

STRENGTHEN THE CORE, BROADEN THE FRONT

VVA' must take the lead in building a mass vets' movement

Since our last meeting in Chicago, the Vietnamese people have won a tremendous victory. Of course, the US has not given up its murderous actions. At this very moment political prisoners are being murdered by the Thieu clique and the bombing of Cambodia continues. But the signing of the 9-Point Accords means a new level of struggle which is much more favorable to the Vietnamese and all the people of the world. It marks a new stage in the inevitable defeat of imperialism.

We should take a moment to see the significance of the US defeat, and to taste our victory, because we had a part in it too. Along with the heroic Vietnamese people, the antiwar movement, draft resisters and above all the refusal of GIs to fight an imperialist war helped disorganize the imperialist forces and bring the war to an end. We see from this victory how we will win in the end - by attacking imperialism simultaneously on all fronts, from the outside and the inside.

Here at home, the signing of the Accords has not felt much like victory. The reason is because imperialism never admits defeat, because the increasing contradictions of the US on a world scale are driving it into a corner where the wounded pig is lashing out more and more violently at us inside the US. Billions of dollars were poured into a losing effort in Vietnam - the result has been inflation, wage controls. The other imperialist powers such as Germany and Japan have been quick to see US corporations losing their grip and grab up world markets - the result has been a loss of competitiveness of US business, depression, unemployment. Other countries, recognizing the fatal weakness of the US, have been increasingly resisting imperialist investment and control - for example Chile and the oil-producing countries. The corporations' profits and their world position are threatened and the result is that they are forced to try and make it up by increased ripoffs of the working people at home. Through speed-up, wage freeze, welfare/workfare, cutbacks in all services, even greater oppression of 3rd world groups and women.

We don't have to look far to see the results of this attack - at least half a million vets unemployed, because there are no jobs, because the Army doesn't provide training, because vets' programs are being cut back. This is especially true for 3rd world vets. Bad discharges - many of which were gotten for resisting the Army and the war - are keeping many from getting VA and unemployment benefits and medical care. Those who are in school are being denied payment of tuition which

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was guaranteed under the GI Bill after World War II. And we all have to deal with the red tape and be treated like shit by the VA. This again is especially true for 3rd world vets. But where there is oppression there is resistance and the crisis within the US is showing more and more people that it is the system of imperialism which is causing their suffering.

We know what problems vets have, and it is by dealing with them that we can reach significant numbers of veterans, build VVA and make a contribution to the struggles of all peoples against imperialism. We have to see that imperialism is one system. As Ho Chi Minh said, it is a two-headed monster which sucks the blood of the colonized peoples and at the same time the working people of the imperialist countries. We want to cut off both its heads, and that means getting down to organizing the working people of the US to be part of the worldwide struggle against imperialism.

What does this mean for VVA? Veterans are a powerful force against imperialism, because vets have experienced the true nature of imperialism in S.E. Asia and at other outposts all around the world. Most come from working class and lower petty bourgeoisie and are hit especially hard by the crisis - because of being young, because many are 3rd world, because we had to do time in the military and come home to no jobs, with no training or benefits to make up for lost time. These veterans represent a potentially powerful force against imperialism. And VVA is the only organization that can lead them in the fight against imperialism and for their day-to-day demands. Because VVA is the only veterans' organization that had consistently fought against the war and the only organization with a name among vets. We can win other vets to the struggle by showing them now that we are also the strongest fighters for their immediate interests. The key to building a mass movement and a mass anti-imperialist organization of vets is support for day-to-day economic and democratic demands. If we in VVA don't deal with vets' problems it will be a real loss. Many vets will be left to government front groups like the American Legion or other vets' groups which try to use the vets' issues for their own narrow organizational purposes - see ASU.

Some people say that it is opposed to anti-imperialism if we organize around economic demands of vets. On the contrary, winning victories in this area is essential for strengthening the people's movement and weakening imperialism. Like the trade union struggles of the working class, fighting around economic demands of veterans will never be enough by itself to make a revolution. But it is essential in reaching masses of vets, and if we don't see our work in isolation but as part of a united front, then it too will be a "school for revolution". Out of the day-to-day struggles of the masses we will build a real mass movement, deeper and

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stronger than the anti-war movement, just as the crisis of imperialism gets deeper and broader with every day.

Some people are afraid that bringing an organization of veterans we will be dividing the movement. In fact, by organizing masses of vets we will be making a contribution that no one else can make. A real anti-imperialist mass movement of vets will be a strong force to support the people's struggles on all fronts. It can be a spark to inspire them and a valuable ally. If we don't do this, if we become a "Winter Soldier Organization", then we will be dispersing the vets' issues and dropping them from being fighting issues and a fighting movement. It won't broaden our organization, it will kill it, and we will fall apart like the Peace and Freedom Party because we won't be relating to anybody's problems in a real way.

It is true that some of the ways vets' demands have been put forward in the past have had the effect of divisiveness - treating veterans as an "interest group". But this will not be true if we organize vets as part of the united front against imperialism. We have an example of this in the veterans' movement of the Thirties. When twenty-five thousand vets marched on Washington in 1932 to demand payment of the "bonus" which Congress had promised but refused to pay out, the Trotskyite wreckers and the Socialist Party, which was playing the same sellout role the CP plays today, refused to support them, saying it would divide the working class. The Workers' Ex-Servicemen's League, under the then revolutionary leadership of the CP, did support, organize and lead them. This was not only an inspiration to other segments of the movement - by building and strengthening the vets' mass struggle the CP activists were able to raise the demand for unemployment insurance and social security, which meant concrete support for the struggles of the unemployed and the entire working class. This is concrete solidarity, it is an example of what can be achieved by linking up vets' struggles with the anti-imperialist movement as a whole.

What we need is the same kind of fighting movement now. The masses of vets are ready for it, but it has to be real. We need to start now to organize thousands of vets who have never had an opportunity to relate to VVAW before. Each chapter should act on its own to find the most effective ways to reach these brothers and build local struggles. On the basis of these struggles we can plan for a national action of veterans in Washington, which will not be an end in itself but consolidate the results of our day-to-day work, show strength, and move the movement forward.

Some of the demands we will raise could be:

JCS FOR ALL VETS

END BAD DISCHARGES



PAY TUITION UNDER THE GI BILL

IMPROVE MEDICAL CARE, TREAT DRUG ADDICTION AS A SERVICE-RELATED DISABILITY

MAKE THE VA SERVE VETERANS

Other demands should include:

END SUPPORT FOR THIEU, IMPLEMENT THE ACCORDS

ALL US FORCES OUT OF S.E. ASIA

We must take these demands and relate them to the whole system of imperialism, both in our literature and by joint actions with other groups - like our work with the United Farm Workers on the West Coast. In formulating our demands we should give special attention to supporting the struggles of 3rd world vets. Above all, we must concentrate on building the struggle for the day-to-day needs of veteran and strengthening the mass movement. If we are successful, not only the mass movement, but VVAW as an organization will be immensely strengthened. Or in the words of Ho Chi Minh, "The stronger the core, the broader the front!" Build VVAW, build the mass veterans' movement!