

(Chicago, Illinois)

18 October, 1974

NATIONAL GI CONFERENCE

For the first time in over two years there was a national GI organizing conference, during the weekend of October 11 - 14, 1974, in Chicago, Illinois. Called by Vietnam Veterans Against the War/Winter Soldier Organization (VVAW/WSO), this important conference was attended by 60 people working with 25 GI groups across the country. In addition to summarizing people's experience, there was long and principled struggle over many different theoretical points effecting GI organizing. There was also discussion over ways in which programmatic unity could be achieved.

Conference participants agreed that the bourgeoisie would not hesitate to attempt to use its military forces to suppress national liberation struggles around the world or to suppress liberation struggles here in this country; that they will continue to conduct campaigns of intimidation, harassment and suppression of other progressive struggles here and abroad; and that the military will continue to be an oppressive, racist and sexist system for the people it bribes into service with ever-higher pay and re-enlistment bonuses, etc. One inherent weakness of this plan to use economic incentives for raising its military is that it is forced to hire its class enemies, the working class, to support its efforts against the working class and other progressive elements both overseas and at home. This weakness combined with growing militancy on the part of GIs has already led to many situations where GIs are refusing to do someone else's 'dirty work' for them. The military authorities have responded with increased discipline and harassment while arbitrarily enforcing already repressive regulations, and letting working and living conditions deteriorate.

There was complete agreement on the fact that the GI movement is an important part of the overall struggle for socialism in this country and that the development of class unity is essential. Participants at the conference did, however, recognize that

there were political differences over certain issues. It is important to note, also, that the conference did not divide into two or three monolithic camps over differences, as there were a variety of positions on many issues.

One such topic was the important issue of the double oppression of Third World GIs. There was no disagreement that it is essential to unity and final victory that oppression of nationalities be smashed. All participants felt as though it is necessary to support the right of Third World GIs to establish separate Third World organizations within the GI movement. Some participants felt as though at this time it is essential to encourage separate Third World organizations as the best way of ultimately developing GI unity and class unity. Other participants felt it is necessary to encourage multi-national forms as the best means to developing that unity. A resolution was passed that called for upholding the right to self-determination of oppressed nationalities and that the development of independent Third World forms of organization is essential as a way of building unity between GIs.

Another such difference came about over the issue of women's oppression in the military. All participants felt it necessary to support the right of women to form independent organizations/caucuses within the GI movement. Some felt women should not be encouraged to form independent organizations/caucuses within the GI movement - that to do so indicates a weakness in the overall effort to end women's oppression. Other participants felt that at this time it is necessary to encourage such independent organizations so that women have a material base for control of their lives. Everyone agreed it is essential to place special consideration on the oppression of Third World women in the military. A resolution was passed that called for upholding the right of women to organize themselves into autonomous women's groups/caucuses within the GI movement and that special oppression of Third World women must be exposed. In addition, a resolution was passed establishing a task force to analyze the practice on these issues and to identify problem areas with women in the military (both active duty, reservists and mem-

bers of military families) as well as to make programmatic suggestions for the future.

Another major difference was around the issue of the role of GIs. There was no disagreement about the necessity to develop working class consciousness among GIs nor that efforts at working with GIs are an important part of our efforts to build a socialist revolution in this country. The differences came down to the position that GIs hold in society. One position holds that GIs are workers; that they do not play exactly the same role as workers because of their special position of enforcing imperialist foreign and domestic policies, but they are so similar that the two can and should be treated in a like manner. Another position is that GIs are not "workers" in a theoretical sense - that they play a different role from workers in society predominantly because they hold a special position as a body of armed people to carry out the policies of imperialism. Still other participants said that in general GIs are not workers, as such, but at times, depending on their assignments, take on similar roles and can be approached at that time as "workers".

The final major difference was around the concept of a United Front Against Imperialism as the strategy to building a socialist revolution in this country. The positions on this strategy were much more varied and diverse, although two main approaches seemed to develop. One position holds that the UFAI is the correct strategy to building a socialist revolution in this country and incorporates the GI movement into this strategy. The other position rejects the United Front strategy, basing its arguments on the historical use of united fronts. This position did, however, include the tactical use of united fronts around specific issues.

Some of the other issues and topics discussed at the conference were tactics in counseling, defense committee work, attacking the UCMJ, amnesty, attacking the discharge system, attacking the brass's tool of anti-homosexuality, discussion of the use of the Reserves and National Guard and our tasks in organizing those people.

In addition to the above, the conference passed a variety of resolutions, which included: A resolution to analyze the class, national, sexual and tactical composition of each service and the bases of the US military; to strengthen ties between the labor struggles and the GI movement; to attack as a divisive tool the brass's anti-homosexual tactics; to raise GI consciousness around riot control/martial law activities of the US military; to support the Anti-NATO soldiers conference being held in Holland this November and to send delegates to it; to support Puerto Rican independence and send a letter of solidarity to the upcoming rally in Madison Square Garden in New York City; to financially support and increase the input into the work of the GI Project Alliance in San Diego in their efforts to publish the GIPA News and Discussion Bulletin, the internal bulletin of the GI movement; that the GI Assistance Project in St. Louis, MO, or the VVAW/WSO National Office be the center for GI-related film distribution to the various projects; and a call for demonstrations at or near US bases all over the world, where feasible and desirable, on Armed Forces Day, 1975 (May 17).

The vast majority of participants viewed this as the most productive GI organizing conference they have attended and that the ideological struggle was advanced to an even higher level in a principled and positive manner. Plans were made to hold regional conferences and to call another National Conference next year.

The following groups participated in the Conference:

- American Friends Service Committee - Chicago
- Black Military Resistance League - Norfolk, Virginia
- Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors(CCCO) - Chicago
- Center for Servicemen's Rights - San Diego, California
- The Covered Wagon - Mt. Home, Idaho
- Defense Committee/Charleston, South Carolina
- Defense Committee/Jacksonville, North Carolina
- Defense Committee/Tidewater, Virginia
- GI Union - Ft. Bragg - South Carolina
- GI Assistance Project - St. Louis, Missouri
- Military Law Project - Baltimore, Maryland
- National Lawyers Guild
- Pacific Counseling Service/Military Law Office - San Francisco, California

Third World Political Education Project - Cleveland, Ohio
Third World Political Education Project - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Vietnam Veterans Against the War/Winter Soldier Organization/Colorado
Springs, Colorado
Vietnam Veterans Against the War/Winter Soldier Organization/Columbus, Ohio
VVAW/WSO/Dayton, Ohio
VVAW/WSO/Denver, Colorado
VVAW/WSO/National Office
VVAW/WSO/Tacoma, Washington
WILDCAT - Evanston, Illinois

Observers

Center for National Security Studies - Washington, DC
Los Angeles Military Law Panel

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT ANY OF THE ABOVE ORGANIZATIONS
BY REFERRING TO THE ENCLOSED "LIST OF GI MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS."

(Insert Bay Area Military Law Panel in list of participants)