

VVAW/WSO is a "Ship Without a Rudder"

VVAW/WSO is about to launch into a three-line struggle over the definition of the organization. Our purpose in this paper is to put forward what we think is a correct position and to draw up a few ideas for programatically implementing that position through an advance on the concept of "objectives". We see two incorrect tendencies, right and left, which must be struggled against.

The "right" tendency in the organization is to go backwards and attempt to restrict the membership of VVAW/WSO to veterans and GI's only. This is unrealistic in the light of our past practice, which has shown that without the support of non-vets., particularly non-vet. women, the organization would have ceased to exist long ago. We believe that we can integrate non-vets. into the struggles around vets. and GI's issues without creating a "ladies auxiliary" similar to the reactionary VFW. This tendency is based on veterans chauvinism and an idealistic, unrealistic approach to a very real problem. Because it is so obviously backward, we feel that it represents little real danger of being implemented at this time.

The real danger to VVAW/WSO is the "left" tendency which we label as the Winter Soldier Concept. Advocates of this position are opposed to implementing a real vets. and GI's focus to the organization. They wish us to become the amorphous "Winter Soldier Organization". This position effectively denies the need for a specific organizational focus. More to the point, it denies the need for an organizational focus on vets and GI's.

The tendency to think of VVAW/WSO as "the left" or an organization capable of absorbing anyone interested in almost any facet of the anti-imperialist struggle is not new. This WSO concept started out as a progressive step to allow non-vets. to join the organization and have an equal say in how it is run. Also, a good part of the anti-war movement had collapsed and left VVAW/WSO as one of the few surviving mass organizations still in existence with objectively anti-imperialist politics. The organizations reaction to this condition was to expand the type and scope of it's projects and activities to encompass many different aspects of the overall anti-imperialist struggle in an attempt to fill the gaps. Three examples of this are Bouge Chitto, Cairo, and Gary Lawton. Objectively, this started a trend away from veterans and GI's struggles and into a situation where we referred to our vets and GI members for credibility whenever we needed it, but really failed to deal with the problems of that constituency on a national level.

Our position is not to condemn the past because we believe this WSO trend started as a good thing. However, we are no longer back in those

happy-go-lucky days of yore. New conditions exist now that we hadn't imagined then. The WSO concept fails to meet real needs in three important ways.

1. It fails to provide anti-imperialist leadership for the rapidly growing spontaneous veterans struggles which are not taking place and abandons them to opportunists like the leadership of AVM.
2. It fails to take into account that the "left" is in a qualitatively new period which requires organizations to realize that some sections of oppressed people have different specific demands than others. This means that forces must be concentrated on dealing with the real day-to-day struggles of a specific section of the working class and linking that struggle to the anti-imperialist movement as a whole. Unless this is done, we will become mere idealists without practice to back up our words.
3. Most importantly, it distorts the concept of the "United Front Against Imperialism", by having VVAW/WSO continue wandering about like a ship without a rudder, with no real focus on a specific section of the anti-imperialist struggle.

We view the United Front Against Imperialism as an inter-organizational body composed of all those organizations which can be united around a program against imperialism. These individual organizations concentrate specifically on the problems and struggles of a particular section of oppressed people, such as women's struggles, in-plant struggles, veteran-GI struggles, student struggles, etc., and generally on the overall anti-imperialist struggle by raising consciousness among their members and working through the United Front Against Imperialism to support the overall fight of all oppressed peoples.

The WSO concept of having no organizational focus attempts to make VVAW/WSO into a United Front Against Imperialism all by itself. Instead of having many organizations in the UFAL, it results in only one organization with many separate focuses. Our study of many successful revolutions in other countries, such as Vietnam, Korea, Albania, China and the USSR (Bolsheviks) shows the bankruptcy of this position.

The work of a broad UFAL can only be handled inter-organizationally. Practice has shown even in our own organization that it is impossible to take a firm stand in the struggle for veterans economic benefits, better medical care, etc. and also work on other issues (Bogue Chitto and Gary Lawton as examples) which are outside the focus. One of those struggles, in this case Bogue Chitto, Gary Lawton, or vets, and GI's is going to lose out and be shorted of support. In fact, what has happened is that all three have not received the support they deserve. This can lead to opportunism, as in the case of Bogue Chitto, where we propagandize about our support for adequate medical care in Alabama to look good when in fact we do next to nothing for it.

The WSO line will lead to organizational diffusion, lack of focus, and a lack of unity which will never really advance any struggle. Only implementation of a real focus on one group's struggles, vets. and GIs in our case, will build the unity of a fighting organization capable of winning real victories for that section of the people, and advancing the anti-imperialist movement as a whole through working with other organizations in a real United Front Against Imperialism.

We feel that VVAW/WSO has to take a good look at itself, struggle out these points, and decide to unify around a veterans and GI focus. We must formulate and implement a program aimed at fighting for decent medical care, adequate benefits, repeal of the UCMJ and other bread and butter issues of vets and GI's. Our goals are to win these battles and educate those involved as to the nature of the Imperialist system.

To help implement and provide for a base for this new unity, we feel the organization should put down its focus, goals, program etc, in a clear way. To this end, we are proposing that the objectives be taken one step farther and systematized so that our priorities are obvious. The following format of a Principal of Unity, Definition of Focus for VVAW/WSO, a Program and a Statement of Principals, meets our needs.

#### FORMAT FOR POLITICAL STATEMENTS OF VVAW/WSO

##### PRINCIPAL OF UNITY

We are opposed to the system of Imperialism and its oppression of peoples and national liberation struggles at home and abroad.

##### DEFINITION OF VVAW/WSO

We are a mass anti-imperialist organization with a veterans and active-duty people base and focus.

##### STATEMENT OF PRINCIPALS

This should be an elaboration of the principal of unity and definition of VVAW/WSO. It should contain a further explanation of imperialism and sections on its manifestations, such as racism and sexism. This is also where we should explain the relationship of other struggles, for example strikes, UFW, U. S. aggression in Southeast Asia, etc. to our own struggles. We suggest a form similar to the pamphlet "What is VVAW/WSO".

Primary Work

- I. Amnesty
  - A. Veterans Administration
    - 1. A GI bill equal to WWII and KOREA
    - 2. End discrimination against all vets with less than honorable discharges.
    - 3. Restore all cut backs.
    - 4. Full Benefits for alternative service people.
    - 5. Good quality medical care.
      - a. Recognition of PVS as a service connected disability.
      - b. End all methadone maintenance programs, better drug programs.
      - c. Better staff to patient ratio.
      - d. End retaliation against patients who speak out against the VA.
      - e. End all experimentation on patients.
  - B. Discharge Upgrading Program (Single type discharge).
  - C. End SPN's or descriptions.
  - D. Prison Project
- II. Active Duty People Work.
  - A. Initiate active-duty projects where not exist.
  - B. Support active-duty projects.
  - C. Set up military counseling programs.

Secondary Level

- I. United Front Work
  - A. Kick Nixon Out!
  - B. Indochina
  - C. Other national liberation struggles.
  - D. Domestic Struggles.
    - 1. Political Prisoners.
      - a. Lawton-Gardiner (National Project).
      - b. Leavenworth Brothers
      - c. Attica Brothers
      - d. Ruchelle Magee.
      - e. Wounded Knee.
      - f. Others.
    - 2. Workers struggles
      - a. United Farm Workers
      - b. Steelworkers (against ENA)
      - c. Borden strikers
      - d. Others

- II. National Defence Committee (when necessary)
  - A. Bob Hood

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B. Leavinworth Brothers.

## END OF PROGRAM FORMAT

As you can see this is simply a much clearer and systematic way of setting down the old "objectives". We placed the idea of old objective #1 #2, #10 first as our principal of unity because we are primarily an anti-imperialist organization. We combined #3, #4, #5 into the definition of VVAW/WSO so our focus would be clear. We placed #7, #8, #9 in the statement of principals so their relationship to the overall anti-imperialist struggle and our focus could be clear.

Our primary goal in this paper is to help define the struggle for the clarification of our organizational definition and focus. We would like our proposed format to be taken back to the regions and discussed. However, that is not the primary goal of this paper. So, we are not interested in a point-for-point hassle over the proposed program, etc. until the major areas of focus, etc. are cleared up. A bureaucratic way of dealing with this could be very divisive at this time!

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