

Vietnam Veterans Against the War-Winter Soldier Organization

NEWSLETTER

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The information in this newsletter is supposed to go to member of chapters, not just to the individual picking up the mail. Please pass it around.

ADDRESS CHANGE: For reasons explained later in this newsletter, the NO is moving. And, after only three years in Chicago, we now have a PO Box. Our new mailing address, which should be used after October 15, is P. O. Box 20184, Chicago, Illinois 60620.

Bankruptcy

After much consideration, the NO has decided that it should file formal bankruptcy for VVAW/WSO Inc. This measure has become necessary primarily because of dwindling income from individual contributors. These contributors, receiving appeals in the mail, were the main source of income for the NO, and made it possible for the NO to maintain credit with several suppliers while still getting out the national newspaper and spending almost \$6,000 a month.

Now these contributions are down and the NO can no longer raise money by sending out massive mail appeals. In fact, the debt we have is mainly from fundraising costs incurred by putting out those mailers. That debt is currently \$30,000. Coupling this debt with the total lack of income recently, including no dues, the collective decided that formal bankruptcy is the only correct solution to the immediate problem.

What this means is that the NO will file a bankruptcy petition in court. Creditors will then be notified of a bankruptcy hearing shortly thereafter. In the period between the filing of the petition and the hearing, our "corporate assets" will be frozen. At the hearing the referee handling our case will decide what has to be done; most probably the corporation will be just declared "discharged into bankruptcy." At that point, we can again operate as VVAW/WSO Inc with all debts liquidated.

That will take care of the immediate problem, but not the long range one of the continued operation of the NO and the production of The Veteran. We're taking many measures to cut down the cost of running the office. First, the office is being moved to a place which costs well less than half of the current rent. Coordinators will be getting part-time jobs, using the GI Bill, or finding other possibilities for income. The idea is that the organization would then not have to pay for rent or living expenses for the NO.

What this means for the rest of the organization is clear. Membership must support the work of the office. For the last several months, the NO has received NO dues from chapters. There was a good response to the appeal for money to put out a new issue of The Veteran., but regular funding was non-existent. Yet we got many requests for materials and information. People, these materials cannot be forthcoming if chapters do not raise the money for them. Dues must be collected regularly. Even more important, if we are to have a national newspaper, chapters must get at least the cost of what they order into the office BEFORE the paper can be printed.

This last is crucial. Until recently, because contributions were coming in to the NO, we have been able to get out the paper regularly whether or not chapters paid for it. We can't do that any longer! Chapters should hold discussions at regular chapter meetings on raising money for the paper. At the same time, special fundraising events should be held as regularly as possible to get "extra" money for the NO--the "extra" will go towards printing buttons, pamphlets (like the program pamphlet) and other needed materials. These fundraisers must be political, part of the campaigns being built by chapters as tools for mass outreach and involving vets who may not be fully active in a chapter now in the life of the organization. This goes hand in hand with the section in this newsletter about developing the social life of VVAW.

The organization is at a new level of work. The "good old days" are gone, with all the money that came with them gone also. Now we truly must rely on the masses of veterans and working people to support the growing veterans movement. VVAW is not just a "movement" group, " it is a fighting vets organization, deeply involved in the daily battles of veterans and working people. Chapters must draw on those masses, for their strength is great and their potential enthusiasm for our work unbounded. Let's get to it!!!

VET'S DAY ACTIONS

Veterans Day, November 11th (or whatever day is celebrated in your particular state or city) has traditionally been a day of parades by the reactionary vets groups to bolster the present foreign policy of the US and to speak with "honor, glory, and patriotism" about past and future wars. For the past several years, VVAW has provided another side to the Vets Day actions, one of exposing the war in Indochina for what it was, a war of aggression and exploitation, and to raise the important issue of the treatment of Vietnam-era and other vets in the US today.

Vets Day this year is no exception to this history. Faced with the danger of war at any time, high unemployment, and decent benefits something that we have to fight tooth and nail for, this Veterans Day and the necessity for actions are more important than ever. Vets Day this year should be an important day of focus, highlighting the local struggles for vets and the activities around the VA. Based on these struggles, the types of activities and slogans raised depend on local conditions. One concept to consider is the value of uniting with the rank and file of other veterans organizations when and where possible and also reaching out to military units (mostly reserve and guard) which participate in the traditional activities. People should investigate the planned activities in different cities to see if linking up and putting forward demands would be worthwhile. In places where consistent work is going on at the VA, many older vets are coming forward and voicing their unity and support for

many of the demands being raised, demands that mean as much to them as they do to Vietnam-era vets.

Just as important on Vets Day is the necessity for chapters to emphasize, particularly to new people who are coming forward, the national scope of the struggles being waged against the VA. This contributes significantly to breaking down the feelings of isolation by showing the struggle for "Decent Benefits for all Vets" to be truly a national movement on the rise. Incorporating the struggles and victories of other vets around the country (as laid out in The Veteran) into your speeches, talks, and literature can add significantly to making the Veterans Day actions this year a successful step forward in our local and national work.

ALL OUT FOR VETS DAY!!

NIC Meeting

For several reasons, including the relatively low level of activity in the past couple of months, the NIC meeting, tentatively scheduled for early October should not be held then. Trying to hold that meeting between now and Vets Day could hamper our work in building for those actions. So, the NO feels that a NIC meeting should take place as soon after Vets Day as possible. We suggest the weekend of the 15th and 16th of November. Detroit has offered to host the meeting (though we haven't yet checked with the chapter there about those particular dates).

There have been some questions about whether a NIC meeting is needed at all; we think it is.

1. As people can see from The Veteran, struggles are building. While good sum-ups of what is happening are important and will be used to spread the information around, they can't take the place of people getting together and discussing and summing up what is going on. The NIC has the job not only of summing up, but seeing how some of the gains being made can best be consolidated to move both the individual chapters and the organization as a whole forward.

2. The organization was united around the need for a NIC, seeing it as a tool for providing better links between the work in different places as well as providing on-the-spot direction for the organization. This need still exists. One of the first tasks the NIC will have to take up is to define its own function.

3. The name: the organization is united around the need to drop "WSO" from our name; it adds nothing, is confusing, and reflects a period in the history of the organization which we have left behind. As The Veteran reflects, some chapters have already gone ahead and dropped WSO from their name. However, around VVAW the dropping of that name and coming up with another the position in the organization is not so clearcut. Our ability to talk about the Vietnam war and draw the connections between Vietnam and the danger of future wars of aggression is an important part of our program, and the name of the organization can help reflect that. There are some advantages to maintaining VVAW--it points out that we are vets, that being against imperialist war is an essential part of our work, and the name is known (it served as a kind of slogan around which thousands of vets united). From our experience, the name is an annoyance to some extent, but not something that really holds back our work (people see us for what we do, not what we are called). There has been, as yet, no unity around a name with which to replace VVAW. People

should seriously take up the question of the name and whether it should be changed (beyond dropping WSO) at this time so that we can have as full an understanding as possible about the change--both why and what to. In other words, we need the political input about the name, and the NIC has to reach some conclusions about it.

4. The NIC needs to finalize the program which can then go out to vets. Our rewritten version of the program should be in people's hands within three weeks, but that should not stop chapters and members of chapters from getting input into the NO based on their practice.

5. National coordinators: as it now stands, after the next NSCM, there will be two (2) people in the NO. The NIC needs to come up with nominees to fill the vacancies. There also has to be some discussion how, under new circumstances, the NO can best function to fill the needs of the organization and move the struggle forward.

As well as reasons why we feel the NIC meeting is needed, these are also suggestions for some of the agenda items. Now we need input from you: Are these possible dates? What other items should be on the agenda? Proposals or ideas for the meeting? By late October we hope to be able to put out a tentative agenda for that meeting. We also believe that if the organization decides this is the right time for the NIC meeting, then the next National Steering Committee meeting should be pushed back a couple of months.

According to the working paper passed in Milwaukee last July, the NIC is to be made up of the regional coordinator or representative from the regional collective, plus one other person from each region.

Socializing

If we look at what chapters have been doing over the past year, it's pretty clear that we have gotten a grasp on how to build a fighting veterans organization. From the various campaigns being waged around the country, it is clear that vets are beginning to unite with us in the War on the VA. There is, however, one aspect of building the vet's movement that has hovered around us for a long time and one that we think should be developed in a more conscious way as part of our work. This deals with the need for us to be of a social organization rather than just a political group that unites with veterans on a purely political level.

This does not mean that we become a reactionary organization like the VFW which promotes swilling beer at every opportunity to divert the anger of veterans. But there is an aspect of the VFW that reflects the mass base of its membership. Vets join a veteran's organization out of a desire to be with others who have shared similar experiences. Certainly that is true in our organization. While we direct our anger at the VA and the system it is part of, we also like to sit around over a beer and talk about our days in the military or about life in general.

We have to unite with all aspects of the lives of veterans. By uniting only around campaigns or demonstrations, we are cutting out important parts of building that unity. We all like to have a good time, whether it be having friends over for dinner or going to parties or other social activities. And this is exactly what we should be doing with vets who are joining or are interested in joining VVAW. In short, we have to see vets as individuals, as people, not just "masses" to be won over.

Socializing doesn't mean that we look at our work on different levels, "Well, today we'll go to the VA and tomorrow we'll have a party." Both aspects will take precedence at one time or another, but there is absolutely nothing wrong with going to a demonstration and then going to a bar to talk about it--what its successes were and what its weaknesses were. The same applies to chapter meetings. There is a real tendency for them to get downright boring if all we do is talk about the problems we are having or who does what next week.

Chapter meetings are essential to building the organization. They are a reflection of our work. They should be lively as well as take care of business. If there is little to discuss, there's nothing wrong with just sitting around and having a few beers or watching TV--that certainly beats making up things to say to keep a meeting going. Another part of the chapter's work is to raise money. And it should be a way to socialize with new members. Fundraising parties, pot-luck dinners, garage sales, etc can bring in bucks and can also be fun.

If we really want to build a fighting vets organization we have to begin to see our organization as a center of activities, on all levels, for uniting with vets. If we fail to do so, we become isolated and cadrified. If we really see ourselves as part of the vet's struggle, and also part of building that struggle, we will not make these errors and we will build into a really powerful force.

The Veteran

As can be seen from the masthead, the name of the national newspaper has been changed from the Winter Soldier to The Veteran. The national office, in conjunction with those chapters we were able to contact, thought that the name more adequately reflects the VVAW/WSO program and struggle than a quote from someone hardly anyone can recognize. The name change itself, however, is very secondary to the overall struggle whith the organization and the newspaper must develop, and the relationship that chapters and regions must develop with it. As was stated at the last NSCM, "when the paper actively takes up the day-to-day struggle of the people and puts those struggles forward in a lively way, it is a key tool to building the fighting vets movement." We in the NO cannot pull articles from the sky, nor can we adequately represent the struggle being built in a certain area by trying to draw together all the strings of an article over the phone a few days before the paper is to come out. But, in fact, the practice of chapters in the past in helping to develop the paper makes us believe that chapters think this. This cannot continue: not only does it not serve the struggle, but holds it back. This all means that chapters must assign people to write articles on pickets, actions and campaigns and get them to the NO on time for them to be put into the paper. While the date for the next issue of The Veteran depends on having the necessary material and the money to print it, we are hoping to print again at the end of November.

The overall purpose of the paper should be to help build the struggle, point the finger at the system by unfolding it through our campaigns, spark struggle through ongoing struggles (this means also bringing out some of the glaring shortcomings as well as the successes) and to give vets a sense of the growing vets movement nationwide. Chapters must take all this into account as they get articles together for The Veteran.

An article about a local campaign builds the struggle in the area where it is taking place at the same time it serves the whole organization and the vets movement, by spreading the struggle--its victories and lessons--nationally. Articles for The Veteran should not be seen as total sum-ups of work, but more agitational. Sum-ups are invaluable, but are more properly reserved for the newsletter.

The NO will probably do some rewriting of any article so as to fully integrate a story with the whole paper. In this light it's helpful for chapters to send in not only articles but leaflets and posters as well to give a full sense of the way a struggle was developed. And, while the political lessons are an important part of any article, it is the specific details which make an article come alive--that means quotes from the people there, incidents which happened which make your demo different from others, etc.

Along with leaflets and articles, photos are really needed. A picture of a militant demo tells the story the way a headline stating "militant fight-back" could never do. It's important that the photos maximize the effect of the action--people chanting "cut red tape" would be more effective if people tried getting the banner or signs in the photo saying "cut red tape." Also, where there is not room for a whole article, a photo with caption can still be put in the paper and make the point.

Finally, but by all means not least, MONEY. The only way that the paper is going to come out at all is by that money coming from the chapters. This means not only getting the 5¢ per paper in, but also holding fundraisers for the paper. Not only will these help pay for the paper but also serve to draw people into the life of the organization, especially those who buy the paper on a regular basis.

The Veteran must reflect the fighting vets movement, a national movement, and not just a few chapters. It must be taken up actively, not just be selling the paper and supporting it financially, but building through articles.

More FBI Activity in VVAW/WSO

Recently, yet another series of FBI agents has been uncovered in the continuing, and futile, attempts of the government to sabotage VVAW/WSO and the growing veterans movement. In Milwaukee, the chapter exposed Tony Tochalowski and Linda Imacus as full-time, paid informants of the FBI who had tried to gather information on VVAW/WSO for an extended period of time. This month's issue of The Veteran contains an article dealing with this incident. Along with this newsletter has also been included a copy of the poster the Milwaukee chapter made up and distributed around their community, as a warning about these two people to other working people in their area.

Another FBI informant who has been revealed is Sarah Jane ("Sally") Moore. Having gained national prominence in the "Nut of the Month" Club of would-be presidential assassins, Moore briefly belonged to the former Oakland Chapter of VVAW/WSO before she was exposed as an FBI agent and kicked out of the organization. Moore apparently continued her spying activities after being thrown out of VVAW/WSO, working with a number of movement organizations in the Bay Area as an informant for the FBI and other federal police agencies. Fittingly, the day before she tried to shoot President Ford in San Francisco she was working with

agents from the Alcohol and Tobacco tax division supposedly trying to get the goods on "illegal gun dealings." Her control agent literally helped her buy the gun she would use the next day in her attempt to blow Ford's head off. It should be interesting to watch the media try to explain away THAT little piece of information.

If there is a common thread running through these two separate incidents, it is the lesson that these people are going to continue to be around us and that they are damn dangerous. As this month's Veteran pointed out, these people are our enemies and should be treated that way. But this is not to say that we should get all jacked out of shape each time another incident like these occurs, dropping our work to fret and bullshit about it. We've got to learn to deal with these attacks as a matter of course, taking them in our stride and not allowing the work of building a fighting veterans movement to be diverted for a single moment.

We feel that the way the Milwaukee chapter dealt with Tochalowski and Imacus was an excellent example of how this can be done. The informants were rapidly and effectively isolated from the organization and the community at large was warned of their activities. The whole episode was then used to draw out some very important lessons with the chapter membership as to the nature of repression in this country, the need to fight back against it, and a living example of how to do it. Most importantly, the affair was used to again make the point that no matter how many assets the government uses to attack us and the larger movement of working people, it is doomed to failure. As long as we rely on our unity and the strength of the mass action of veterans we can and will effectively combat these attacks.

Enclosures

Along with the Milwaukee poster, we're including copies of a leaflet from the NYC chapter around their campaign against late checks; as a technical matter, the back of these leaflets are a fine way to use an otherwise wasted blank piece of paper, and to show graphically exactly what the leaflet is about. Also we're including a leaflet from the Chicago chapter around the latest episode in their campaign; the fight against the repressive acts of the VA is building (there will no doubt be further information around this in the future).

Chants

The following chants come from the Detroit chapter--we also need chants from other chapters:

"Bring the director down;
We want to talk to the clown. "

"Don't talk trash; Give us our cash. "

"They say benefits, we say rights==
They say wait awhile--we say fight. "

"VA don't give a damn about you and me,
Money's the only thing that they can see. "

"VA big shots better beware,
We're gonna fight for medical care. "

"VA bosses pass the word,
We're here to fight, and
we're gonna be heard. "

"What do we want?

Decent benefits/ Full staff/ Less cops/ No red-tape/ ...

What time is it? Time to unite/ Time to fight. ... "