

Vietnam Veterans Against the War/
Winter Soldier Organization
1023 Allen Avenue
St. Louis, Missouri 63104

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Brothers and Sisters:

Enclosed are two papers for presentation to the 14th National Steering Committee and general circulation in VVAW/WSO.

The first paper is a "working paper" by the chapter here in St. Louis, after several months of intensive study, delineating a tentative position by our chapter on the questions facing our organization with regard to its future. We want to emphasize that this is a working paper putting forth ideas and our practice around which we hope to struggle, grow and change. We do not feel that we have a "line" or that we are part of a two-line struggle. We hope this paper will advance our discussions of the future of VVAW/WSO in a scientific and ~~practical~~ manner.

The second paper concerns the issues of homosexuality and the role of the nuclear family in capitalist society and it is written and presented by Bill Fish, an active member of the St. Louis Chapter. We hope that this, too, will add to the debate around that issue in the organization.

In struggle,

The St. Louis Chapter
VVAW/WSO

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The debate now occurring in VVAW/WSO about the future of the organization is a good one and a proper one. Unfortunately, this debate has been clouded by the recent influx of (public) members of the Revolutionary Union (RU) in VVAW/WSO and their desire to guide us in a direction consistent with the United Front Against Imperialism (UFAI) strategy that RU has adopted. It was not until the Buffalo MSCM that members of the steering committee began indentifying themselves as members of RU. We propose to examine the UFAI in theory and in practice, and the implications for this organization.

I. THE UNITED FRONT AGAINST IMPERIALISM

Let us first preface this section by stating that despite the National Office's (NO) disclaimer of the UFAI as a prerequisite to a vets-GI focus, we are not convinced by that disclaimer. First, it is quite clear from the first paper that the adoption of a vets and GI focus stems directly from the concept of VVAW/WSO as a finger in the UFAI fist. Second, the increased presence and interest of RU in VVAW/WSO and its apparent concern that we adopt a vets-GI focus indicate that that organization (RU) continues to view us as a part of their UFAI strategy. Finally, the NO admits that they have not abandoned that strategy themselves. (Clarification Paper (CP), pp. 1,6). Let us examine both papers for what they said.

It is clear from even a cursory reading of the Red Papers (published by RU) that the UFAI is a strategy for socialist revolution. If VVAW/WSO is to consciously or unconsciously become part of that strategy, we believe that the UFAI must be critically analyzed. Unfortunately, both the California Papers (Venice Chapter & California Sub-regional Coordinator--Venice and Snake, respectively) did not deal with the strategy itself but confined themselves to analyzing the objective conditions existing in the U.S. While we agree with both of those papers with regard to their analysis of what the actual conditions are, we are disappointed at their uncritical acceptance of the UFAI strategy. That leaves the NO to claim that a UFAI is still in its infant stages and conditions are not yet appropriate for the formation of an actual organization (although this is ultimately what they have in mind). Thus, at this time, states the NO, we need not accept the vets-GI focus (which in our view can have no objective purpose outside of the UFAI).

We also want to preface our remarks by stating that it is not unity, or the basic idea of unifying as many people as possible, that we object to. To oppose unity would be analogous to passing on the flag. The crux of the UFAI strategy is to unite as many people as possible around a minimum program. It is the history and practice of pushing minimum programs in a united front to which we especially object. The NO lumps together several fingers, each one united around a minimum program, which according to the guiding palm (RU?) are objectively anti-imperialist even if the demands themselves are reformist. Somehow, not exactly explained by either RU or NO, we are expected to turn vets concerned with getting VA checks on time into dedicated revolutionaries. Minimum programs in search of allies lead

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not to class consciousness, not to dedicated revolutionaries, but to coalitions with racists in Boston on the one hand and a strong resistance elsewhere to dealing with racism and sexism on the other, as major divisions preventing a unified working class. (The Venice Paper correctly criticizes the UC Paper for failing to deal with racism and sexism in VVAW/USO).

The situation in Boston is a classic example. RU sees racism in that situation as secondary to the demand for better schools which capitalism refuses to provide. But the demand by whites to end busing (which RU supports) is not for better schools (RU's point of unity) but for whiter schools. The Black people are demanding better education and they understand only too well that money gets spent on schools with white children in them. RU's attempt to unify with those putting forth racist demands seems to lead away from unity with Third World people having a national consciousness. Worse, any unity (assuming it could be achieved) around busing would go no further, as the divisions of those in South Boston are much greater than any superficial unity that might be achieved around the issue of busing.

The UFAI assures, without justification in our view, that revolutionary consciousness can be built from fighting what are essentially reform battles. We believe that only by specifically building working class consciousness, by developing a 'world view', and by involving ourselves in those struggles that further that consciousness will we be able to fulfill the need for a revolutionary force when the opportunity for revolution is greatest. This is the opposite of what the UC proposes. In their original paper (p. 15) one finds this quote: "It is the very nature of a mass organization that there be widely divergent political outlooks. It does not have the political unity to achieve a complete world view, nor should it." (Emphasis supplied). We believe that we should be constantly pushing for a 'world view'. What kind of organization, what kind of revolutionary organization, would we be if that were not one of our goals? Certainly as a mass organization it should not be a requirement to be a part of the organization or to work on its programs, but to rule out the possibility of having a 'world view' leads nowhere, much less to a revolutionary class consciousness. The achievement of such a 'world view' will not come about by osmosis, but only if we want it and then work to accomplish it.

The UFAI assumes that the unity of minimum programs will be stronger than the divergences between the groups "united" when the time comes to challenge state power. The history of the various coalitions built in the US and the proven ability of the UC ruling class to coopt and destroy these coalitions leads us to the opposite conclusion: the divergences will be greater than the unity. A further question arises from RU's assumption that the UFAI will be, and is being, led by the working class; one is forced to wonder, as the Venice Chapter and Snake's paper did, about who the hell they have in mind at this time. With organized labor having organized only 25% of the working force and with organized labor itself being almost uniformly class-collaborationist, what leadership, what unity, what organizations of the working class are they talking about? Is it possible

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that they are talking about RU? Or whatever name RU as a Party calls itself?

Finally, we believe that a strategy derived from anti-imperialist military struggles in China and Viet-Nam and from a 1936 strategy to protect the Soviet Union prior to World War II is not an appropriate strategy given the objective conditions in the US today. Indeed, examining these examples clearly distinguishes them from present conditions in our country. The United Front in Europe (pre World War II) (the Popular Front) was a strategy, not of revolution, but one of defense of the Soviet Union primarily, and as a defense against the rise of facism in the European countries. Thus, communists were bound by the needs of the Soviet Union. They specifically refrained from raising communist, or even socialist, demands (despite parliamentary successes and widespread reforms) for fear of alienating capitalist powers with which the Soviet Union was attempting to ally itself against the German threat to the West. The Popular Front government in France was destroyed when it failed to actively support the worker's government in Spain and when the Popular Front government was unable to prevent growing inflation. Throughout Europe the Popular Front emphasized minimum demands and the fascist threat. The Popular Front in Spain was crushed by fascist intervention and Soviet surges. Except for a brief period in Spain, these "United Fronts" deliberately refrained from pressing demands that could lead to socialist transformation of society. One by one they lost the support and unity which had given them the ability to wage and win parliamentary and other reform struggles.

The United Front in China and Viet-Nam were completely different. There the Chinese were faced with an imperialist occupying power. A broad base of people were united, not around a program for socialism, but rather a military struggle to defeat Japanese Imperialism. In a country 96% peasant, the Chinese communists were calling for "new Democracy", including the promise of land reform. In Viet-Nam, the situation is quite similar: a foreign aggressor, a history of cultural nationalism and a peasant population demanding land reform. Successful revolutions can and have been built from a united front approach applied to these conditions. But certainly no one would suggest that the overall conditions in the US are even remotely similar. In this country, imperialism means the system of monopoly capitalism, not a foreign occupying force.

In summary, we do not share the conviction of the NO and RU that the United Front with minimum demands is an appropriate strategy for the US. We believe that it's continual emphasis on unity, unity, unity leads to consideration of issues of race and sex as "secondary" and something presumably to be dealt with after the revolution. The lack of emphasis on these aspects in the program the NO lays out further demonstrates that the strategy of a vets-CI focus makes sense only if seen in the context of a United Front. If the United Front does not make sense, neither does a vets-CI focus that 'logically' flows from it.

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II. VETS AND GI FOCUS

The simplistic way the UC "clarifies" what it means by focus in terms of analogies of ducks and bears is insulting and paternalistic. We fully agree with Snake's comments and analysis regarding the primary contradictions facing vets. We agree with both Snake's Paper and the Venice Chapter Paper with regard to the effect of the adoption of a vets and GI focus on the organization.

We agree with those papers that objectively looking at the conditions in the US today, a united front does not exist, except by using the most tortured logic. Certainly, there are many people rebelling against oppressive conditions. But to transform this isolated and, generally, spontaneous resistance into an objective united front (even a baby one), especially one against imperialism, is wishful thinking.

We also agree most particularly with Snake's analysis of the 'primary-secondary' contradictions oppressing veterans. In St. Louis, we cannot think of one veteran who has ever joined our chapter because he or she was oppressed by being a veteran, in the most accepted sense. Most of the veterans have done so because they were anti-war. Those who have remained have done so because of an increased awareness of the imperialism explicit in their experience. They see VVAW/USO as a vehicle for utilizing that experience to fight imperialism, to expose it at every turn and to organize others to fight it. One way we do this is by showing that Viet Nam was not a mistake (contrary to a rumor VVAW had a lot to do with spreading). We are able to show that today's fading economy is imperialism's chickens coming home to roost.

Finally, we agree that the result of the vets-GI focus would be to drive out half of the organization, particularly those members who struggle with us daily on issues of sexism and veteran chauvinism. (We do not perceive much struggle on the issue of racism in VVAW/USO, which is not surprising for a nearly all-white organization.) This is definitely true in St. Louis. For these reasons, we urge our brothers and sisters to carefully examine their own chapters, compare them with what the UC states already exists, compare their experience, and reject a vets and GI focus.

III. THE FUTURE OF VVAW/USO

One of the things lacking in the California papers is a sufficient statement on their views on the future of the organization. It appears that these papers would continue the general anti-imperialist stance of the organization while taking advantage of our veteran GI base to work with issues in which that base still gives us a basic credibility. With the addition of some thoughts on the context of our GI work, discussed below, we basically agree with that focus. But before going further, we want to emphasize what we mean by base and focus. The issues we outline below, which already compose most or all of our

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present work take advantage of our base but do not necessarily appeal primarily to veterans. Thus, the question seems to present itself posed as to whether one is interested in what is being said or to whom it is being said. The order these issues are discussed does not indicate priority, except that we would like to add that we place very high priority on GI organizing when it is done in the context discussed at the end of this paper.

We believe that our work around amnesty and Indochina are important struggles in the overall battle against imperialism. The former attempts to legitimize the right of people to resist imperialist wars and the latter attempts to support the defeat of imperialism in its rawest form in Indochina. We are given special credibility on both these issues because of our veterans base. Amnesty is regarded as a "slap in the face" to veterans. We can destroy that myth. We can continue to 'shine a light in the ugly face of imperialism' (which is what WSI's are all about), as we have so successfully in the past, by demonstrating the criminal nature of the war. We can demonstrate what we have learned (and how we have learned it) and show that Viet-Nam was not a mistake to be corrected but a deliberate imperialist venture and the natural consequence of a capitalist economy. There is broad sentiment against our involvement in Viet-Nam. While the issue of amnesty is alive we can structure that sentiment into an anti-imperialist sentiment.

We can and should support the struggles of workers as the economy inevitably demands more from them. Our study and our organizing experience and our veteran experience can help show that economic conditions today are directly linked to imperialism (especially in Indochina).

While we are inclined to believe that a successful combination of politics, expertise and financial support has not yet developed to measure the value of its work, we have developed serious reservations in that regard. Our experience indicates that any honest attempt to upgrade discharges takes an inordinate amount of work and financial support in relation to the numbers of people potentially affected. We still believe the discharge system affords an ideal example of the class nature of the military system and the use of the punitive discharge to keep working class people oppressed and divided. However, in the context of millions of veterans and even more millions of workers, whether we should drain our resources so severely to reach a few thousand (who may or may not be recruited as a result) is, in our view an open question. In addition, our experience in the past half a year is that additional numbers of less than honorably discharged vets are seeking upgrades in order to get back into the service because of economic hardship on the outside. The Military Law Project has had recruiters calling in rush orders so they can meet their quota.

There is no question in our mind about GI organizing. We should be doing GI organizing on all levels: active duty, reservists and National Guard. This organizing should not be done around broad slogans (as MO and RU propose) but rather around issues which will raise the class consciousness of these

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within the military. That the military is the armed protector of the state is well understood. But who controls the state? The class nature of the state must be emphasized. Thus, rebellions against the existing order such as the ghetto riots, the strike of independent truckers, threaten the interests of the propertied classes and their interests alone. And what clearer example of imperialist war than Indochina? Objectively, no other class but the capitalists could gain economic or political benefits from the subjugation of that area of the world.

We need to raise class consciousness so that the ruling class may not count on its army to fight wars of imperialism; so that it may not count on its army to crush strikes and protect scabs; and ultimately so that it will identify with its own class, the working class, when that class inevitably raises questions of state power. This work should be done with a socialist (working class) perspective. It should be done in unity with, not in opposition to, the rest of the GI movement. It should be done among active duty GI's, reservists, and National Guard. We are well equipped to do the work because of our veteran and GI base and because our level of political understanding and experience has made us aware of the importance of the armed forces to the continued survival of the ruling class and capitalist oppression.

Because of the importance which we attach to this issue, members of our chapter who have been doing GI organizing for several years have prepared a more detailed analysis and program for GI organizing within VVAW/USO, and the GI movement in general, which we hope will add to the tone and level of political discussion in our organization today. We urge you to read it and discuss it.