). Although these vets are not there every day, they can be mobilized.

The rising problem of unemployment is also part of the campaign. If size of membership permits, work should begin around unemployment centers. There are many vets there with bad discharges also, and can be moved around the SINGLE TYPE DISCHARGE. There are lots of vets who have been laid off due to lack of seniority. Along with unemployment centers go the vocational training centers where vets are given six months (more or less) job training, only to have no job waiting. There is an increasing number of vets at these places, some of them having special days just for vets to come on. If work is done around these centers, it must be consistent or nothing will come of it. There are

also other groups doing unemployment work and they should be investigated to see what kind of unity could be achieved with them for doing joint work.

Some chapters exist around campus situations. Although investigation must be done as to what is foremost on these campuses, much work can be done around the GI Bill. Also, many campuses have a VA representative on campus, and these reps can be attacked or used as a focus for the campaign against the VA, particularly if there is no other VA facility in town. This also raises the question of where vets go for help when there is no VA facility in a town. We have had no input in this area and think it should be looked into to see if vets are having difficulty because of this situation.

Work on bad discharges has been going on for some time, but there has been little growth in a movement for single type discharge. We think this is because there has been no program to plug vets with LTHDs into after getting hold of them. Linking them with the campaign around the fact that they cannot get jobs and that the VA will not help them will move this demand forward. Raising the demand for a SINGLE TYPE DISCHARGE at the VA and demanding that treatment be given regardless of discharge status is important, bringing out the real nature of discharges and winning those people who are eligible for treatment to supporting this demand.

The VA has many fingers out in the community that affect what is happening to vets. Many drug programs get funds from the VA to keep people hooked on methadone. Many vets are angry about their inability to get loans for purchasing homes, as pointed out by the incident that happened in Chicago (in the January meeting) at a meeting called by the city for vets. These fingers can be traced out and work done around them. If this work is plugged into a larger campaign, then it is more effective, as the meetings that the city or VA call never provide real answers to the questions the vets raise to them. Providing these angry people with a way to fight back is crucial.

Finally, there is the work around the National Guard and Reserves. This is covered more thoroughly in the program on GIs. Briefly, VVAW/WSO must take up the task of stemming the ability of the ruling class to use the National Guard and Reserves for domestic repression. The Guard will most assuredly be used in the near future to attack the people's movement, and work must be done to neutralize or turn this around. We think this work should be done on the basis of either having already established an attack on the VA or if there are no other aspects of the program that can be implemented in an area. This is because there must be a base from which to approach Guardsmen and Reservists, and an anti-imperialist vets movement is such a base.

Methods of Work

It is important to draw the lessons of the past in taking up this program. The major weakness of implementing any program, and the weakness that has characterized the work in the last four months, is the lack of consistency. Just choosing the VA system as the point of attack does not automatically lead to success in organizing. Also, holding any number of demonstrations at one place is not the essential part. It is constantly being out there among the people, learning from them and what they see as the primary contradictions, going to them and bringing our organizational strength to their struggles that is essential. An example of this is in the Wisconsin report. They picked one ward of one VA hospital and started going there on a consistent basis. They talked with patients, organized support among the VA workers, started a study group and organized. This has led to growing support from the patients and the VA workers, with these forces coming out to demonstrations the chapters has called, and patients joining the chapter. This would not have happened if the chapter had not gone onto the ward consistently.

By picking out the key contradictions that people face and conducting thorough investigations of these conditions, we will be better able to lead the fight of vets against the system. One of the problems of the past period has been the hit-or-miss method of trying to educate and mobilize people in the struggle. We call this the "butterfly syndrome," flitting from one building or target to the next, thinking that one or two demos has moved the people at these places forward. We do not think that any such thing happens using this method of work. A few people who are already anti-imperialist may come forward, but without consistent work, the masses are ignored.

Besides consistency, it was pointed out earlier that mobilizing vets around the key demand of "Decent Benefits" will lead to a related movement around the other demands on amnesty and Indochina. It has been said by many chapters that people, especially vets, do not relate to the amnesty demand or the Indochina demand when first approached. This is very understandable, since anti-imperialist consciousness does not come out of the sky. People must be won to it. By uniting with and leading the struggle around demands that veterans immediately grasp are in their interests provides the material basis for explaining the other demands and winning their support of them, not the other way around. This will not happen if the fight around the immediate needs is conducted in an economist or reformist way, never attacking the system or bringing out the system's true nature.

Equally important is trying to link up the independent vets groups that exist by the hundreds across the country. The basis for uniting with them should be around programmatic unity, not ideological unity at first. What we are trying to do is win them to the fight against the system, not leave them to it. This may mean that only one demand can be united around. If this is the case, that demand must be used as a springboard to the other demands and the struggle against the system as a whole. The key here is to maintain an independent stance politically while uniting programmatically.

Finally, the campaign around the conditions that vets face is not isolated from the overall anti-imperialist movement. As pointed out earlier, it is imperative that our program be linked with the work of other progressive forces so that veterans are brought into the anti-imperialist struggle and not isolated from it. This program is aimed at mobilizing veterans, but it is also the framework around which the system can be unfolded.