

# VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR NEWSLETTER



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## VFW Slanders VVAW; We Sue!

On August 5 the Philadelphia Veterans of Foreign Wars pulled off one of the dumber--and more disgusting--stunts in their long history of jumping when the US ruling class pulls the strings. According to the Philadelphia Daily News, VFW District Commander Joseph Buckley and VFW member of the executive board John Kapitolo, speaking for the Executive Board of the Philly VFW, said that there should be an investigation into a possible conspiracy in the deaths of the 24 American Legionnaires.

According to Buckley, there have been certain groups infiltrating Philadelphia since January. "You know whom they are," he said. Continuing, "For them to go out on a sneak attack after the finest kind of Americans there are is... is terrible." Kapitolo, according to the newspaper, identified VVAW and the Rich Off Our Backs-July 4th Coalition as among the groups the Commander was speaking of.

Covering all possible bases, the VFW Executive Board also suggested that the deaths of the Legion members may have been due to a conspiracy on the part of drug companies wanting to sell swine flu vaccine. Some of the major manufacturers of the vaccine have headquarters in Philadelphia; they immediately denied the charges saying they were ridiculous. Backing off slightly, the VFW mouthpieces demanded a state probe of their conspiracy theory.

The American Legion through its State Adjutant, wanted it made clear to all that people should not confuse the American Legion with the VFW and that the American Legion wanted nothing whatever to do with these charges.

In a news conference on August 6th, Ed Damato, speaking for VVAW, pointed out what the VFW was up to. Among Ed's points was the fact that there had been (at that time) a total of 23 tragic deaths among the Legion members. In the most self-serving way possible, the VFW was blatantly using those deaths to put forward their reactionary line. In the same way that the VFW leadership gave its wholehearted support to the US ruling class war in Southeast Asia, they are still trying to attack and work against the interests of the large majority of veterans and working people in this country. Despite all the attempts to slow down or stop the July 1-4 demonstrations in Philadelphia, the demonstrations were a great success, and

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now they are still trying to dredge up whatever they can to attack these successes. While the VFW trots out its reactionary political line behind the facade of representing veterans, their actions speak even louder--they completely agreed with the Memorial Day cutoff of the GI Bill for 3, 7 million veterans, for instance.

Plans for the VVAW news conference included having a spokesperson from the Medical Committee for Human Rights speak to the fact that because of cutbacks in all kinds of services in the city of Philadelphia, the city is a potential hotbed of disease and that it is not too surprising that something like the spread of whatever disease caused the death of the Legionnaires should have started in Philadelphia.

VVAW also stated our intention to sue the VFW Executive Board and the individual spokesmen for slander.

If the press conference statement and news release gets to us before this Newsletter is sent out we will include a copy. At this time we do not know if the news story will be carried by wire services--people in Philadelphia were told by several of the newspapers there that they wouldn't even print the story.

The following major points were made in our press conference in Philadelphia and should be used elsewhere if the need arises:

1. The deaths of the Legionnaires are in fact a tragic thing.
2. While we point out the way in which the Legion and the VFW are used by the US ruling class to glorify their wars, etc (see the article in the copy of The Veteran which is enclosed with this newsletter), we are making a distinction between the leadership of these organizations (which work hand in hand with the ruling class in Philadelphia and nationally) and the rank-and-file, many of whom have a long history of struggle.
3. VVAW is fighting for the needs of vets--all vets--around issues such as the Extend and Expand the GI Bill. The VFW charges are not only slanderous and bordering on insanity, but they are also ridiculous. If the VFW were really interested in serving the needs of vets they would be fighting for the same things we are, not making ridiculous charges about conspiracies.

### Regional Meetings

As put out in the last newsletter, the National Office is calling for VVAW regional meetings to be held in the West, the Mid-West and the East as a kick-off for the fall campaign around Extend and Expand the GI Bill. Based on the minimal feedback we have gotten at this time, chapters which have discussed the possibility of such meetings see them as a positive step.

Tentative dates for the meetings are the last weekend in September (25-26) which would give chapters a chance to do work at college campuses around registration and, in some places, through the first month of the fall term, and build for the meetings and the demonstration/picket line or whatever actions are decided upon as a way to begin the meetings. The end of September would still give us the opportunity to make use of the lessons we will learn from these meetings through the greater part of the fall semester.

One key to making these meetings a success is building for them, and building as soon as possible. Chapters should know when the schools in their areas are holding registration and then be there with the GI Bill petitions, with leaflets, with The Veteran. Chapters in the various regions should also be in contact with one another to try to work out dates and places for the meetings so that the information can be gotten out as soon as possible (for instance, the Milwaukee Chapter has already offered to hold the Midwest regional meeting at the end of September). While the N. O. will do whatever we can to help coordinate these meetings, it makes no sense for us to try to make arrangements for a meeting on the West Coast, for instance, when the chapters there can work it out among themselves and then let us know.

These meetings should be seen as one more step in the building of the campaign around the GI Bill and in building VVAW, not as ends in themselves. As this issue of The Veteran should emphasize, however, the GI Bill campaign is also not the end-all of VVAW activities. Working people in this country are under attack in many ways; for veterans this attack by the ruling class comes down most clearly and strongly around the GI Bill in particular as the rich try to dump their crisis on us. What we are saying is that veterans--all veterans, not just those immediately affected by the GI Bill--need to stand up and fight. As part of this we have to counterattack in those places where there are particular outrages--as in the article concerning Northern Virginia Community College--but it is a real mistake to see these individual outrages as the whole campaign.

Our approach should be that the way we stop these attacks in individual schools is through a real national campaign waged by a real national organization, one that can respond to the specific outrages but does not base itself just on these attacks. Instead, we're pointing directly at the enemy--the ruling class--which is trying to grind us down.

Among the lessons learned from the July 1-4 demonstrations is the need to get information out as broadly as possible, to let thousands and hundreds of thousands of people know what is going on. The Extend and Expand the GI Bill campaign can be built in a similar way, using petitions, demonstrations, posters, news conferences, whatever other ways people can think of, but never losing sight of the goal to build VVAW into a real veterans organization which stands on the side of working people.

### The Veteran

The latest issue of The Veteran was shipped by Greyhound (collect) to the following chapters on August 3rd: Boston, NYC, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Detroit, Cincinnati, San Jose, and Los Angeles. If Greyhound hasn't informed you already that the papers are there, you should give them a call. We can give you the busbill numbers if necessary.

There are chapters with long overdue bills for the last issue of the paper; we need the money, now! For any chapter which is doing its job and selling even a portion of the papers you get, there is no reason whatever for not sending us the money to pay for the papers that the whole organization needs.

Chapters not getting the paper by Greyhound will be getting their orders by parcel post (cheaper but slower); we are not including copies of the papers to those chapters who are getting their orders by Greyhound since the bus delivery is faster than the mail and we can save some money on postage that way. For some chapters or people starting chapters, we do not know how many papers you can use--let us know as soon as possible and we'll get the papers to you. Chapters are sending 10¢ per paper ordered to the N. O. to pay for the printing, and chapters are expected to pay the postage on the papers.

There are also included in the packages of papers bills for this issue; we also need that money as soon as possible.

### Articles

There are two short articles in the paper--one titled Baltimore and the other Northern Virginia Community College--which were sent in to us by the Baltimore chapter. In the past we've talked about the need for short articles which are not necessarily concerned with anything spectacular but which give people around the country a sense of activity going on in the various areas. These two articles are excellent examples of how this can and should be done. Other chapters should be looking toward sending us similar articles in the future.

### VVAW Films

In building for the July 1-4 demonstrations, the VVAW film "Only the Beginning" got a real workout. And one thing we learned from that was that our film distribution network is terrible. On at least one occasion, a film needed in Milwaukee finally got there from Boston via NYC, Philadelphia and Chicago (late, of course). The best answer we can come up with is to centralize the films; that means sending whatever films your chapter has here to the NO so that we can handle getting them out where they need to be and so that chapters will know where to go to find the films when they need them. If your copy of OTB is scheduled to be used in the next couple of weeks, let us know that you have it and then send it to us; if your copy is not scheduled, send it to the NO now and, when you need the films in the future, let us know enough in advance so we can get it out to you. And then return it!

### VVAW July 1-4 Demonstration Pix

Some of the best pictures we could get hold of from the July 1-4 demonstrations are in this issue of The Veteran, but we also know there are many more pictures which were taken. Several chapters have suggested that we should try to get together a slide show which will have a particular focus on the role of vets and VVAW during those demonstrations. To do that we will have to have, or at the very least, know about the pictures that people have of vets at the demonstrations. We can then make a selection of the best of the pictures, come up with slides, and get that useful tool for building out to the chapters. So, if you have pictures of vets during the demonstrations, either send us copies of the pictures or at least let us know what you have.

### Dues

Since the last newsletter, dues have trickled in from a couple of chapters. That's good, but not good enough.

Those of us in the N. O. are presently surviving by borrowing money from members of the local chapter. This is not a situation which can continue for long. We scraped together the money to get buttons printed, for instance, but have gotten back very little of it from the chapters who are using and, we assume, selling the buttons. We understand the financial problems faced by almost every chapter--obviously, we have them too. But people cannot work on the assumption that because they have something, such as the buttons, in hand that means they don't have to be paid for.

By the time of the September regional meetings, we hope to have out a 4-page supplement to The Veteran which will focus on the Extend and Expand the GI Bill campaign. To get 15,000 printed up will cost us around \$250 or \$300. We believe it will be a real aid to the work--without the money to print it, however, it will not happen because it can't.

### Tax-Exemption

Back in early June the Illinois Corporation VVAW/WSO Inc was declared tax-exempt; this means that, as a corporation we not only do not have to pay taxes (which has been the case for some time) but also that contributions to the national organization are, for the first time, tax deductible. If you are in a position to talk to people for whom that makes a difference (usually foundations, or people who give lots of money to charitable organizations) you should point that out. This does not apply to local chapters, only to the national organization as represented by the N. O. If there are questions around this, please let us know and we'll try to answer them.

### Subscriptions

In addition to sending in the money chapters owe for the paper, one of the best ways to keep The Veteran coming out regularly is through getting subscriptions to the paper. When selling the paper point out the subscription blank on page 2 and encourage people to subscribe. Schools and libraries should also be pushed to subscribe to the paper as a "public service for veterans."