

THE Y.S.A. ON VETERANS

The article printed at the bottom of this page was taken from a document entitled, "THE CRISIS CONFRONTING YOUTH: A Strategy To Fight Back and Win." The document was printed in the November, 1975 issue of *The Young Socialist*, the newspaper put out by the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA).

The document itself was written as a contribution for consideration at the YSA National Convention to be held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at UW-Milwaukee from December 28, 1975 to January 1, 1976.

It should be emphasized that this particular section of the entire document is NOT the official position of the YSA at this time. Such a decision won't be made until the convention.

Normally the Wisconsin Veterans Union does not engage in discussions of this type, so a word of explanation is in order.

We feel that the YSA is made up of people who are honestly trying to change a very messed up world. We also feel that the YSA reflects the type of organizational and political groups we can work with. But, in order for them to be able to work with us (and we feel veterans in general) it is first necessary that they take a correct position vis-a-vis the problems which face veterans.

We are not endorsing the YSA as the perfect organization, or even the only organization, veterans should work with, we are saying however, that we are sufficiently impressed with their dedication and honesty to take out time to correct what we feel is a document that has many serious errors in it.

We ask veterans to read their document, and our critique, and to tell WVU what you think about both. We also encourage veterans to seek out YSA people and talk to them about veteran related problems.

INTRODUCTION

The problems we have with the document are three in number:

- 1.) It lumps veterans and G.I.s together in one general grouping.
- 2.) Some of the demands put forth are so general as to not be demands at all.
- 3.) Some of the demands are just plain incorrect.

G.I.s ARE NOT VETS

The document is entitled, "Full rights for GIs and vets!" Thus, the YSA commits an error which is often committed. It lumps veterans and GIs into the same bag.

We will be the last to suggest that there is not a great similarity in outlook and perception between veterans and GIs. After all, every vet was a GI, and every GI will be a vet. Yet, it is very wrong to lump the two categories together.

The problems that face GIs stem from the fact that they are in the military. This by itself restricts their ability to both organize and to struggle for the things they want. In order for GIs to even begin to make serious gains, they will have to overcome two obstacles: The military itself, and their own lack of organization. *The fight inside the military is basically a fight for basic democratic rights!* And, it is that fight which overshadows everything else. Any gains GIs may want to make run head on into

the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), which denies GIs most of the basic rights we all take for granted: right to assemble, free speech, and freedom of the press. The document points that out in a general way, but it still seems to lump the need to fight for democratic rights inside the military along with the need of veterans to defend the material gains veterans have made and need to extend.

GIs are certainly interested in what goes on inside the veterans community; after all, they too will one day become part of that community. But, the interest is on almost an academic plane when contrasted with the many and varied problems GIs face inside of the military! GIs are interested in being able to wear any length hair they want; GIs are interested in being able to print and distribute newsletters; GIs are interested in being able to do away with Article 15s; GIs are interested in keeping their COs and First Sergeants from being able to go through a GI's personal possessions any time they want to; and, GIs are interested in being able to question orders they feel are either wrong or ridiculous.

Veterans, on the other hand, already have the basic democratic rights which GIs lack. What veterans have to do is to turn these democratic rights into a power tool to win a better GI Bill, to improve VA hospitals, and to make sure they have jobs.

In short, GIs need to win democratic rights, while veterans need to expand upon them. The general goals and orientation are very different, and to lump the two groups into one general classification will only mean that neither will be understood.

VAGUENESS

Most of the demands that are put forth in the document are much too vague.

If this document is to be a real program (and not just a statement of general principles) then the demands must be clearer.

One section states: *We demand full educational, vocational, and health benefits for all veterans. The YSA supports the struggles of veterans on campus for higher financial grants, better medical treatment, and special vocational counseling.* It sounds nice, but what does it all mean?

First, it calls for better education and medical treatment for all veterans, and then calls for the same thing for veterans in school. Unless the YSA is calling for better treatment for veterans in school than on the street, this section seems to be redundant.

What the YSA should call for is:

- 1.) An educational package at least equal to that which veterans of WW 2 got.
- 2.) The massive upgrading of all V.A. hospitals, or allowing veterans to go to the hospital of their choice at government expense.
- 3.) The establishment of a VA Vet Rep for at least every 500 to 750 veterans in a school.
- 4.) The establishment of a cost-of-living escalator clause onto the G.I. Bill.
- 5.) The establishment of an independent commission consisting of Vietnam-era veterans who will have the power to oversee the VA, and to make policy changes if it so desires.

Such a program as we have outlined above would speak to the concrete and real needs veterans in this country have. They would serve as a starting point for veterans to be able to get what they need to live a decent life.

AMNESTY

The YSA document calls for: *The YSA demands unconditional amnesty for all Vietnam war resisters now in exile or prison.*

It is disheartening to see an otherwise solid organization fall into a classical error in regards to amnesty. Not only does the general demand fall far short of reality, it leaves out some huge categories of people who are in need of amnesty!

The demand is for *unconditional* amnesty while the objective need is for *universal, unconditional* amnesty. The inclusion of the word universal takes in all of the people who have been messed over by the government as a result of their contact with the military.

The way the present document is written, it leaves out the following categories:

- 1.) The almost 700,000 veterans who have less-than-honorable-discharges.
- 2.) The over 200,000 men who evaded the draft but were never prosecuted, but still have that threat hanging over them.
- 3.) The over 60,000 military and draft resisters living underground inside the United States.

We are afraid we must call into question a demand which leaves out almost 1 million people!

What the YSA should call for is:

- 1.) Universal, unconditional amnesty for all draft and military resisters.
- 2.) The upgrading of all less-than-honorable-discharges to honorable.
- 3.) The establishment of a single-type-discharge system within the military to see to it that no other veteran ever get a bad paper discharge again.

Such demands speak to the real issues of amnesty, and provide the framework by which such demands can be won.

CONCLUSION

We realize that this short article can not even begin to cover all of the questions raised. However, we look upon it as a working paper to be used as a guide to arrive at positions which are closer to reality and much more concrete.

We hope the YSA will take this article and the criticisms raised herein in the spirit in which it was written. We realize that it is very hard to come up with a good position the first shot out of the box, we hope this small contribution to the discussion will help to clarify and reorient the YSA in a better direction.

In the meantime, we again urge all veterans to study both of these articles and to draw their own conclusions. We also would like to hear from veterans both inside and outside of the YSA as to what they think.

Also, if any veteran would like to attend the YSA convention here in Milwaukee, we would like you to get in touch with WVU at The University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee, Box 75, 2200 E. Kenwood Ave., Milwaukee, WI., 53202.

Full Rights for GIs and Vets

(Editors Note: The following is a reprint from the YSA newspapers, *The Young Socialist*. We have reprinted it here in order to let our readers see the original document that we are talking about in the above article.)

Anyone interested should contact the YSA at UWM at (414) 963-5551, or stop by their office on the Third Floor of the UWM Student Union.)

High unemployment and rising tuition rates have given a boost to the Pentagon's efforts to meet its monthly recruitment quotas. Many thousands of young men, jobless and unable to afford college, are "joining up." In the army they expect at least to get food, housing, and a little spending money on the side. Many hope to leave the army with training and G.I. benefits that can help them get a good job or a college education.

During the 1960s, 30% of all draft age black youth were conscripted, compared to 18% of white youth. Today's astronomical unemployment in the black community has increased Black enlistment in the army still further. During the first 6 months of 1975, Blacks

made up 26% of all enlistments. About half of all Black GIs reenlist, compared to a third of the white soldiers.

The Pentagon is now worried that whites are discouraged from enlisting because they seek to avoid common living quarters and social contact with Blacks. The racist generals also fear that an army composed largely of Blacks would be unreliable in combat against a non-white "foreign enemy" or in crushing a strike or ghetto rebellion.

The Army is hardly the "road to opportunity" that the recruitment ads pretend. The unemployment rate for veterans aged 20-24 this year hovered between 17-21%. Veterans on the college campuses are forced to get by on extremely small grants, and their money is often held up through bureaucratic red-tape. The low quality medical care provided at federal veterans' hospitals is scandalous.

As usual, the situation is particularly severe for Blacks and other minorities. Black GIs are overrepresented in combat units, averaging one-fifth of these positions, and underrepresented in areas that provide skills or training. For example, in 1972 Black soldiers held only 7.7% of the army's technical positions and 5.3% of its electronic positions.

Racism permeates every other aspect of military life as well. Blacks are two or three times more likely than whites to land in a military stockade, twice as likely to receive a less-than-honorable discharge, less likely to receive promotions, and dead certain to receive racial slurs and insults from racist officers and fellow soldiers.

If GIs organize to protest these conditions, they are immediately confronted with their status as second-class citizens. Because they are soldiers they have been stripped of their basic democratic rights. The fight for these rights is necessarily at the center of any GI struggle.

The anti-war sentiment generated by the Vietnam War runs high today both inside the army and among the millions of young people that the Pentagon will be forced to draft if it has to wage another major war. The continuing youth radicalization and the rising militancy of young workers do not bode well for Washington's chances of constructing a highly reliable army—either of volunteers or draftees.

The YSA is opposed to the reinstatement of the draft. We oppose the US military intervention in the affairs of other countries. No more Vietnam!

The YSA demands unconditional amnesty for all Vietnam war resisters now in exile or in prison.

We support full democratic rights for all GIs, in and out of uniform, on base and off. No citizen-soldier should lose any freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. We oppose all form of racial and sex discrimination inside the armed forces.

We demand full educational, vocational, and health benefits for all veterans. The YSA supports the struggles of veterans on campus for higher financial grants, better medical treatment, and special vocational counseling.