

NATIONAL OFFICE DRAFT OF VVAW/WSO's FIGHTING PROGRAM

The following is the National Office's draft of VVAW/WSO's fighting program for building the veterans movement. This program is to be printed as a pamphlet, along with photos and graphics, and used as a mass tool at VA regional office offices, campuses and wherever else chapters are working to organize and build their struggles. This is designed to be a mass, agitational pamphlet, laying out our program in such a way that the masses of vets can understand and unite with it. This draft is not yet complete and is being brought to this National Steering Committee Meeting so that we can get the in-put and ideas of the chapters and regions. Also, this draft program should serve as the basis of discussion in some of the workshops held at this meeting and these workshops should sum-up the demands and ideas put forward in this draft, i. e. are the demands correct? what's missing from the pamphlet and what needs to be expanded? what is superfluous and needs to be cut? etc. When you get right down to it, our program is what VVAW/WSO is; thus, we need to collectively make this pamphlet as good as can be.

DRAFT PROGRAM

They say cut back, but we are fighting back! That's what the over 50 chapters of Vietnam Veterans Against the War Winter Soldier Organization are doing around the country. We are out to carry the fight to every community, workplace, school, unemployment office and VA facility in the country around our national program.

Our program is being built around the day-to-day needs and problems of veterans. We are about the business of building a fighting veterans movement, a movement to wage battle on the VA and for jobs and against the war-makers. The government and big business are coming down heavy on all working and poor people with cutbacks, layoffs, speedups on the job and increased police repression in our communities. Along with these, vets face more attacks which come down mainly through the Veterans Administration.

Our campaign is not calling for some spare pocket change like the American Legion or VFW; nor are we asking for benefits as a reward for fighting a rich man's war in Indochina. We're fighting to get the benefits which were promised us and to raise all vets' benefits to a level where veterans and their families can live decently. We are fighting for Jobs or Income because they are the right of all people. And we are fighting against future rich man's wars because we have seen who is used as cannon fodder for those wars.

OUR DEMANDS

\*NO MORE RED TAPE. END MILITARY TYPE CONTROL OVER BENEFITS!

We know that the red tape and bureaucracy is deliberately used by the VA to discourage and prevent us from receiving our benefits. One Vietnam widow in New York City trying to get survivor benefits for her critically ill daughter was shuffled from office to office, chasing lost paperwork, being promised that someone would look into it; this went on for months. And there are hundreds of thousands of

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similar cases. WE DEMAND IMMEDIATE PROCESSING OF ALL CLAIMS AND APPEALS.

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The VA, like the military, makes its own laws and is answerable to no one but itself. They rule on veterans' disability payments in secret -- not letting the vet present his case before them. One vet in Chicago has been trying for months to get his inadequate disability payments raised. He wants to present his evidence showing that he can't get by on his small payment because of his disability, and he wants to know how the VA made its decision on his case. WE DEMAND OPEN HEARINGS. WE ALSO DEMAND AN END TO VA SECRECY. WE DEMAND THE RIGHT TO OUR OWN PHYSICIANS AT ALL DISABILITY EXAMS AND HEARINGS, AND THE RIGHT TO APPEAL THROUGH THE COURTS.

\*SINGLE-TYPE DISCHARGE AND FULL VA BENEFITS FOR ALL VETS!

600,000 Vietnam-era vets have less-than-honorable discharges and because of this, are denied full VA benefits. The regional VA offices have the authority to give these vets full benefits, but seldom do. WE DEMAND THE VA GIVE FULL BENEFITS TO ALL VETS REGARDLESS OF DISCHARGE.

The military uses bad discharges to threaten and punish GIs who refuse to take the harassment that the military hands out, and who fight back against racism, lousy conditions, and wars like Indochina. Some 35% of vets with bad discharges are Black and Latino. Bad discharges mean that a vet is not only screwed over by the VA, but it's hard as hell to find any kind of decent job -- mainly because employers treat badly discharged vets like they have leprosy. WE DEMAND A SINGLE-TYPE DISCHARGE, RETROACTIVELY FOR ALL VETS!

\*DECENT CARE AND FULL STAFF AT VA HOSPITALS. WE DEMAND THE RIGHT TO OUR CHOICE OF DOCTORS AND MEDICAL SERVICES AT GOV'T EXPENSE!

We've seen the rotten conditions that exist in VA hospitals around the country. One vet, paralyzed and unable to speak, was left in his wheelchair in a VA hospital elevator for 27 hours before anyone even noticed -- and his isn't an isolated case. Many vets don't even use their benefits because conditions are so bad. Many more don't even know they're eligible for treatment at all. Only about 15% of vets now use the VA. WE DEMAND FULL AND DECENT MEDICAL CARE FOR ALL VETS AND DEPENDENTS.

VA hospitals, like prisons and other institutions, use vets as guinea pigs for new drugs and surgical procedures without even letting the patients know what is happening to them. WE DEMAND THE VA IMMEDIATELY STOP USING VETS AS GUINEA PIGS!

Many VA hospitals are used primarily as warehouses to store away older vets until they die. Many who are either patients or live in VA housing are forced to work for the VA at menial jobs and slave wages. WE DEMAND THAT ALL OLDER VETS BE TREATED WITH RESPECT AND DIGNITY. MINIMUM WAGES FOR ALL WORKING PATIENTS.

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**\*DECENT WAGES FOR VA WORKERS. STOP HARASSMENT OF PATIENTS AND WORKERS!**

Cutbacks in VA staff and workers has seriously hurt any ability to give vets the care needed. Even before the recent round of cutbacks, the VA was ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ too cheap to hire enough people or pay them decent wages. Now they are trying to speed-up the workers who remain. WE SUPPORT THE STRUGGLES OF VA WORKERS FOR BETTER PAY AND WORKING CONDITIONS. NO MORE CUTBACKS!

Harassment of both workers and patients goes on all the time. The VA has all kinds of petty rules designed to make life tougher for workers and patients alike. DE-MILITARIZE THE VA.

**\*EDUCATION AND JOB-TRAINING FOR ALL VETS. EXTEND THE GI BILL!**

The present GI Bill makes it nearly impossible for working class and poor vets to go to school. There are all kinds of restrictions on how the Bill can be used. And the payments are well below federal poverty levels. WE DEMAND PAYMENT OF TUITION AND ALL SCHOOL-RELATED EXPENSES AND A LIVING ALLOWANCE AT FEDERAL MINIMUM STANDARDS.

One-third of the prisoners in state and federal prisons are Vietnam-era veterans. These vets face both the red tape of the VA and the bureaucracy and repression of the prison system, making it almost impossible to get the benefits which they are entitled to. WE DEMAND FREE ACCESS TO THE VA FOR ALL VETS IN PRISON!

The Ford administration has now asked that GI Bill benefits be cut off for anyone entering the military after June 30, 1975. WE DEMAND THERE BE NO CUT-OFF IN THE GI BILL.

WE DEMAND AN END TO TIME LIMITS ON ELIGIBILITY AND TO ALL RESTRICTIONS ON THE USE OF THE GI BILL.

**\*NO MORE DISCRIMINATION!**

Just like the military, the VA facilities and programs discriminate against Black, Latino and other minority vets. The lack of forms for Spanish-speaking vets is just one example of this. We will fight every instance of discrimination and the denial of rights against these minority people.

**\*NO MILITARY RECRUITERS AT THE VA. THROW OUT MISLEADERS OF VETS!**

By having recruiters in the VA buildings, and because jobs are hard to get, the VA is working hand-in-hand with the Pentagon to funnel vets back into the military. They do this by giving vets the option of remaining unemployed or re-uping.

Veterans organizations such as the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars are given free space in the VA. We know that these types of organizations don't really work in the interests of vets. They have historically supported and pushed for wars of aggression, like the Indochina war. And when the American Legion supported the budget cuts for the VA, we could see that they work more in the VA's interests than they do for vets. WE DEMAND THEY BE THROWN OUT OF THE VA ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

\*JOBS OR INCOME NOW!

As unemployment gets worse, vets are especially hard hit. It's the cause of the economic crisis and we won't suffer for it. It's the crisis of this rotten system -- the rich man's system. But they don't want to pay for it; instead, they try to push their crisis on to working people -- using layoffs and speedups and cutbacks. They lie about the economy, but we're not buying those lies. When we want work and there are no jobs to be found, we know that their system is rotten. **WE DEMAND JOBS FOR ALL!**

But this system can't provide all the jobs which people need. So, for all those people who can't get jobs, we demand a liveable income. That income should not stop just because some set number of weeks is over -- people have to eat every day even if they can't find jobs. **WE DEMAND A LIVEABLE INCOME FOR PEOPLE WHO CAN'T FIND WORK. NO TIME LIMIT ON UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.**

Just like the VA, the unemployment offices around the country are tangled up in a huge ball of red tape. This means late checks, and sometimes no checks for people who have no other way to live. **WE DEMAND AN END TO UNEMPLOYMENT RED TAPE AND WE ALSO DEMAND THAT OUR CHECKS BE ON TIME.**

Also, just as at the VA, military recruiters are becoming more prevalent in unemployment offices around the country. Hundreds of thousands of us went straight from the chow lines of the military to unemployment lines, and we won't end up in their chow lines again. The military is at unemployment offices because cannon-fodder is needed to fight in wars and unemployed workers are a good target for their lies about learning a skill and getting a steady job. But we were the cannon-fodder in the last rich man's war and we're demanding -- **THROW MILITARY RECRUITERS OUT OF UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICES.**

Because vets are uniting and fighting, many cities have come up with "Jobs for Vets" programs. They hire vets who need work under these special programs, pay less than for usual city workers, and then don't hire other people who need jobs. We say that the interests of all workers are our interests. **WE WON'T SCAB AND WE WON'T STARVE -- WE'LL FIGHT!**

\*WE WON'T FIGHT ANOTHER RICH MAN'S WAR!

Because we are a vets organization, we've seen what war is about. And we've seen whose interests a war like Vietnam serves. That war sure as hell didn't do anything for us or the Indochinese people; what it did was make a whole pile of profits for the rich. Because of the long and fierce fight of the people of Indochina, and because of the millions of people in the US and around the world who demanded that the war cease, the US government lost. But hundreds and thousands of US troops are still stationed all around the world, particularly in Europe and Korea. **WE DEMAND THE WITHDRAWAL OF US MILITARY FORCES FROM FOREIGN SOIL.**

Around the world, US military forces are used to prop up petty dictators just like the government propped up Thieu in Vietnam and Lon Nol in Cambodia. The US government does this simply to protect US interests -- which are the int,

terests of the rich. When the military isn't used, then the government sends in the CIA to do its dirty-work. WE DEMAND AN END TO INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF OTHER COUNTRIES.

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Above all, wars are used to try to get the US economic system out of its crisis. That happened with World War II, which got the country out of the Great Depression, and it has happened since. The government is clearly planning to use the same method again -- in the Middle East, Korea or somewhere else -- because it has to make war in order to try to escape from economic collapse. We were the cannon fodder for the last war and we learned that we won't do it again. We're telling all the other working class and poor people to join us in saying "WE WON'T FIGHT ANOTHER RICH MAN'S WAR."

TO FIGHT EFFECTIVELY AND WIN VICTORIES AGAINST THE VA AND THE BOSSES, WE MUST ORGANIZE AND RELY ON THE MASSES OF VETS!

From history, we know that the only way people have won victories over the government and the big business it represents was to rely on themselves and build a mass movement to fight for their demands. Look at the BONUS MARCH. In 1932, during the height of the depression, over 25,000 vets and their families went to Washington, DC to demand their bonus pay from World War I. Despite attempts by veterans groups such as the American Legion leadership, and various slick politicians to sidetrack their struggle, the vets finally relied on themselves and fought. Eventually, they forced the government to give them their money.

The same lesson comes out of the struggles of people for unemployment compensation. During the Depression, millions of people lost their jobs and had nothing to exist on. They organized into a National Unemployed Council with chapters in every major town and city. They fought the police and landlords, keeping hundreds of thousands of people from being evicted. They organized mass meetings and demonstrations with millions of people attending to demand unemployment insurance and federal relief payments. They finally forced the government to grant relief and unemployment insurance which we still have today. We must fight to keep and extend it.

Countless other struggles united people to win. Like the CIO fight to organize industrial unions and the struggles of Black people for civil rights and the struggle of millions of Americans against the war in Indochina. The main lessons of all these fights is that in order to win any real victories, we have to organize and rely on the masses of people, and unite to fight for our demands. That's just what the vets are doing today.

THE VA CAN'T MEET THE REAL NEEDS OF VETS

Some people have said, "If we have Vietnam vets as VA administrators, then we'll get good treatment," or "The real problem with the VA is that it's mis-managed." In fact, VA administrators, no matter who they are, and the VA apparatus as a whole is not answerable to the people they are supposed to serve. The VA is part of the federal government which works wholly in the interests of a small

wealthy class, and is answerable only to them.

Just for one example, the government presently spends \$5 billion a year to retired military officers. At the same time (in 1972), total VA benefits to Vietnam-era vets was \$2.4 billion (the VA now receives a budget of \$15 billion -- and still ran out of money before the end of the fiscal year 1975). The VA has actively promoted attacks on vets. In 1973, it proposed a 65% cut in disability ratings for Vietnam-era vets. The plan was shelved, temporarily, due to public pressure. More recently, it has gone through a series of cutbacks in personnel and services; fewer and fewer vets can get any kind of care, and almost none can get good care. The VA keeps a few model hospitals to show off when the pressure builds; the rest suffer just as their patients do.

World War II vets got much better benefits than Vietnam vets. And there's a clear reason. Immediately following the War, the US government tried to keep GIs in Europe as an occupation force, and to send GIs to China to put down the revolution going on there. GIs responded by organizing a mass "Back Home Movement" in which hundreds of thousands of GIs marched in the streets of France, Germany, the Philippines and Okinawa demanding that they be brought home immediately.

Not only was the US government faced with the militance of their own soldiers; the country's rulers had made piles of money off the war and gained influence over large areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America where they could make even larger profits from the sweat and blood of the native peoples. Scared of a strong vets movement among returning GIs, and with money to spare, the ruling class was forced to give some of their war profits to the vets to keep them quiet.

Today, the situation is far different. Liberation movements around the world have cut off a large source of profit; rising struggles of workers are hurting profits at home. Still, the ruling class tries to squeeze every last penny out of the workers and the poor.

Vets are hard hit because the whole system is in deep trouble. Cutbacks, layoffs, dollar devaluations, inflation -- they're all part of the crisis. It hits vets hard because vets' benefits aren't a profit-making business. When we were GIs fighting in Indochina, then we were needed and they'd promise us anything; now, it's a case of use once and throw away. Benefits don't make money, so to hell with it -- who cares about people.

### VETERANS' PIMPS AND POLITICIANS

The history of the vets movement is filled with the pimps and politicians who leech off the vets struggle to build themselves a name and a safe little career. It happened during the Bonus March and is happening today. These self-proclaimed "gurus" are simply used as mouthpieces of the government and the ruling class. They may appear, at first, as sympathizers wanting to help vets. Their answers are always, "through proper channels," or "I'll take care of your problems."

They try to hold back the real struggle by saying "Don't rock the boat." That's because they're sitting in that boat and are scared to death of being sunk. When vets see that the "proper channels" lead nowhere, the pimps are there to say "Rely on your Congressman -- write him a letter." Or they'll make the excuse that "Congress just won't give us the money."

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These jerks need to be exposed at every turn. Because their solutions will never work, they will always be exposed in the long run, but they can slow down the struggle by sidetracking vets into the dead end road of begging and pleading for a few crumbs.

These same people sometimes say that "Vets are a special interest group" and that we should restrict our struggles to getting more bennies. According to them, we shouldn't have fought to end the war in Indochina, and shouldn't demand amnesty, or an end to police repression, or shout that "We Won't fight Another Rich Man's War." "Just stick to vets' issues and you'll be better off," they say. But we say that the VA isn't sitting there all by itself -- it's just one part of a much larger system. And vets have all the same problems as the rest of the working class -- we need jobs and healthcare and education, just like everyone else.

#### OUR REAL FRIENDS ARE THE MASSES OF VETS

Relying on the rank-and-file vets is the only way we are going to win our struggle against the VA and all it stands for. Relying on masses of vets and uniting with other workers, employed and unemployed, is the only way we are going to win the struggle against unemployment. We can't rely on the pimps no matter how sweet they talk. And we can't rely on the politicians and their empty promises.

We're out to build a vets movement that fights for the needs and rights of vets. We're out to build a vets movement that unites with other people who have the same needs. And we're out to win that fight. If you see that your fight is the same as ours, we want to join with you. The address of your local chapter of VVAW/WSO is stamped on this pamphlet; if there's no chapter near you, contact the National Office and we'll put you in touch with the nearest regional office or chapter. Together, united, we're going to win!

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