

VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR NEWSLETTER



Number 44

Feb 29, 1976

National Steering Committee Meeting

The 16th NSCM was held in Chicago on the 14th and 15th of February. Minutes of the meeting will be out in the near future, but a couple of the decisions and discussions at that meeting should be carried forward now.

Bicentennial Demonstration

Much of the meeting was spent in discussion of the Bicentennial demonstration and what the role of VVAW is in building for that demo. The discussion will be covered more completely in the minutes of the meeting. Briefly, however, the demonstration will be built under the overall slogan "We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years; Let's Get Them Off Our Backs." There will be two demands--Jobs or Income Now, and We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War. These demands represent two of the heaviest burdens now being pushed on to the working people of this country by the ruling class and, at the same time, are the two demands which best expose the lies of the rich man's system. This is particularly true concerning the lies and propaganda which the rich will be putting out around the Bicentennial.

At the NSCM representatives from the Unemployed Workers Organizing Committee (UWOC), the Revolutionary Student Brigade (RSB) and the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) all spoke about the demonstration. During the meeting, a national planning committee--the "200 Years Is Long Enough Committee"--was set up in order to make overall plans for the demonstration. In many places, local coalitions made up of the same groups, plus whatever other local organizations may be building for the demonstration are being formed. Chapters which have not been in contact with the local UWOC chapter or RSB chapter should do so. This demonstration is a joint effort; it is not a vets rally or an unemployed march or a student rally, and it's important to build it that way. VVAW is taking out the demands which are demands of people all over the country--Jobs or Income Now, We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War--though we are primarily taking those demands out to vets.

BUILD FOR THE REGIONAL CONFERENCES !!!

All the specific plans for the demonstration are not yet made. One of the places

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where some of these plans will be worked on is at regional conferences to be held in Philadelphia on March 13th, and in Cincinnati on March 20th. These conferences will be sponsored by the "200 Years Is Long Enough" Committee, and VVAW chapters should be building to get as many people as possible to these conferences. This will be an opportunity to join with other groups and individuals who are also building toward the Bicentennial demonstration, and to discuss plans for that action.

At this time, plans call for a four-day demonstration; vets, the unemployed, and youth and students will be in Philadelphia on the 1st of July. Workers' organizations, individuals, other groups working on the demonstration, as well as all those people who can only be in Philadelphia for the July 4th weekend, will be coming on the 3rd or 4th. It's vital that we get as many vets as possible to Philadelphia as early as possible; chapters should be building for the full four days. As soon as specific plans for the early days of the demo are worked out, we will get that information out to chapters. Chapters should also be discussing ideas around these days and get those ideas in to the N. O.

In at least one case that we know about so far, a representative from VVAW went to an area RSB meeting; all chapters should be looking for opportunities to go out to places where there are not now chapters to talk about the demonstration, taking VVAW literature, petitions, etc. With more organizational effort being pointed toward the GI Bill, it's particularly important to get out information about VVAW and our programs on the campuses.

We will need such things as chants for the demo--the old "Jody" chants which were used in the military can be updated (and changed for sure), and chapters should start trying to work out better, louder and more militant chants. Again, get them to us, and we'll get them around to other chapters. The kind of cadences ("You gotta go home on your left--your right") which the military used had the purpose of building spirit and, historically, of creating panic in the enemy. We should be capitalizing on these spirit-building aspects of the cadences.

Included with this newsletter are copies of the national leaflet concerning the Bicentennial demonstration (as decided by the NSCM). It's cheaper for all concerned if these are reproduced on the spot rather than us sending out enough copies for all chapters. Chapters should read the leaflet; it explains, in different words, the same position concerning the demonstration that was put forward in the Call which appeared in the last issue of the Veteran, and is based on discussions at the NSCM. The emphasis in the leaflet is on the slogan and the demands of the demonstration. Building VVAW and building the fighting veterans movement is not the same thing as building for the demonstration, though the two are related. The demonstration is seen as a way in which vets can participate with other organizations and individuals in a unified action to strike a blow against and expose the class which has been on all our backs for 200 years at the moment when they are celebrating the Bicentennial with all their hoopla and propaganda. The fighting veterans movement, on the other hand, will go on long after the July action is over. As we do our day-to-day work to build that movement and to build VVAW, we will be meeting vets who, while they might agree with the demands around Jobs or Income Now and We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War, may not see these demands as important enough or relevant enough to them to want to go to Phila-

delphia. At the same time, we've already met vets who have immediately taken up the idea of the July action as their own and who want to get involved in building for it. With the first group of vets, we want to work to bring out an understanding of why that demonstration, around those demands, is a vital action at this time. With the second group, we want to help them become organizers.

UWOC Petition

At the NSCM, we decided that VVAW should be taking out the UWOC petition--chapters should get in contact with the local UWOC chapters about getting copies of the petition. This petition drive is aimed at the Bicentennial demonstration, with the goal of having 250,000 signatures on the petition by the time we go to Philadelphia. Also included with this mailing is a copy of the UWOC newsletter which talks about UWOC activities around the country and announces UWOC's decision to join the coalition building for the demonstration. For chapters who are not already up on UWOC activities, this newsletter provides a good summary of what's happening. This is important background information in taking out the UWOC leaflet; people should also have the address and/or phone number of the local UWOC chapter to give to people who are interested in finding out more about UWOC and its activities. The UWOC petition is not something that VVAW chapters can only take to the unemployment office, or only something which can be used when there is a UWOC member nearby--the demand for Jobs or Income NOW is just as real at a VA hospital or regional office or school. Use of the petition cannot be mechanical--like the VVAW petition or any of the rest of the material that we are using, the UWOC petition is an organizing tool to be used.

GI Bill Work

There was discussion at the NSCM concerning the successes and failures of the "War on the VA." A summary of this discussion will appear in the minutes of the meeting, but it was seen that, although much good work has gone on, the organization has not made the kind of breakthrough in terms of involving vets in VVAW that we need. The meeting decided that work around the VA should continue and that particular campaigns that local chapters are now waging at the VA should not stop, but that overall the organization should concentrate its work around the GI Bill.

As a national organization VVAW should take up work around the attacks on the GI Bill because it is the particular attack which most affects vets at this time. Some 20% of Vietnam-era vets are in school (this varies somewhat from state to state) on the GI Bill, so schools provide the greatest concentration of veterans. And because vets are going to school on a regular basis, there is the ability to talk with the same vets day after day in the process of building struggle. Some of the attacks now coming down on the GI Bill have been described in recent issues of The Veteran; more will be described in the upcoming issue. The GI Bill, under the present 10 years eligibility, is rapidly running out for many vets; now, in the latest budget message, President Ford wants to cut the 10 years back to eight years. The demand to expand and extend the GI Bill is a reality for hundreds of thousands of veterans who face the problems of an inadequate GI Bill everyday.

One caution was strongly emphasized at the NSCM; the meeting united on the idea that VVAW should concentrate work around the GI Bill, but we are not looking to become a student vets organization. During the time that we were doing most of our work around the VA, we were consistently pushing the idea of building a well-rounded vets movement, and that holds just as true for work around the GI Bill. Work now going on in terms of building struggle at the VA or unemployment offices should not suddenly cease. Agitational material as well as petitions can be taken to the VA; paper sales should continue. The point of concentrating work around the GI Bill is not simply so that we can build a campus vets organization but rather that by making breakthroughs at the schools we will have the ability to do more and better work in all aspects of the vets movement.

GI Bill Petition

One tool for building the struggle, it was decided, would be a national petition campaign. Copies of that petition are included with this newsletter. Discussion of using the petition pointed toward its use as a tool for struggle. We have no intention of giving the petition to Congress or our local legislator. We have learned from experience that until there is a real mass movement around an issue, talking to Congress is a waste of time (they'll throw petitions into the nearest trash can as soon as they're out of sight). There may be a time when we'll take the petitions to Washington or to a statehouse, but even then, not with the intention of giving them to officials. We're demanding that the GI Bill be extended and expanded, not begging for a few crumbs. Signed petitions can be used in rallies or demonstrations--here are the people who stand with us through their signatures. In taking out the petitions, people should bring out our organizational experience in trying lobbying, etc during the anti-war movement when we did lobby Congress, but that did nothing to stop the war. In short, we have to build a movement which relies on ourselves and on our own initiative, not on Congress.

The petition is a tool for organizing; while it's good to get a vet to sign the petition, it's better to get that vet to take the petition himself or herself and get it filled out. If chapters recopy the petition they should add their own contact box with local address; also, if people re-do the petition, the second line should read "The GI Bill was one of the reasons many of us went into the service to begin with." (The petition now seems to say that all of us went into the military to get the GI Bill among other things, which is not true.) A space for where and when the petition was filled out is also useful; another column which would give vets a chance to indicate if they were interested in finding out more about VVAW would also be useful. Chapters should keep the N. O. informed about their practice with the petitions so that we can sum up how they are being used and get that information out the rest of the organization.

The Veteran

We have almost enough money by now to get out the next issue of the paper. Plans call for it to be ready sometime around the 10th of March. If we don't already have your order, get it to us immediately.