

BUILD THE ANTI- IMPERIALIST VETERANS MOVEMENT



A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES BY THE
REVOLUTIONARY UNION

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VET STRUGGLE GROWS

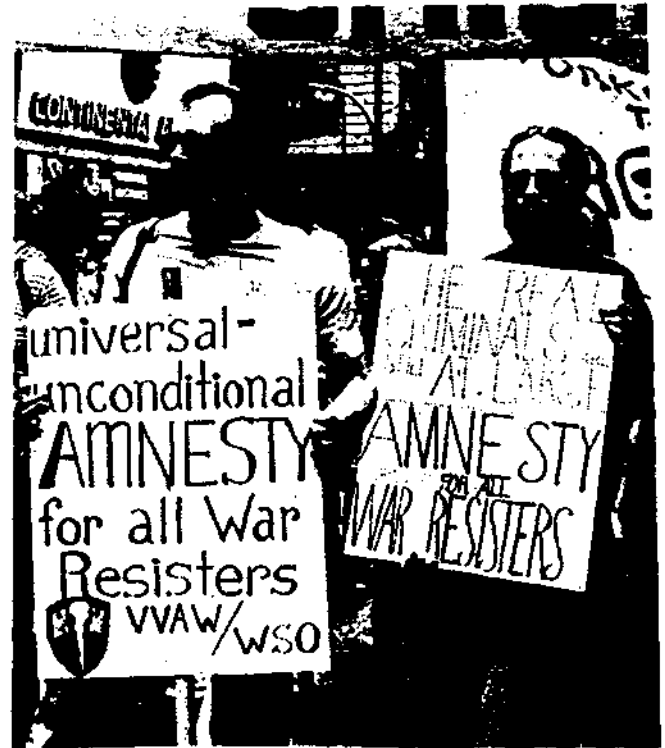
Thousands of veterans, workers, G.I.'s and students coming to Washington, July 4 to demonstrate. People demanding amnesty and an end to imperialist aggression in Indochina. Demanding Nixon's ouster—"on his ass, for his crimes and for his class". Angry thousands demanding an end to oppressive and racist less-than-honorable discharges, telling government and VA bureaucrats that vets won't accept their criminal excuse for benefits. Thousands seeing that vets' problems, and the problems of the rest of the people come from the same source—U.S. Imperialism, a profit-seeking blood sucking monster that needs to be smashed.

The significance of this demonstration, called by VVAW/WSO, a mass anti-imperialist organization growing out of the struggles of Vietnam Vets who opposed the war in Indo-China, goes beyond even all this.

These 4 days of struggle can be a giant step in building an anti-imperialist veterans movement— a movement that while fighting around the day to day issues of veterans, focuses them all on their source—the imperialist system. This cannot be a narrow reform group, begging for a few crumbs, but one that opposes all aspects of imperialism whether it be imperialist aggression, repression against Black people, or speed-up in the shops. The veterans movement must be linked up with the developing revolutionary workers' movement and all the people's struggles. This demonstration in its building, organizing propoganda, tactics, targets, and overall politics shows the strength of building an antiimperialist vets movement as part of the overall United Front Against Imperialism.

The Revolutionary Union supports this demonstration for several reasons. First we agree with the idea of the demonstration as it was presented by VVAW/WSO and with the five demands. The demonstration is a solid blow against imperialism. It unites people against many faces of the system, and in particular represents one of the only recent mass mobilizations against continued U.S. aggression in S.E. Asia.

The demand to implement the agreements exposes the hypocrisy of the ruling class. They never intended to live up to them and now in blatant disregard of the peace agreements are propping up the puppet leader of South Vietnam, Thieu, as well as the increasingly isolated Lon Nol clique in Cambodia. The demand for amnesty says that all who resisted the war were justi-



fied whether in the military or by resisting the draft. This is not a forgive and forget plea. The war was unjust, to resist was justified.

Secondly, the RU feels it is important to support the activities of VVAW/WSO as a mass anti-imperialist organization. VVAW/WSO is one of the few anti-war organizations of the late 60's which developed into a consciously anti-imperialist organization and remained on a revolutionary path into the 70's. It is the existing mass organization that can link up and give leadership to the developing upsurge among veterans and keep it from the swamp of poverty pimps and narrow bread and butter reformism.

The success of this demonstration will be very helpful in building VVAW/WSO as one of the important anti-imperialist forces in this country.

Thirdly, the RU feels the demonstration as we said earlier, can be an important step in the creation of an anti-imperialist vets movement that is closely linked up with the revolutionary workers' movement, and the United Front Against Imperialism. This demonstration is only a first step in the creation of this movement, but much of the organizing that went into it shows the potential for such a movement.

For example, in Newark, members of VVAW/WSO, Outlaw (an anti-imperialist postal workers' organization), the Revolutionary Student Brigade and the Revolutionary Union co-operated in building a demonstration at the regional VA office. The demonstrators seized the director's office and a fight with police in the halls of the building followed. Demands were raised around the bureaucracy at the VA and the extension of benefits to all vets regardless of bad discharges. The demonstrators also raised that the VA publicize the July 1-4 demonstration and its five demands. The demonstration was built mainly among veterans, but also in plants, communities, and schools.

VVAW/WSO members put forward the idea of a veterans' "shit list" that could be signed with complaints raised at the VA hospital, VA center etc. Tables were set up at these places literature about the demonstration. The response was tremen-

dous! The "shit list" collected statements not only about the VA bureaucracy but also such things as "Death to imperialism". Many vets greeted the idea of a demonstration and a fighting vets movement enthusiastically.

Several local vets' groups were drawn into the work of building for the Newark and Washington demos. There was initially resistance with some people over the idea of amnesty. But at least some unity was achieved after struggle around the war as an imperialist war fought for the monopolists and against the interests of workers. Several members of these local vets groups participated in the seizure of the directors' office and the demonstration outside.

Through these struggles and the political discussion around them, many vets began to realize their fight was with more than the VA, and that the government wasn't going to work for vets or other working people.

At the same time support was mobilized amongst workers in general in North Jersey. Postal workers, both vets and non-vets, were very active in the struggle. Word of the office seizure was spread in the nearby Seacaucus Bulk Mail Facility as it was taking place. This work and the work in general around July 1-4 has helped lay the basis for going back to bring many more into an anti-imperialist vets movement.

The RU recently participated in a wildcat in an auto plant in Detroit. Many of the active leaders of the 3-1/2 day walk-out and shutdown of Dodge Truck were vets. When these workers heard about the demo July 1-4, they greeted the idea of vets getting together to fight enthusiastically. While unable to come to Washington, many were anxious to take up the struggles of vets. And the July 1-4 actions were seen by some as part of a common struggle.

The RU built for the demonstration all around the country, both among vets and among workers and oppressed people in general. We also tried to involve students as well as forces from the anti-war, amnesty, and anti-Nixon movements. Everywhere we saw a tremendous response to the idea of a fighting vets movement that would link up with the other struggles against imperialism. This movement is just barely coming into existence and will be attacked from many sides.

Poverty Pimps, reformists, and government officials have fallen all over each other to build themselves at the expense of vets and lead the movement into dead



ends. A vets movement does exist! This is undeniable! The question is who will lead it and where will it go. If anti-imperialist forces do not take up these tasks then it creates fertile ground for the opportunists by abandoning the masses of vets. This demonstration is crucial in developing this movement.

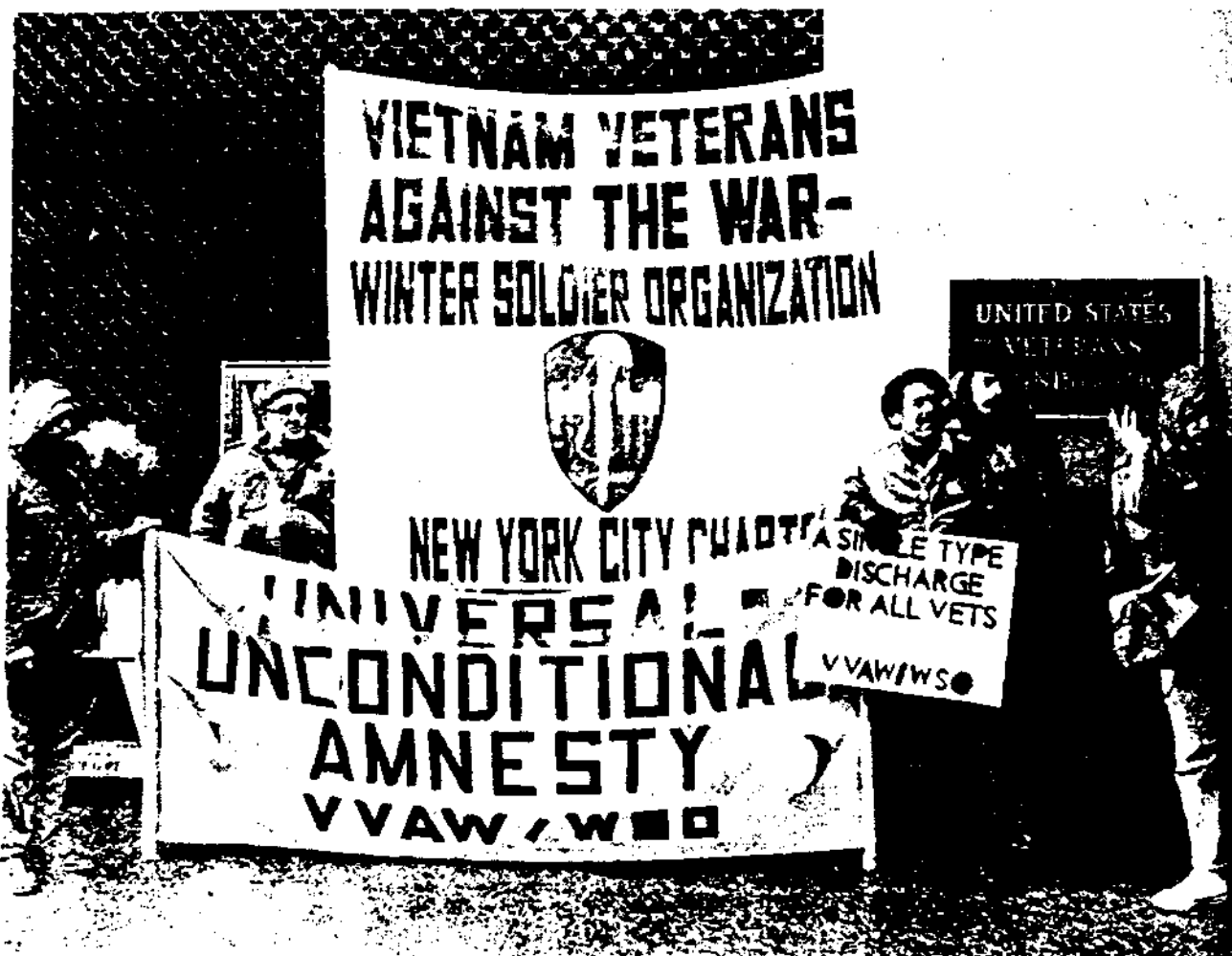
The path forward from here is most important. Extensive discussion and struggle over this point should go on. One of the reasons we have put this pamphlet out is to contribute to this struggle. The struggle within VVAW/WSO over these points is particularly important. We hope the RU can contribute to these discussions both by publications like this as well as through our work with VVAW/WSO. We have tried to make our position clear through our line and practice. We feel that an anti-imperialist organization based on vets and GI's is necessary to the further development of the vets movement and anti-imperialist united front. Particularly important is to build this organization among all nationalities taking up struggles against national oppression directed against vets and all people and building strong multi-national

unity. This is one of the main weaknesses of the present movement.

We have tried, in building for this demonstration, to struggle for this position in a principled and open fashion while upholding the democratic decisions of VVAW/WSO regarding the nature of the demo. We think a great deal of unity has been built in this fashion and the basis for greater unity has been laid.

Finally, we think work around the national action is very important to building a new Communist Party, the central task of communists at the present time. A unified center is needed that can tie all the various struggles of the people together around a revolutionary program.

Many people have raised questions about the role of communists in mass organizations. One thing we have tried to show is that communists do not build themselves at the expense of the mass movement. Communists have always been in the forefront of the mass struggle of the working class and all its allies. While fighting hard for the position that they feel best serves the interest of the people, communists respect the democracy of the mass organ-



ization. While fighting for their position, Communists believe that real unity comes from open and above board struggle. In the course of this, they never lose sight of or subordinate their long-term goal of socialist revolution to the immediate, day to day tasks.

Building the party means building the mass movement as well. Flowing from an opportunist line on mass struggle, groups like the Progressive Labor Party, or more recently, the Communist League, build themselves like blood-suckers by splitting and drawing off individuals from the mass movement. We have always opposed such sectarianism and tried to show in practice that our line is the opposite. While we feel it would be incorrect for VVAW/WSO as a mass organization to take a formal stand on the lines being struggled out leading to a party, it is extremely important for individuals in VVAW/WSO to take up these questions. Struggles over building a revolutionary or a reformist united front, for example, can only strengthen the work of mass organizations. The question of whether

to tail behind liberal politicians and union bureaucrats or to rely on the masses of people is not an academic debate. It is a life and death question that goes to the heart of the struggle and determines the future.

The discussion and struggle over the nature of the vets movement and work among GI's is not only for the development of VVAW/WSO, but can be an important contribution to the development of the program of a new Communist Party.

This pamphlet is a collection of articles from the RU's newspaper, Revolution. We are reprinting them in the hope that it will help clarify the questions facing the veterans' movement today, and begin to point the way forward.

The veterans' movement is growing rapidly. Through pickets, marches, and building seizures it is inspiring all working and oppressed people, as well as fighting for the needs of veterans. The task before us is to build a fighting multi-national veterans' movement and link it with the broader United Front Against Imperialism.

BUILD THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST VETERANS MOVEMENT!!



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Washington, D.C. Demo July 1-4

Vets' Movement On the Rise

Vietnam vets are on the move. All over the country, they have been demonstrating, sitting in, saying "No!" to the lies being pushed down their throat. For example, on March 29, so-called "Honor Vietnam Veterans Day", vets took the opportunity to expose the sham "honor" and real mistreatment they are getting (see *May Revolution*).

These militant actions, many of which linked the rising veterans movement to the overall struggle against imperialism, put the government so uptight that the next day, Nixon appointed Veterans Administration chief Donald Johnson to carry out a special inquiry into the effectiveness of his own agency. The result was that veterans' cries to "Dump Donald Johnson" became all the stronger, and before month's end Johnson declared he would resign.

The fact that another of Nixon's friends has fallen under the hatchet does not mean that things really will get better for vets. But Johnson's forced departure does contain several lessons. It demonstrates that vets get results by relying on mass action, not on those "concerned" politicians who took up the vets' demands only when they no longer could ignore them, and not one minute sooner.

For another thing, Johnson is a former National Commander of the American Legion, showing that the struggle of veterans for their needs and rights must be directed in part against the right wing of the veterans movement and the reactionary veterans lobby.

No Heroes' Welcome

There are over six million Vietnam era vets, about three million of whom served in Vietnam. They are mostly from the working class or lower petty bourgeoisie. Many entered the service with illusions of "defending democracy" or at least getting some decent job training. Some had their eyes opened by the Vietnamese people's heroic struggle, others by the military's racism and the class contradictions between officer corps and enlisted men. Thousands ended up fighting the U.S. military while still in Vietnam, and came back determined to continue that fight.

Others discovered when they returned that the "heroes' welcome" they expected was reserved for a bunch of elite pilot POW's. What awaited vets instead was joblessness, callous mistreatment and miserable "benefits" from the VA, discrimination of third world vets as well as on account of bad discharges, and employers' fears that vets are "walking time bombs".

The government and the veterans lobby have worked hard to give the impression that vets are a little better off than the average Joe, and that concerned agencies are working overtime to ensure that "their boys" get nothing but the best. But nothing could be further from the truth.

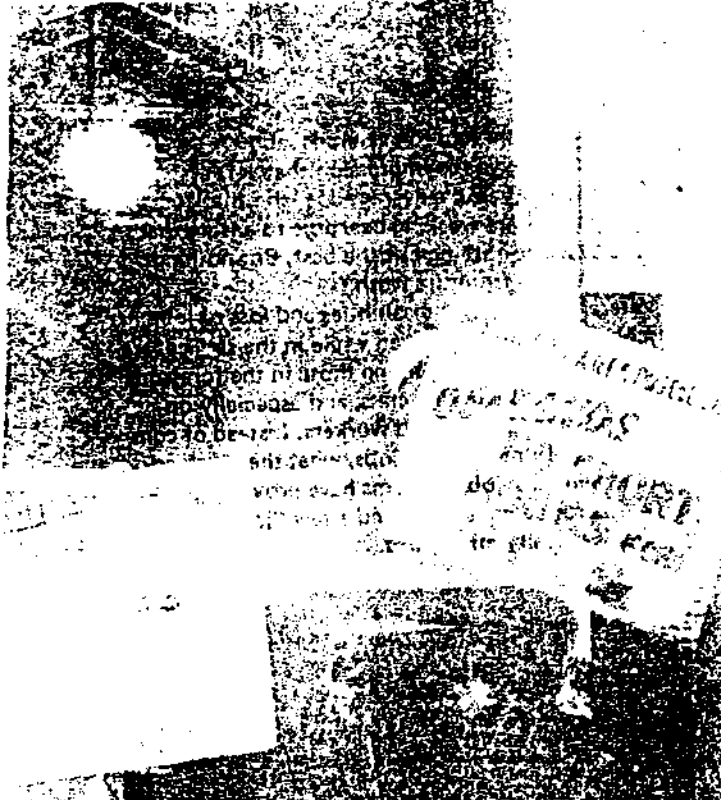
Veterans, because of disabilities and loss of job or school experience suffered while in the service, are now finding themselves among those in the forefront of attacks on the working class, and especially on Black and other third world workers. Instead of compensation, job training and jobs, what the much advertised veterans' job programs have provided is a lot of profits for ad companies and a few "job training" programs, usually minus jobs.



Phoney V.A. claims can't hide the high unemployment rate of Vietnam era vets

When jobs are made available, there is almost always a catch somewhere. For example, vets who applied for jobs at the Post Office under a special program called the Veterans Readjustment Act (VRA), found that this "preferential treatment" was nothing but a hoax and a source of cheap and expendable labor for the Postal Service. Vets hired under the VRA programs can be fired or laid off at any time without appeal, have no access to the grievance procedure, and are denied Sunday premium pay given to all other government employees.

In New York, VVAW have responded to this injustice with spirited struggle, linking it to the rank and file postal workers' movement as a whole and the demand of all substitutes to be made regular. By exposing the shabby truth behind this "special" vets' program, they have won strong support from other Post Office workers.



"Job programs" like the VRA exploit vets and must be fought by all workers

VA a Sham

Most veterans' programs and benefits are administered by the do-nothing, government-run Veterans Administration. Veterans' programs are not at all a top priority for the government, which currently spends about \$5 billion a year on retired officers' benefits. By contrast, total VA benefits and compensation to Vietnam era veterans in 1972 amounted to less than half of that—\$2.4 billion.

The VA carries out the policies of the veterans lobby and the government and has actively promoted attacks on veterans and Vietnam veterans in particular. Last year, for example, the VA proposed to cut the disability ratings of Vietnam era vets.

According to this proposal, a veteran who had lost a leg would pay for his monthly payments out from \$275 to \$100. The plan was temporarily shelved because of public resistance, but will almost certainly be revived as soon as the economic crisis on the world is over.

The VA provides health care and other services to the community. It is a major employer of disabled veterans, and is a major source of income for many disabled veterans.

conditions and not uncommonly forced to lie for hours in their own excrement. Drug misuse is rampant. Vets have resisted these conditions with protests of all kinds, also supporting demands for better pay and working conditions for hospital staff.

The other major area of benefits administered by the VA is the GI bill. At schools and colleges all over the country, veterans have been rising in struggle for a GI bill they can live on. The present \$220 monthly GI bill is not enough to survive on, even without the cost of tuition and books. Recently, on Vietnam Veterans Day, mostly third world vets from the NY City GI bill system made their anger known to a congressional subcommittee, as well as in a spontaneous, unannounced march to the national headquarters in Washington. The veterans have vowed to continue their struggle until their demands are met.

Question of Discharges

An important demand of the veterans movement which has been widely raised following the Vietnam Veterans Against the War/Winter Solidarity (VVAW/WSO), is for the abolition of the present system of bad discharges, which affects 20% of Vietnam era vets.

Whether many of them given for resistance to the war because of racism and repression in the military prevent the veteran from receiving benefits of unemployment and are a source of discrimination on the job market. Third world vets are especially hard hit—the percentage of bad discharges given to third world GIs being double that of white vets within the armed forces.



Who resist the military, like ANGL's in Japan, are hit with bad discharges

Knowing that the discharge system is a major source of military discipline and racial discrimination, the VA is a major factor holding back many vets

in the struggle against economic attacks, VVAW/WSO has raised the demand for a single type discharge for all vets and confronted the VA with dozens of militant actions aimed at winning decent benefits for all vets. Where this campaign has been built strongly, it has also proven to be an important tool in winning Black and Latin vets to the struggle and a first step in building multinational unity.

The upsurge of the veterans movement within the last several months comes about because they are particularly hard hit by the current round of economic attacks and cutbacks directed against working people in general.

This upsurge follows a time of relative quiet among vets. A few years ago the vets movement was also very active, though somewhat different from the present day one. Because of their experiences in the war, seeing the naked, terroristic, thoroughly reactionary face of imperialism, vets became very active in the anti-war movement and made many contributions to it. Operation Dewey Canyon III called by VVAW, where vets threw their medals at the Capitol Building, deeply moved many Americans and helped bring home the truth of U.S. aggression against the Vietnamese people.

VVAW did much to expose the myth of G.I. support for the war. The task now is to link up these present vets' struggles around benefits, bad discharges, etc. with the overall anti-imperialist movement, and especially with the developing revolutionary workers movement and also the struggle against national oppression.

The struggle for immediate needs and reforms is important. The question is whether the movement will be restricted to that and become mired in bourgeois reformism, or whether it will be linked with the movement to overthrow imperialism.

Struggles in the 30s

This question of linking up the immediate struggles of vets with the revolutionary movement was also the question in the 30s. Under the Roosevelt "New Deal,"

veterans back in a pamphlet by the American League of Ex-Servicemen declares, "the shock troops of the depression: 15% of war veterans were unemployed or working part time. Pensions were cut and hospitalization reduced, disability ratings slashed as part of the infamous "economy" drive.



In the Depression, vets helped show there was only one answer to breadlines — struggle

Organized by the Ex-Servicemen's League under the then revolutionary leadership of the Communist Party, veterans of the 30s unleashed a storm of resistance which became an inspiration to the entire working class. They not only fought for and finally won the so-called "bonus," actually adjusted back pay from time in the service, but made an important contribution to the workers movement by taking up the demand for unemployment insurance for all jobless workers.

Like anti-imperialist veterans organizations today, the Ex-Servicemen's League also fought for the rights



The vets of the Bonus Army fought cops and the army to win just demands

of active-duty people and against racial discrimination and imperialist war. The organization paid special attention, in pamphlet after popular pamphlet, to exposing the role of the right-wing veterans organizations and providing the ideological fuel for the "struggle of the attached and unattached rank-and-file vets against the old-line reactionary, officer-controlled organizations" (from a pamphlet published in 1935).

They also exposed the role of liberal members of Congress, who "because of our pressure, come forward. . .making it appear that they are favoring us, and again we see the same attacks being made against us. We recognize these as smoke screens and camouflage colors of our enemies behind which the bankers, owners of big industry and the railroads are receiving billions of dollars to protect their profits, while there is no money for relief of the workers as a whole or for the war veterans." (from a 1932 pamphlet).

Today, the upsurge in the veterans movement makes it particularly urgent for communist and anti-imperialist forces within it to sum up the lessons of the 30s and apply them correctly to the current situation. For as the struggle of veterans has developed over the last two years, some incorrect tendencies have emerged which could seriously undermine the potential contributions the vets movement can make to the revolutionary struggle.

Reformist Tendency

At this time, the main danger is a reformist tendency. This has taken the form of restricting the fight to bread-and-butter issues, regarding the mass movement only as a means of "putting pressure on Congress" and, most importantly, trying to build the veterans' fight as that of an interest group (veterans), and thus cutting vets off from their natural allies within the anti-imperialist movement.

In looking at mass actions as a way of creating a pressure group, "forcing Congress to respond", etc., this tendency has failed to build locally, increase the consciousness and fighting spirit of the masses of veterans themselves, and apply the method of the "single spark"—building spontaneous outbursts into model struggles that can inspire others and spread the political lessons learned in the process.

This reformist tendency goes hand in hand with an unclear and compromising position toward the veterans lobby and the VA itself. It is important to recognize that people like Donald Johnson do not at all represent veterans, nor is the "veterans' crisis" the result of any political hack's "inability to cope with the problem". It is in fact not really a "veterans' crisis" at all, but a single aspect of the general crisis of the U.S. imperialist system, a partial reflection of the bourgeoisie's generalized attack on the livelihood of working people.

Failure to recognize this fact can lead to fruitless appeals to bourgeois forces within the veterans lobby to devote their resources to the grassroots veterans movement, which these bourgeois forces in fact are trying to control and eventually destroy. The American Legion, for example, was founded by its own intention to fight revolutionary ideas in the ranks of veterans fresh from the battlefields of WW I, and



A reformist vets movement would be incapable of an act of anti-imperialist solidarity like VVAW/WSO's takeover of the Saigon Information Office.

who were clearly impressed by the early achievements of the Russian Revolution. Today, the Legion and similar groups are still out there for the same purpose.

Any attempt to unite with these forces now can only result in weakening and confusing the veterans movement and opening it up to economic betrayal and ideological sabotage.

In struggling against this reformist tendency, communist and anti-imperialist forces within the vets movement can learn from the example of the 30s, when a powerful movement was created precisely by not relying on liberal politicians, and by isolating the right wing and uniting with the rank and file veterans and the workers movement, building veterans' just struggles and the famous Bonus March not as a gimmick or a "special interest", but as an integral part of the proletarian revolutionary movement. And we can also learn from more recent examples. For instance, during Operation Dewey Canyon III, Kennedy and other liberals circulated among the protesting vets, shaking hands, promising them jobs and other benefits, etc. Most of the vets knew it was a shuck and went ahead with their protest.

Another Wrong Tendency

At the same time, certain other tendencies exist within the veterans movement which must also be overcome if the struggle is to grow in strength and consciousness. For instance, there is a tendency to deny the importance of the veterans' struggle for economic benefits, and to fail to unite with and build this fight. This can isolate anti-imperialist and revolutionary forces from those many veterans struggling for such benefits, thus leaving them wide open to the reformist influences described above. Although this "left" tendency is at present not the principle

danger, it must definitely be corrected.

Supporters of this tendency maintain that raising separate veterans' demands is "divisive". This is similar to a position put forward in the 1930s around the Bonus March. This march could not have been successful if revolutionaries of that time had been taken in by the line—advocated by other groups including the Socialist Party and the Trotskyites—that the demand for the bonus was divisive or "unfair to the unemployed."

The words of the Communist International are important here: "The Socialist Party refused to support the demand for payment of the bonus and hypocritically advised the veterans that 'these soldiers would do better to work for general relief for the workers than for a special gift for themselves'. The tactics of the Socialist were clear: to break up the movement of the veterans under the pretext of the necessity to fight 'in general' in favor of unemployment relief; not to develop and strengthen this mass movement by connecting it up with the unemployed movement, but to demoralize, compromise and disrupt it" (Communist International, Sept. 2, 1932).

Correct Path Ahead

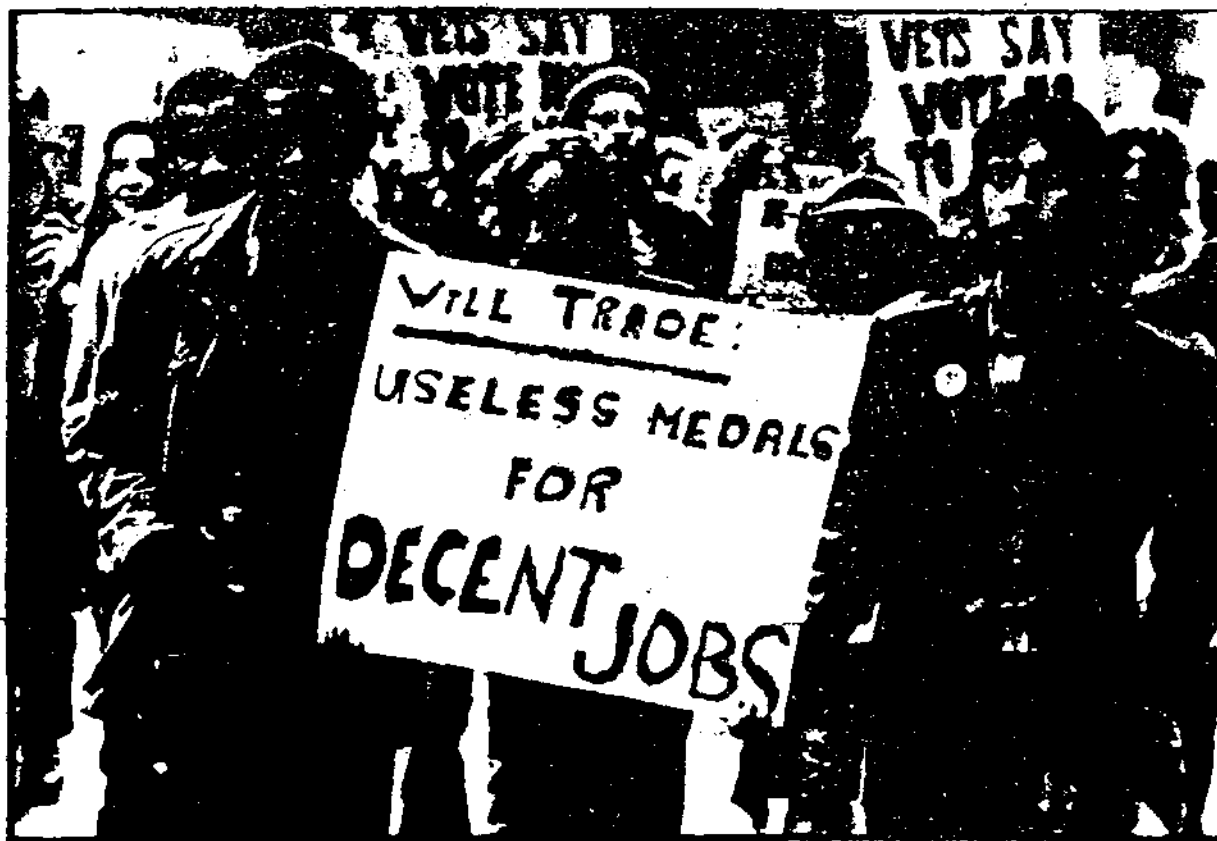
The correct path pointed out by the Comintern in

1932 is still valid today—to take up the just struggles of veterans and build them broader and deeper; not to turn our backs on the needs and demands of the masses, but to lead the struggle and unfold anti-imperialist, anti-system consciousness around that.

Much work remains to be done in developing a concrete program for a revolutionary multinational veterans movement, building that struggle, and exposing and isolating reformist and right-wing elements. This will be accomplished on the basis of concrete struggles such as the national campaign and demonstration called by VVAW/WSO for July 1-4 in Washington, D.C. We join with other revolutionary organizations and forces in fully supporting this demonstration and its five demands:

**UNIVERSAL UNCONDITIONAL AMNESTY FOR
ALL WAR RESISTERS!
IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENTS/END ALL AID
TO THIEU AND LON NOLI
A SINGLE-TYPE DISCHARGE FOR ALL VETS!
KICK NIXON OUT!
DECENT BENEFITS FOR ALL VETS!**

This demonstration points the way forward for linking up the veterans movement with the progressive, anti-imperialist and revolutionary forces throughout the country, while at the same time speaking and fighting for the immediate needs of all vets. ■



To build an anti-imperialist veterans movement, we must unfold its program around the needs and demands of vets and the advanced consciousness they gained fighting against the brass and the war.

Vet Blasts Use of POW's

Editors, REVOLUTION:

I am just writing in order to say a few words about how Nixon & Co. are speeding up the propaganda machinery around the returning of the P.O.W.'s. As a Vietnam veteran, it turns my stomach to the point of vomiting the incredible way they are trying to drum up patriotism and put "glory" back into the U.S. aggression in Vietnam.

American people are supposed to forget the My Lai massacre, the napalm-burned children, and B-52 cratered landscapes where rice paddies used to be. We are also supposed to forget the 45,000 to 50,000 American working class sons and brothers who died so that Vietnam might be made safe for U.S. capital investment and exploitation.

Now Nixon has his peace with "honor" (it makes no difference that basically the same peace plan could have been had a couple of years ago) and the "heroes" are coming home.

But who are Nixon's "heroes?" Who are these P.O.W.'s? Ninety percent of these P.O.W.'s are officers and pilots. And as such they have been and will remain the privileged aristocracy of the armed forces.

And what about the average American G.I.? Why isn't Nixon holding him up, too, as an example of faithful patriotism? Because the average G.I. has learned with his own experience the rotten nature of the Vietnam war.

At the age of 17, I went into the army in 1965. Believing in the lie that we stood for freedom and democracy of the Vietnamese people, I was eager for duty in Vietnam.

But soon after I got to Vietnam my head was turned around. The first thing that struck me was the tremendous poverty of the people, where old men begged on the streets and little boys sold anything from their older sister to American insignia patches.

It seemed that the Vietnamese people had a dual policy for the American soldiers. In the cities they only wanted our money, and in the villages they would welcome us by setting ambushes.

I learned to respect the fighting ability and the determination to win of the Viet Cong soldier. In comparison, the Saigon army lacked all enthusiasm in the war and was content to let the Americans handle it alone.

At first I was confused by their attitude. If they believed in freedom and democracy why wouldn't they fight? Eventually I became aware that the Saigon government was looked upon as a corrupt dictatorship and the majority of the Vietnamese people actively supported or at least sympathized with the Viet Cong.

But at that time I really didn't care. I just wanted to get out of Vietnam. Near the end of my scheduled tour I was wounded, sent home, and eventually discharged.

I thought that Vietnam was to be a half-forgotten part of my past, but it wasn't. After attending a junior college for a year in my home town, I slowly started going to anti-war demonstrations.

In my mind at the time, an anti-war protestor was a long-haired hippie type who opposed the war because of a general philosophy of pacifism and non-violence. I opposed the war for a different reason.

My own experiences showed me that the war



G.I.'s learned from their own experience the corrupt, aggressive nature of the Vietnam war.

could not be won—militarily or politically—to I wanted to save American lives by getting out. At these demonstrations I was drawn to the anti-imperialist contingents out of curiosity and the novelty of seeing Viet Cong flags and red banners.

My curiosity turned into serious interest when Marxist-Leninist people that I met began to explain their views as to the real nature of the war. What they had to say made sense to me.

I began to understand not only the war but also my whole life. Everything fell into place. Of why my family was poor because of being working class, and also how we were kept at the very bottom of the barrel by the fact that we were part of a national minority. And of how the same rich imperialist gangsters that exploited and oppressed my family and many, many other people like us, had conned me into doing their dirty work in Vietnam.

Now Nixon is using the same tricks that were used before. Captains, colonels and majors are made out to be the average All-American "G.I. Joe." The real masses of American veterans are forgotten and

those American boys who avoided the war by leaving the country are made out to be criminals who "must pay the price" for their actions.

But the real criminals are Nixon and his imperialist backers who have committed foul, savage crimes on both the Vietnamese and the American people. The Vietnamese have been standing up to this and leading the way in making these gangsters pay for their bloody deeds.

Many American people have learned from this struggle. They have learned that within the United States the real heroes are not Nixon's colonels and majors but those who dared to forge solidarity with the Vietnamese—students who began the protest marches and thousands of workers and third world people who joined in and made the movement powerful.

The real heroes in the United States, Vietnam, and throughout the world are the millions of people who are tired of oppression and are determined not to take any more.

—A Vietnam Vet

REVOLUTION, Vol. 1, No. 5, JUNE, 1973

Vets: Yesterday and Today

Key Force Against Imperialism

June, 1932—They came marching by the hundreds and thousands from every part of the country. By the end of June there were at least 25,000 in and around Washington, D.C.—25,000 World War I veterans, veterans' wives and children. They had marched, ridden the rails, and come by any means of transportation they could to demand the "bonus" promised to servicemen by Congress in 1923.

The "bonus," really their more-than-earned adjusted service pay, was to be paid in 1945. But in 1932 it was the heart of the depression. Millions out of work and desperate for a way to feed their families—feed themselves—find a way to live from one day to the next. Their mortgaged homes had been lost, savings wiped out.

Many of these unemployed millions were veterans who had fought in the imperialists' world-wide war and seen hundreds of thousands of their working class brothers die for a cause that was not theirs. They had been asked to make the greatest sacrifice—their lives—to "defend democracy". Now they were being forced to live like animals.



World War I vets used any transportation they could find to get to Washington.

The veterans summed up the way they felt with slogans: "We fought for Democracy—What Did We Get?" "Heroes in 1917—Bums in 1932." And they came to Washington to demand their "bonus" now, when they needed it most.

Massive Turnout

The call for the national march to Washington was made by an ex-servicemen's organization, with Communists among the leadership. The Communist Party, then a fighting force in the workers' interests, gave full backing to the vets' demands and supported the march, while the sell out A.F. of L. leadership opposed it. The call hit the hearts and needs of vets everywhere, and many unorganized groups joined the organized forces in a massive camp-out in the capital, building shantytowns to live in while they presented their grievances.

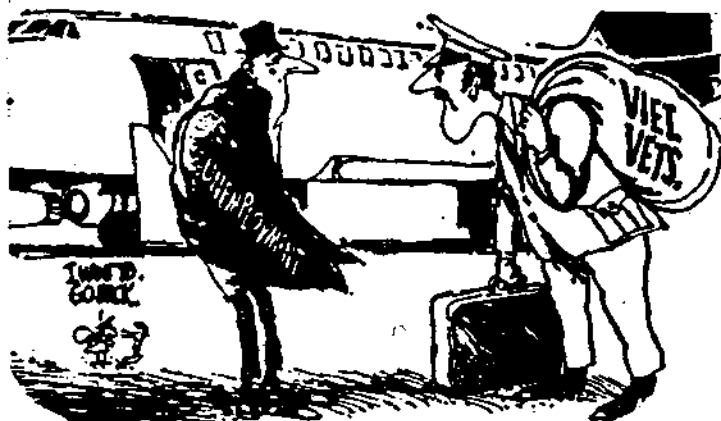
Many Black workers participated and the unity and determination of the bonus marchers made the government and press see "red" all over the place. More than half of those who had come in June were still solidly encamped at the end of July; they were determined their demands be met. So President Hoover called on General Douglas MacArthur, aided by Major Dwight D. Eisenhower, to get rid of this embarrassing indictment of capitalism.

On July 28 the Army moved in. An 11-week-old baby died from the tear gas, two unarmed vets were killed, scores were wounded (including women and children), and the vets' tents and shacks were burned to the ground.

MacArthur told the press later that delayed military action might have "threatened the institutions of our country" and led to "insurgency and insurrection." The men had become "a bad looking mob animated by the spirit of revolution," he added.

Same Old Story

Today things are not yet as bad as they were in the 1930's for most working people—although it's tough enough to live today and getting tougher all the time. But the Vietnam vets, the ones who were forced to do most of the dirty work and to make the real sacrifices



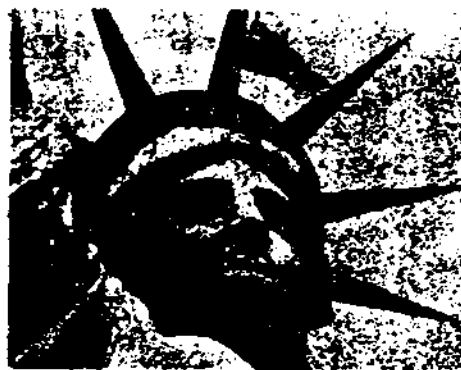
I RUSHED DOWN TO WELCOME YOU BACK!

—not the super-privileged. Now officers and pilots who are being given the million dollar treatment today—find themselves facing the full contradictions of the capitalist system—just as the vets in '32 did. Home from a war fought to "preserve democracy" only to face long unemployment lines, empty government promises, and in the case of third world vets, discrimination and racist oppression.

Half a million vets unemployed, inadequate medical care and long waits for treatment, a GI Bill that doesn't begin to meet the costs of going to school and living at the same time.

It's even worse for Third World vets. The unemployment rate for Vietnam vets is twice that for Americans in general; for Third World vets the rate is three times the average rate.

"Bad" discharges—many given for resisting the Army and the war—are keeping many from getting their deserved VA and unemployment benefits, medical care and tuition payments.



Vets stood at the forefront of protest when Nixon bombed Haiphong.

Medical Cutbacks

And it will be even worse if Nixon's budget cuts get through Congress this month. Along with day care and other health and welfare cutbacks, there's a whole series of slashes in medical care that are aimed right at the Vietnam vets, the ones who need the most: medical care right now: big decreases in funds for medical employees (doctors, nurses, etc.) at VA hospitals, VA-connected medical research and hospital construction.

In addition, the budget includes a cut in disability payments of \$160 million. This means, for example, that a vet who has lost a leg will get \$169 less each month. Also, cuts in vocational training programs will hit vets hard; vets make up 38% of those in one of the programs scheduled to get the axe.

The Vietnam vets have been a big pain for Nixon and the rest of the ruling class. Nothing gives the lie more to the government's claim that the U.S. has achieved "peace with honor" than the GIs who have come back from Southeast Asia and tell the truth. Now Nixon & Co. are trying to blackmail them into shutting up, or keep them high on drugs or demoralize them so they'll stay out of the struggle.

But more and more Vietnam vets are resisting—fighting back on all levels—speaking out against continued U.S. aggression abroad as well as against the attacks on all working and oppressed people in the U.S.

Important Role in Struggle

Just as the "Bonus Army" vets were an important part of the general fight against depression conditions in 1932 and helped inspire millions of other Americans to continue to build the struggle, so the Vietnam vets have been and are an important part of the growing united front against U.S. imperialism.

Because of their experience in Southeast Asia, seeing U.S. imperialism in all its viciousness, and, at the same time, seeing its exposure and defeat by the Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian peoples, the Vietnam vets have great potential to grasp the connection between imperialism abroad and conditions at home, and the need to build a movement that will contribute to its final overthrow.

Many vets have already taken this position, and many more are sure to, as the veterans' movement brings together vets to fight for their own economic needs and rights, and links their struggle with the growing U.S. working class and oppressed peoples' movements and the anti-imperialist movement as a whole. ■



Support for the just struggle of their former "enemy" shows the leap in consciousness many vets made in recent years.

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Vets Use "Their Day" To Attack Government

Nixon declared March 29 to be "Vietnam Veterans Day" in an effort to cover over Vietnam vets' tremendous problems with the flag of patriotism. But the vets didn't go for it, turning what was supposed to be a celebration of the government's "concern" into a militant demonstration against the government, and showing the vets' determination to fight for what they need.

March 29 saw over a dozen sit-ins and other spirited actions by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War/Winter Soldier Organization (VVAW/WSO) and other veterans' groups. The government was unable to head off what it warned about in a memo sent out to all regional Veterans Administration offices: "Some information was received to the effect that the Vietnam Veterans Against the War/Winter Volunteers Organization (sic) and similar organizations may demonstrate at VA hospitals and regional offices...Confrontations may occur."

Angry veterans demanding jobs, more benefits, better medical care, an end to bad discharges, universal and unconditional amnesty and a total end to U.S. aggression in Indochina proved the VA's worst fears had a strong foundation.

Actions in Many Cities

There were actions in New York City, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Denver, Miami, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, San Jose and Yorba Linda, Calif. Another protest took place in February in Los Angeles.

In New York, 60 vets led by VVAW/WSO marched from the VA office to the veterans' unemployment center and back to demand jobs, exposing the fact that many vets are unemployed because of bad discharges they got for resisting U.S. aggression in Vietnam. Then they marched into the VA Regional Office and demanded to see the administrator, who didn't answer their questions and pleaded that he was "only one of 260,000" employees!

Fifty-five VVAW/WSO members in Milwaukee showed what they thought "Vietnam Veterans' Day" was all about by picketing in front of the Woods Veterans Hospital, joined by some of the hospital's patients. Other vets inside who were too ill to come out showed their solidarity with the action by raising clenched fists.

As the pickets marched outside, two dozen VVAW/

WSO members seized the head administrator's office and held it for six hours. The organization's previous extensive investigation of conditions at the hospital showed that the VA had been lying "four times every 15 minutes," and that conditions there were terrible. The evidence included written statements from patients and a taped interview with a hospital administrator made by a VVAW/WSO member while he was a patient.

This was the fourth Milwaukee VVAW/WSO action in the last six months, and each one has gained increasing support and participation from veterans and the anti-imperialist movement as a whole.

False Promises, More Actions

Two days after these nation-wide actions, Nixon announced he was setting up a new "council" to "study the problem." But as the ruling class goes through the motions of pretending to solve a problem they in fact cannot solve, the veterans movement is stepping up its activities. For example, VVAW/WSO is building for a national demonstration July 1-4 in Washington, D.C. to demand amnesty, a single class of discharges for all vets, U.S. implementation of the Indochina peace agreements, and ending all aid to Thieu and Lon Noi, decent benefits for all vets, and Kick Nixon Out! ■



Veterans' bitterness can become a finely honed sword to turn on the imperialists.



Vets in April 1971 returned their medals and other possessions "won" in Vietnam to the Senate.