



INSIDE / OUT

Same Struggle, Same Fight

No.17 VVAW Newsletter for Prisoners Aug 76

Militant Greetings:

With this newsletter comes the August-September issue of The Veteran, much of which is devoted to a description and discussion of the Bicentennial Demonstrations which took place in Philadelphia on the 1-4 of July. As usual, we invite your comments and criticisms of the paper or of particular articles in the paper.

In several letters which we have received since the demonstration, people have noted that there was little or no media coverage of what we were doing in Philadelphia. One brother pointed out that friends of his in prison had asked what happened to the demonstration and seemed to be saying that the demonstrations couldn't have been real if they weren't on television. Well, they were real, as you can see from the newspaper.

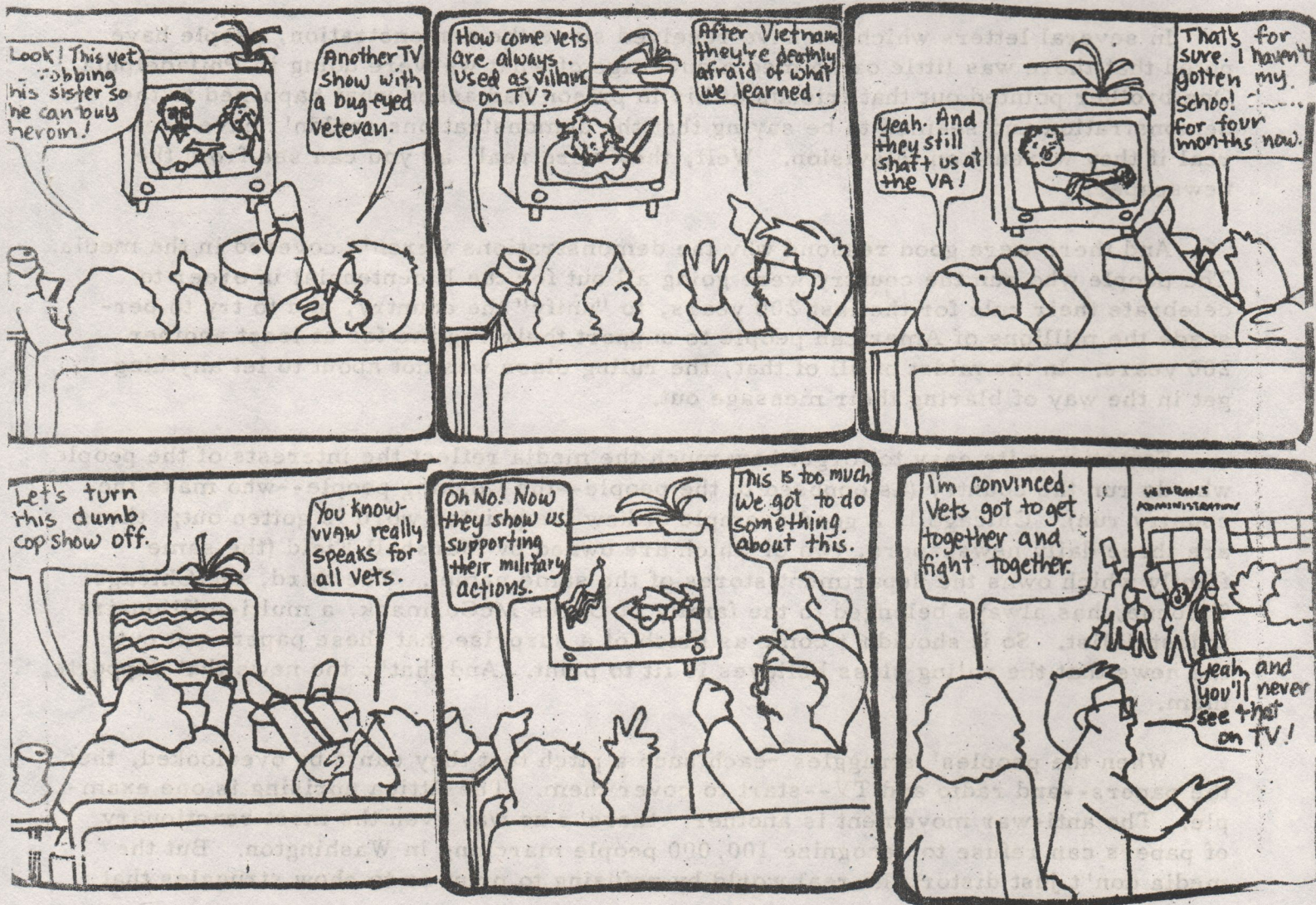
And there were good reasons why the demonstrations weren't covered in the media. The people who run the country were going all out for the Bicentennial in order to celebrate their rule for the last 200 years, to "unify" the country, and to try to persuade the millions of American people to support their regime for at least another 200 years. In the midst of all of that, the ruling class was not about to let anything get in the way of blaring their message out.

Sometimes its easy to forget how much the media reflect the interests of the people who do run the country (as opposed to the people--the working people--who make the country run). Chicago is a good example of how the printed word is gotten out; there are three daily newspapers, two of which are owned by Marshall Field (the same family which owns the department stores of the same name). The third, the Chicago Tribune, has always belonged to the family of Cyrus McCormack, a multi-millionaire industrialist. So it shouldn't come as much of a surprise that these papers put out the news that the ruling class believes is fit to print. And that's the news that supports them.

When the peoples' struggles reach such a pitch that they can't be overlooked, then the papers--and radio and TV--start to cover them. The Attica uprising is one example. The anti-war movement is another; there's no way even the most reactionary of papers can refuse to recognize 100,000 people marching in Washington. But the media don't just distort the real world by refusing to print or to show struggles that

they don't agree with. They also have the job of putting out the reasons why things happen. Very few of the media, for instance, would say anything other than that Nixon finally ended the war in Vietnam. Few papers mentioned the fact that not only were the Vietnamese victorious on the battlefield but the anger of the American people presented Nixon and Congress with such a threat to their rule (and the rule of the rich who pull their strings) that they had no choice but to turn tail and get out of Southeast Asia.

The media operate in more subtle ways to influence how we see the world. The treatment of Vietnam veterans on TV, for instance--vets are either crazy or they're cops. This is no accident; so many Vietnam vets could see through the lies about how we were defending democracy in Vietnam that the rulers of the country have to do anything and everything they can to discredit the veterans. Or look at the treatment of prisons in the media (if you can find any--there isn't much). The way in which the courts and the prisons function is a clear indictment of the system of which they are a part, so they are covered as little as possible. During the time when the brothers at McAlester in Oklahoma were waging a fierce struggle against oppressive conditions there the papers were reporting riots--but never the conditions which gave rise to the rebellions (which is what they were; not riots). When a struggle breaks into print it's usually the result of the building of enough of a mass movement around it that the media can no longer refuse to mention it.



There is reality and then there's the media view of reality which reflects, faithfully, what the ruling class would like people to think. That's one of the reasons why we believe a paper like The Veteran is important--not only to give a different view on the events going on around us but to give a picture of the real work and the real world that will never appear in the Chicago Tribune or any of its many cousins around the country. Like these papers, The Veteran and its articles has the stand of a class--but it's the stand of the people who work, not those who exploit the workers.

DEATH PENALTY

On July 2, the U. S. Supreme Court voted seven to two to restore the use of the death penalty. Making no bones about "detering crime," the justices upheld legal execution on the grounds that it was "society's retribution." Just who's in line for "retribution" and just exactly who in "society" is going to decide who's executed and who isn't?

A lot of murders go down in this country. Many of the 600 prisoners on death row are convicted murderers and some of them are sure to die with this new ruling. Some of them are guilty of truly terrible crimes and, at least under capitalism, won't change. But when the Scotia mine in eastern Kentucky blew up last March 9, killing 15 miners, were the bosses responsible indicted for this mass murder? Hardly. To the capitalists killing workers on the job is not murder, it's business. When a striker was run over and killed on the picket line in the Capitol strike in Chicago last year, were the scab-herders drawn up on charges? Of course not. There's justice and then there's "Justice."

No one has been executed by the ruling class in the U. S. since 1967--leaving aside the thousands of murders they commit every year, from revolutionaries like Fred Hampton to workers in the steel mills and the hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese and GIs killed during the war. In the 60's the mass struggle in this country was very intense, bringing national oppression and wars of aggression under fire, and also hitting at the death penalty. A number of court suits were filed challenging various states' capital punishment laws. They said that many of these laws were discriminatory, inconsistent, and arbitrary.

What these battles pointed to was that defendants who ended up with death sentences were almost 100% working class, poor, or minorities, while no rich person ever died in the gas chamber or the electric chair. These cases wound up in the Supreme Court in 1972, where the court ruled that the states had to redraw their death penalty laws to make them seem fairer and more rational. Meanwhile, executions were held up.

Since the 1972 decision, the ruling class had tried to get a bandwagon rolling for the death penalty "in the interests of deterring crime." They have to take the heat off themselves and their system, the real source of crime. In this recent decision the justices pointed out that no one has been able to prove that capital punishment stops people from committing crimes. It "might," they said, "Hold back the carefully contemplated murders, such as murders for hire." This is a little hard to swallow--few professional hit men ever get caught, that's what makes them professionals. But

for whatever excuse they serve up, the ruling class of capitalists have now gotten their laws "straightened out" and once again added legal execution to all the other kinds of death they deal out.

The working class is not opposed to the death penalty in the abstract or on grounds of sentimentality. But in the hands of the capitalists the death penalty is a dangerous weapon. It can do nothing to control crime, which is rooted in the capitalist system itself. It has been and will be in the future used by them as a weapon against the people.

Time and time again the death penalty has been used by the ruling class to murder revolutionary workers. The Haymarket martyrs who were in the thick of the struggle for the eight hour day; Joe Hill, who tirelessly fought to organize the working class in the days before industrial unions; Sacco and Vanzetti; the Pennsylvania miners of the Molly Maguires--all were put to death for fighting against the capitalists.

The death penalty was not used just to kill these fighters, but to intimidate the masses of workers and to hold over their heads the threat of execution if they dared fight the capitalists' rule. During the Black liberation struggle of the late 60's, several leaders, including Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, faced frame-ups that threatened the death penalty.

The biggest criminals in society are the ruling class who exploit and oppress hundreds of millions of people in this country and around the world. Their hands are drenched in blood. There can be no justice in them taking the lives of others, even those who are guilty of crimes like murder.

Only when the working class is in power will it be possible to punish the master criminals, the capitalists, deal with the common criminals and begin to build a completely new type of society where exploitation, wars and other brutal crimes will be a thing of the past.



ATTICA

On July 11th, struggle erupted once again at Attica prison. A and D yards were once again filled by hundreds of inmates fighting against intolerable conditions, as in September, 1971.

It began when four guards attempted to search the cell of a prisoner who had been placed in solitary confinement for "directing abusive language at a guard." They claim he "assaulted and injured" four guards and they beat him, breaking his jaw. A half hour later when the guards tried to close A and D yards recreation areas, the inmates refused to leave and fighting broke out. Four more guards were injured and they retreated, leaving the men in control of the yards. They held them for four hours and finally retreated to their cells when confronted with shotguns and tear gas.

The authorities try to portray prisoners as animals, who deserve any sort of treatment the prison wardens and guards want to dish out. But aside from a few hard core criminals, the majority of prisoners are working class people, jammed through the capitalists; courts with few rights or even minimal legal assistance given and the spit into jails. Many of the biggest criminals--like the Mafia Dons who head up large criminal syndicates--go free; not to mention the capitalists themselves whose whole system is based on the robbery of the working class.

Prisons do nothing to stop crime. In fact, they breed crime, filling many prisoners full of hatred and desperation. But prisons are also breeding resistance too, as authorities try to force people to live like animals and they rebel.

While the prison superintendent denied that Attica was a "powder keg," the truth is that struggle had been ready to explode for a while. The population was over 2000, more than 500 over the maximum. The week before the July 11 uprising, 125 inmates submitted a petition from the "concerned inmate population" which demanded the State Commissioner of Corrections meet with the prisoners and that any failure to meet with them would be "costly." The petition demanded answers to questions like why 70% of the prisoners are from New York City but are kept at Attica, far away from their families; demanded less harassment around visiting; a real work release program; an educational program that was more than a publicity hype; better food and sanitary conditions, such as having the potatoes and rice washed before cooking and allowing mess hall workers time to shower before handling food; better health care; and other demands.

The demands were similar to those in 1971, and have been ignored. After the 1971 uprising the population was reduced and some token concessions were made and all efforts were bent to prevent struggle from arising again.

These battles sent chills up the capitalists' spines. The 1971 uprising united 1200 men of different nationalities in a determined fist aimed at the capitalist system itself. In trying to defeat this struggle they murdered over 40 men and spent years in the courtroom trying to win murder convictions against some Attica fighters. But the name of Attica is a battle cry for prisoners everywhere. The original revolt sparked other in prisons around the country. The continuation of the Attica brothers unity and determination shows that despite the capitalists' fierce repression, they cannot crush peoples' hatred for them or their will to fight back.

VETERANS: CLOSE RANKS!

Around the country VVAW chapters and members are taking up the campaign to EXPAND AND EXTEND THE GI BILL. One of the ways in which we are building this campaign is through the petition on the next page.

The problems that veterans and working people in general face in this country are much wider than just the GI Bill. All around us we can see the marks of a system in crisis, whether its the jobless rate, inflation, over crowding of prisons, decaying housing or the threat of another war. And when their system is in trouble, the rich try like hell to squeeze every nickel that doesn't bring them a profit. For veterans in particular this shows up in the way the GI Bill is being challenged.

When veterans returning from World War II fought for and won the right to an education, the US ruling class was sitting on top of the world. Their economy was expanding--not only did they have enough profits to be able to afford the GI Bill but they were in need of skilled and "educated" workers. No more. Today the GI Bill isn't adequate for vets to get by on. And every place in the country it is being attacked--whether through sudden attendance requirements, discoveries of "incorrect payments," late checks or monitoring grades. All of these harassments and restrictions are aimed toward one thing: to get as many vets as possible off the GI Bill.

VVAW says no way. We aren't going to stand for these attacks anymore than we're going to sit idly by and watch all the other abuses that the rich think they can heap on us. The attack on the GI Bill is an attack on all vets, whether we're using the Bill right now, or if we were among the 3.7 million vets whose eligibility was cut off on Memorial Day, or if we're already through school or working without ever planning to use the Bill at all. And VVAW is saying that not only do vets have to stand up to meet these attacks, but we also have to take the offensive in order to get the GI Bill expanded and extended, that all restrictions be dropped.

We don't plan to take these petitions, which are being taken out across the country, to our local VA or Congressperson to beg for a few crumbs. We know from our experience in the past that it's too easy for them to drop the petitions in the nearest trash can, or misuse them according to their own interests. Instead we plan to use the petitions in our demonstrations on Veterans Day and again in the future in order to say that there are thousands of veterans who stand with us even though they are not marching in our demonstration; they are here because they support what we are saying and doing, and here are their names.

We're asking you--those of you who are vets, and those who are not but who support the work we're doing--to get these petitions signed if possible and return them to us. All we can guarantee is that they will be used and used well as one more blow in the struggle against the rich and their puppets who are trying to crush us all.



PETITION



EXTEND and EXPAND the GI BILL

A lot of promises were made to vets. American corporations needed us to fight their wars. We were forced to do their dirty work--to get killed, wounded or disabled in wars like Indochina only so that they could continue to bring in profits from foreign plunder.

But what about today? Millions of working people are unemployed--for Vietnam-era vets, 1 out of 4 is unemployed and a record high 1.8 million are on the GI Bill. But, inadequate payments barely cover school costs let alone provide enough to live on. Do we get any help? Hell no! In schools around the country, educational services are being cut back and tuition is being jacked up. To top it off, for vets the government is planning more cutbacks, late checks, more restrictions, cutoffs in eligibility, and attempts to end the GI Bill for people now entering the military. We say enough! We're not going to let the rich give us the shaft again. Once they made us fight for them, but our fight's against them.

WE DEMAND:

- PAYMENT OF ALL SCHOOL EXPENSES PLUS A DECENT LIVING ALLOWANCE!**
- AN END TO GI BILL RESTRICTIONS!**
- NO CUTOFF IN THE GI BILL!**

name

address

PETITION

EXTEND AND EXPAND

the GI Bill

A lot of promises were made to our American servicemen and women during World War II. One of the most important was the GI Bill. It was supposed to give us a way to get a college education, to get a job, to get a home, to get a better life. But now, almost 20 years later, we are still waiting. We are still waiting for the GI Bill to be extended and expanded. We are still waiting for the GI Bill to be made permanent. We are still waiting for the GI Bill to be made a part of our national heritage. We are still waiting for the GI Bill to be made a part of our national identity. We are still waiting for the GI Bill to be made a part of our national pride. We are still waiting for the GI Bill to be made a part of our national strength. We are still waiting for the GI Bill to be made a part of our national future.

WE DEMAND
 PAYMENT OF ALL UNPAID BENEFITS TO ALL VETERANS
 AND TO ALL ELIGIBLE PERSONS

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