

VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR NEWSLETTER



Number 48

July 21, 1976

Bicentennial Demonstration

To describe the demonstrations on July 1-4 by the Rich Off Our Backs--July 4th Coalition in Philadelphia could fill dozens of pages of this newsletter, given the daily accounts of the activities. There will be many meetings and many publications coming out that will recount the five days of activities, struggles, and tremendous victory that these demonstrations were. This is but a brief account of those days.

From the beginning, the tone and character of the demonstrations were set as hundreds of unemployed workers and contingents of veterans poured off buses from across the country, in Washington, DC on June 30th and demonstrated for "Jobs or Income" at the Department of Labor and again on the steps of the Capitol. This first action said loud and clearly "We've Carried the Rich for Two Hundred Years, Let's Get Them Off Our Backs," and further that this was a series of demonstrations built among the US working class.

In Philly, the ruling class and their local representatives threw every road block and tried every trick to insure that the demonstrations would not occur; but, they were fought toe to toe by the working class. Unable to stand up to the determination of workers across the country and exposed to the majority of the American people for the rats they were, the ruling class and their local lackey, Mayor Rizzo, were beaten back time and time again. The demonstrations rolled on.

July 1-4 saw demonstrations led by workers, with students, youth and vets, at unemployment centers, factories, and at Philadelphia General Hospital, the only public hospital in Philly and one the ruling class is trying to close down. Vets also demonstrated at the VA and led a demonstration by all at the main war memorial.

Throughout the first three days people went out into the communities and found tremendous support among working people of Philly. Being transported around the city in open trucks, the chanting, singing demonstrators were greeted by clenched fists and people waving from doors and windows, running into the street and sometimes actually climbing on the trucks to join the demonstrators.

July 4th brought the beginning of the march with an estimated 4000 people from around the country marching through one of several working class sections of Philly.

DOC_B00076

contingents of workers from all over the country--miners from West Va, steel workers from Milwaukee, Chicago, the East Coast and the South; garment workers from New York, the South and West Coast; and these were just a few of the many contingents of workers. Students and marched under banners of the working class and their fights. VVAW contingents led the march and brought up the rear marching in perfect order to militant cadence calls.

The march, over a mile long, wound its way through the communities to the park where speakers were heard from VVAW, Youth, the RSB, many workers' groups, and the Revolutionary Communist Party, represented by its chairman, Bob Avakian. He spoke of the fight ahead and the hopes and aspirations of workers everywhere.

It was clear that the demonstrations were a tremendous success and just one more big step in the process of building our movement stronger, a working class movement that will bring down the rich who have exploited us in this country for 200 years.

The role of veterans, led by VVAW, during the entire five days of demonstrations was significant. Here were the vets who had once fought and marched for the ruling class, now marching with the working class saying, "Rich man, your day is done--it's the working class we're fighting for." The well organized manner with VVAW carried itself throughout the demonstrations was a source of pride and inspiration to all the forces there and built a tremendous sense of unity among the veterans there.

In fatigues or other types of uniforms, representing all branches of the military, the vets presented a militant and multinational force that was a fine cutting thrust against the national chauvinism and "American patriotism" that made up the backbone of what the rich were putting out around the Bicentennial. Marching through the streets of Washington DC and then Philadelphia, the veterans, maintaining perfect ranks, presented a model of militant discipline in step to the cadences that reflected the demands and overall slogan of this working class demonstration.

This manner in which the veterans seriously went about the tasks in Philly was magnified when vets led the demonstration at the Flagship of Admiral Dewey around the theme of "We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War." Growing out of the real experience that vets have from fighting a rich man's war, the enthusiasm and anger of the vets sparked the entire demonstration, over 1000 people, all of whom were marching in step and in ranks before it ended.

Leading up to the demonstrations, in the various local building activities, vets played an important role in the building work everywhere because of the unique experiences of veterans and their ability to speak to the questions of war and imperialism. Seeing the force and feeling the spirit that veterans brought to the Philly demonstrations points to the importance of organizing veterans as a force within the working class movement, and also shows the necessity of VVAW to build an even larger vets organization, an organization that truly speaks for and leads all vets in this country to serve the struggle of the working class.

We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years
Let's Get Them Off Our Backs!

Consolidate!

With the end of the very successful demonstrations in Philadelphia, we in VVAW move into an important period for the organization. The demonstration succeeded in introducing thousands of vets across the country to the organization and bringing many new people into VVAW. Due to our organizing efforts, everywhere many new organizing contacts are beginning to move, in addition to new chapters and renewed work in areas where VVAW had all but ceased to exist.

Things look great but we haven't got time to rest and pat ourselves on the back. If we are to make any genuine progress in building VVAW, we must move quickly to consolidate the new people who came forward around the demonstrations in the local areas. This isn't the time for vacations but a time to bring together those vets who were in Philly or were interested but unable to attend.

Vets everywhere are still facing the same abuses daily that this organization is best equipped to fight and bring leadership in those struggles around the country. The struggle hasn't changed since the first of July and we still must be out there among vets pointing out who the real enemy is and how the attacks fall on all working people, not just veterans.

Aside from the planned meetings, day-to-day work must kick into gear again where vets are--particularly in schools, at the VA, and in the workplace. Many schools will be opening for the fall term as early as August. The campaign to extend and expand the GI Bill has been successful and proven in practise in areas where chapters have gotten off their cans and put the campaign into action. Let's hit the bricks!

* * * * *

The Veteran

We anticipate that the next issue of the paper will be out by the end of July; we need more money to print it, so if you have not paid your last bill, do so as soon as possible. Then we can get out the paper that we all can use. Also, if you want to change the number of papers you are ordering, let us know; otherwise, we'll send the same number as you've gotten in the past.

Local Addresses

We've had some discussion about putting local addresses back into The Veteran as was done in the past. If people have opinions on this question, let us know. For the present, we're strongly recommending that chapters which are not already using the "Local Address" box on the front of the paper start using it. If there is not a chapter, an address or phone number--somewhere that interested people in the area can get in touch with the organization or at least with someone who can point them toward the organization--should be used. Rubber stamps are cheap and worth it.

Dues

It's not like we haven't said it all before. But we keep on trying anyway. A dollar

per member per month to the national office of a national organization is not a huge amount of money. If we had it we would have the freedom to do things at the national office in order to help the organization move ahead that we cannot do now because we can't afford to do them. Having just completed the books for the first six months of the year, we've discovered \$38 in dues paid so far. That record stinks! At this point, the organization almost pays for the publication of the paper; everything else which comes out of this office--like buttons, or the demo leaflets, or newsletters or the stamps that are on this newsletter to you--is paid for out of a few donations from individuals, or from our GI Bill checks, and we all know how small those are.

We need the support. We are asking chapters to establish a system where dues will be collected monthly and sent in (and labelled so that we know a particular amount of money is for dues). And not just once when this newsletter happens to be fresh in mind, but regularly.

*** **

Schedule

The next issue of The Veteran should be out by the end of July. Again, if you haven't sent in your order for the next issue, or want to change the orders from the last issue, we need to know by July 26th.

We're discussing a four-page supplement to The Veteran to be out around the 1st of September directed toward the fall semester in schools and our campaign to Extend and Expand the GI Bill. Our ability to print this will, as usual, depend on money.

Regional Meetings--see below.

Veterans Day--November 11th.

Regional Meetings

Meetings and conferences should serve the struggle. They can provide a sense of organization, provide the form to sum-up work and plan future struggles. In this context, the National Office is calling for regional conferences to be held in the West, Mid-west, and East as a method to kick off the campaign around Extend and Expand the GI Bill. These conferences should be built broadly, especially around campuses but also at the VA offices and hospitals, unemployment centers, and at shops and mills. Bringing veterans forward in the context of putting the ruling class on the line, of we won't accept these attacks, of we won't scab and we won't starve, of building VVAW--all these are essential. Vets in school will probably come forward more, but at the same time we should take this out as a campaign of the veterans' movement, a concrete offensive against the capitalists in building this organization, and should also bring forward other veterans who see the need for joining VVAW and building a vets organization.

The first day of the conference should be a demonstration, picket, or car caravan, concretely laying out there that we won't starve, we'll fight. This action will lead directly into the meeting. The conference should take up the GI Bill as a campaign we're taking up to win, a campaign that is necessary to keep vets from being crushed by this system, and should tie the Bill into unemployment and jobs, and of course, the role of veterans in the context of war, patriotism and as a social force

(ie, the demonstration).

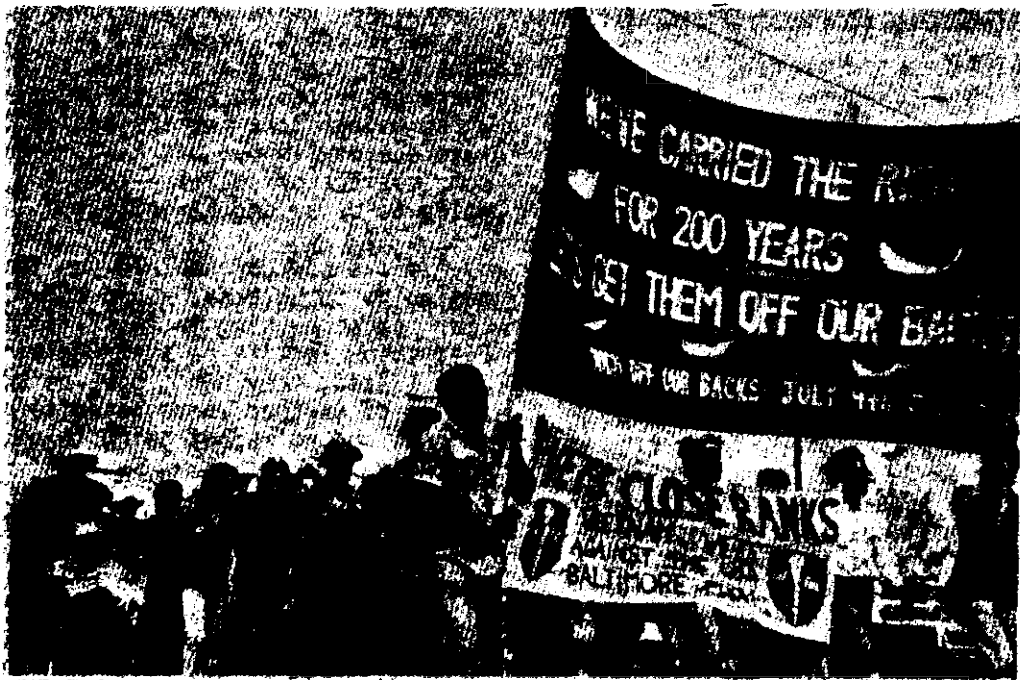
The petition should be put forward, its use as an organizing tool, an agenda of struggle which points out the national character of this campaign, what will be happening regionally, and local plans. People should point toward another regional demonstration to tie together the local campaigns and point toward the possibility of a national convention in the spring as a kick-off for a Bonus March II in the summer (both of these only is the actual conditions of struggle warrant them).

These conferences can be a big part of building the campaign broadly and building VVAW into a powerful weapon representing veterans both in political line and also in membership.

Chapters should begin discussing these meetings; we are suggesting that they be held in the middle or end of September, since that will give us a chance to get out to the schools during registration and first weeks of the new semester in order to build for the conferences. Chapters should be also discussing what kind of action might be held in their areas; the NO will be contacting chapters in order to be able to suggest locations for the meetings, but people should let us know what ideas they have as soon as possible.

NIC Report

A report from the June NIC meeting is enclosed with this newsletter. This is a political summary of what happened at the meeting, not an attempt to write full minutes of everything which went on. Because there was discussion of many important aspects of building our organization, this report should be read and discussed as widely as possible.



WHEREVER IT WENT, THIS CONTINGENT FROM VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR WAS MET WITH CHEERS BY THE MASSES OF PEOPLE ON THE STREETS OF PHILADELPHIA. AS THE SPEAKER FROM VVAW BROUGHT OUT, "IN THE MILITARY WE HATED TO MARCH. BUT TODAY WE WERE PROUD BECAUSE WE MARCHED WITH FELLOW WORKERS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY."