

VVAW/WSO: POINTING THE WAY FORWARD**-- by the National Office Collective**

In April, the Southern California sub-regional meeting expelled from VVAW/WSO the chapters in the Northern sub-region, elected a new regional coordinator, recognized new leadership in the North, and set conditions for individuals in the North to rejoin the organization. The National Collective supports these actions and urges the rest of the organization to ratify them at the July National Steering Committee Meeting (NSCM). The expulsion is correct, and is absolutely essential so that VVAW/WSO can continue to grow in the future.

We say "continue to grow" because growth is what's key in our organization today. Chapters boldly, consistently implementing the program and focus, as decided by the last NSCM, are reaching vets and GIs, and are slowly but concretely bringing them into VVAW/WSO. Many of these new members have directly felt attacks by the system, through unemployment, VA maltreatment, police repression, on-the-job discrimination or use as scabs against other workers, or simply surviving under the racism and repression of the military. VVAW/WSO, by going out to these people, has provided them with a concrete way to organize to fight for what they need, and learning through practice to fight for what is needed by other people oppressed by the system. This process of involving the un-involved vets and GIs in struggle is the primary thing going for us in VVAW/WSO today.

There are some chapters which are having real problems with the program and focus. Some of these chapters agree with the decision of the organization and are trying to implement the program, though they have not yet found the way it can best be done in their communities. Others did not agree with the decision, but because it was the democratic decision of the organization, have tried to find ways to implement that program. Many of these chapters are in small or medium-sized towns, and don't have the targets of work like the VA or unemployment offices at which to aim their work. As an organization, we need to figure out ways to help these chapters; we in the National Collective have no instant solutions, but believe these chapters are an integral part of the organization. It may take time and collective struggle to work out these problems.

Finally, there are a group of chapters which have consciously tried to subvert and undermine the implementation of the program and focus of the organization. These chapters show contempt for the decision of the organization by their outright refusal to follow, or even try to follow, what was said by the NSCM; they are not part of the national organization. Northern California, St. Louis, Buffalo and Dayton all fall into this category. These chapters are excluded from VVAW/WSO by their own words and their own practice. The NSCM needs only to recognize what is already fact: these chapters are not part of VVAW/WSO.

Some people, both inside VVAW/WSO and more so outside the organization, have said that the expulsion by Southern California and the disbanding of the Dayton chapter by that regional meeting are signs that VVAW/WSO is falling to pieces. We

say nonsense; so do chapters who, through their practice, see the gains which the program and focus bring to our organization. Instead, these actions mean that the organization is ridding itself of chapters and people who try to nail our organizational feet to the ground to prevent us from moving ahead. And the organization is stronger, is better able to move forward as a result of their removal.

There have also been questions about whether the action, particularly in California, was "legal." We believe that is the wrong question: the action was right, because it served the vast majority of members of VVAW/WSO. Even more, it served the interests of the masses of vets and GIs who are struggling against their oppression. The action by Southern California was also entirely democratic for the same reason: it carried into practice the decision of the NSCM.

There's room in our organization for many different ideas. There's room for a variety of local projects and support work. There's room for different approaches and activities around organizing vets and GIs. We believe that a mass organization has to be open, and that there must be struggle between political views. But there is no room at all for people who undermine the basic national program of the organization and who try to prevent the building of a fighting vets and GI movement.

The expulsion of Northern California is only one step in the continuing progress of our organization: it must be ratified at the NSCM. Other chapters which have been saying and doing the same kinds of things as Northern California -- subverting the focus and program -- must be dealt with the same way as the Northern California chapters. There have been a number of important decisions made in the last year: base and focus, program. More decisions still need to be made around strengthening the program, as well as a new working paper, democratizing the organization further, principles of unity. In each case, the organization will decide on the basis of what will help us grow and what will help the overall struggle move forward.

We have made a number of statements about a few chapters and ex-chapters. Now to back up these statements. Some of what we are saying many members of the organization already know. Some of it is in the Southern California statement about why they expelled the chapters in the North -- all chapters should have received that paper and read it and we will not try to repeat all that is said there. Some of it is new information. But it adds up to overwhelming reasons why these chapters are not part of the organization.

Almost a year ago, the majority of the leadership in Northern California decided against the base and focus of the organization. Even after the organization resolved the struggle at the last NSCM, Northern California chapters refused to implement the focus through the national program. Instead, they claimed they had tried to implement the focus and program, and that it didn't work (a "discovery" based on no practice; in one case, a new organizing committee said it had implemented the program but all of three weeks later found it didn't work!). One indicator of these chapters' approach to the focus and program is found in the structure

they established. Chapters in the area work through chapter committees which take leadership around major areas of work -- political prisoners, Indochina, internal education, etc. No chapter set up a Veterans and/or VA committee; as a cover-your-ass device, the sub-region concocted one sub-regional committee for that work -- which is the focus and program of the national organization! Is this the way to organize vets who are looking for a way to fight back? Certainly not!

When certain members of these chapters who have consistently supported the focus and program disagreed with what the chapters were doing and saying, they were physically threatened. One such member was actually put on trial: the San Francisco chapter "convicted" him of the "crime" of being a secret member of the RU, based primarily on the fact that he supports the national program of VVAW/WSO. Not only is this wholly unprincipled struggle, but it is in direct service to the police who are much interested in allegations of "secret cadre." Even more importantly, these members who supported the decisions made by the rest of the organization were blocked at every turn from implementing the national program. In San Jose, two members were going to a community college attended by large numbers of vets; the rest of the chapter -- and particularly its leadership -- used a series of bureaucratic tricks to prevent these two people from taking the program out to these vets and bringing them into struggle. In another case, one brother from Oakland was moving to Salinas. The regional leadership made a decision that this person could not organize for VVAW/WSO in Salinas; they knew full well that a chapter in Salinas would be built as a result of taking the national program out to the masses of vets and uniting with their struggles. Regional leadership did everything they could to prevent this from happening.

While Northern California chapters were paying lip-service to the national program, and while San Francisco was devoting its energies to witch-hunting trials, chapters like New York City were out at the VA and unemployment offices, selling papers, talking to vets, and growing. The members of the chapter did not need a special Vets/VA committee because the chapter, including the new members, see this as their primary work. Sure, the chapter worked around May Day and organized to get people to the massive "Jobs or Income" Rally in Washington, DC on April 26th. These support activities helped the chapter grow, in conjunction with their principal vets work. They certainly did not waste their time with secret trials; people who want to work around the national program are exactly the people they want in their chapter.

Northern California is not alone in refusing to implement the focus and program. In Buffalo, New York, after a long period of theoretical discussion, the chapter decided to have nothing to do with the focus or program; instead, they developed their own program of work. Before that decision was formalized, a leading member of the Buffalo chapter, in conversation with the National Collective, told us that the principled thing for the chapter to do was to leave the organization if it could not work around the national focus and program. We agreed then, and we agree now. At present, for vets in Buffalo who see the need to build a vets movement, there is no place to go to build that movement; the Buffalo chapter must get out of the way so that the work of VVAW/WSO can move ahead in that city.

The same is true of Dayton, Ohio, where the old chapter refused to implement the program, sell the paper, or pay national dues. The Regional Meeting declared the chapter defunct and recognized an individual who wanted to build a chapter of the national organization as the new Dayton contact. Was this correct? Of course it was. Participating in this unanimous decision were two chapters, Detroit and Cincinnati, who have the experience of militant, consistent actions around the organizational program.

In St. Louis, the chapter has consistently opposed the direction of VVAW/WSO and vocally supported the "minority caucus" at the last NSCM. After the meeting, the chapter refused to move with the rest of the organization in implementing the program. As a result, after much struggle, Rich Bangert resigned from the chapter in order to build a chapter in St. Louis which would be a real part of the national organization. Should this new chapter be supported in its day-to-day work at the VA, work which is bringing vets into struggle? Definitely. While this work is going on, the only action (so far as we know) carried out by the old "chapter" has been a demonstration on Vietnam Vets Day where chapter members dressed up as a Vietnamese peasant, a worker, and a vet, and stood in front of crosses in order "to bring home the lessons of the Vietnam era" (their description). Do we have any use for a so-called "chapter" which masquerades as workers, peasants and vets, and stands on the steps of a war memorial building holding crosses because (so the "chapter" said) it's Easter weekend and the masses of people will relate to the symbolism? Decidedly not! No matter how gratifying this kind of action may be to the members of the "chapter," it does absolutely nothing in the interests of vets and GIs. On the same day in Boston, 200-225 people held a militant demo around Jobs or Income, We Won't Fight Your Imperialist Wars and Decent Benefits for All Vets. Ten vets, most of them contacted off that demo, came to a general meeting. While St. Louis was crucifying the working class and the Indochinese people, VVAW/WSO members in Milwaukee were fighting back against the mace of GSA guards while vets in the VA Hospital there clamored to unite with the chapter. Who is moving VVAW/WSO and the vets movement forward?

Each of these non-organizational "chapters" was a member of the so-called "minority caucus" at the last NSCM. The history of that caucus can teach us all some real lessons important to our future work. The caucus, made up of a number of people who disagreed with our focus and program for various reasons, met twice during the NSCM. The first such meeting, though not publically announced, was more or less open, though people attending were sworn to secrecy. The second meeting admitted only those people who were, at that time, opposed to the national focus. On the floor of the NSCM, the caucus stated that it intended "to work in the future by putting forth anti-imperialist politics in the context of the Vets and GI focus" (from the St. Louis NSCM Minutes). Even then, some of the delegates to that meeting expressed concern about the caucus turning into a faction. They knew that the seeds of a faction which would try to split the organization was already present. This is exactly what has happened.

At that meeting, in response to the concern about factionalizing, Jeanie Dolly (one of the leaders of the caucus) assured the NSCM that the caucus would remain open and above-board, that the NO would get copies of whatever the caucus was discuss-

sing, work reports, etc, while the members of the caucus implemented the program to the best of their ability. This has not happened. Instead, the NO was informed, in a letter from Dolly on March 10th, "You will receive the final drafts of whatever is coming out, but not the interim letters that produce the final... As for summations of discussions, we will not, as far as I can see, be putting out such things... I will be sending you some of the stuff when it is done..." This is a far different position than that stated at the NSCM where the NO (and any chapter requesting the information) would receive "everything" in order to demonstrate that the caucus was "honest" and "open."

A later mailing from Dolly consisted of a report drawn up for the March 16th Northern California sub-regional meeting. A "Statement from the Northern California Anti-Imperialist Caucus" (NCAIC) seems to be a statement of unity for the caucus (copies of this statement are being sent out along with this paper). It says that caucus meetings will be held once a month and "are open to the membership of VVAW/WSO in California who wish to attend." Excellent! But the statement continues, "The caucus is not open to members of VVAW/WSO who are in the RU or openly support the politics of the Revolutionary Union." Something has happened to the "open" and "honest" caucus. Since the RU position on base and focus and program of the organization is the same as the position decided on by VVAW/WSO nationally, the caucus is apparently closed to anyone who is actually a member of the organization and is implementing the democratic decisions of the organization. This is no longer a "caucus," but a faction working against the organization and certainly working against a vets and GI movement. There is no basis for the NCAIC to even pretend it is part of VVAW/WSO.

The NCAIC statement goes on to say that "The caucus is in contact and communication with many chapters and individuals nationally. We are sharing our practice and beginning to formulate national programs which reflect OUR politics and practice to be presented to the national organization at the next NSCM (emphasis ours)." Despite the professions about openness and honesty, the NO knows nothing of these communications (all of this was taking place before the Northern California chapters were expelled from the organization). We already have a national program; that program is certainly open to criticism, and the next NSCM should see changes in that program which arise from the practice of chapters. Does outright rejection of that program, based not on the practice of the faction (since they have none), but on what they would like to see happen show an interest in moving the organization forward? No!

A private organizational program, their own leadership, secret meetings, secret communications networks: all of these things can lead to only one conclusion. Their purpose is to undermine the work of VVAW/WSO. The article in "Seize the Time" (which was sent out with the Southern California paper), either written by or in close collaboration with the leadership of the faction advocates organizing against the majority of the organization. There is none of the openness and honesty, the setting forth of a concrete position, which is needed for real struggle. This has no place in a mass organization, and the people involved in it have no place in VVAW/WSO. As an organization, we must discard this faction, and particularly its misleadership, into the nearest garbage heap where it belongs.

Within the last month, we have heard from Northern California (not from the faction leadership) that the chapters are now implementing the program. Apparently, people have conveniently forgotten their pious pronouncements of how they were allegedly implementing the program in the past, and have decided to start all over again. We see this tactic for what it is: a dishonest and shallow attempt to gain some kind of credibility in the organization. If the leadership were actually implementing the program, honest vets recruited through that program would soon dispense with that leadership. But their history tells us that these people will not implement the program anymore honestly this time than they did before; though snakes can shed their skin, they are still snakes underneath.

By our organization decision, VVAW/WSO has a huge task ahead. We've seen that we have the capability and the duty to speak to and for masses of vets who want to organize against the system. How we can best do that is the question which confronts every member of the organization. Chapters which chase away vets, because all they have to offer them is study groups (a primary activity in Northern California and Buffalo) or crucifixions -- but no program for building a vets movement -- these are chapters we don't want and can't afford. By their practice, they are holding back all the rest of us who clearly see our task and are working to accomplish it.

Nor is there a place for chapters who feel their only obligation to the organization is to occasionally wear a button and write VVAW/WSO on their stationary. Chapters which say they have to "do their own thing" are showing their disdain of the need for discipline and principled unity in a national mass organization. Worse, they are showing their total contempt for other members of VVAW/WSO, people who through struggle and practice have taken on the task which the national program aims at.

Because we have supported the actions in Ohio and Southern California, we've been accused of heartlessness, harshness, inhumanity. There is a real trap in the question, "How could people vote out of the organization our 'brothers and sisters' with whom we have worked for so long?" Amid the moaning and groaning and buckets of crocodile tears, we answer that there are people more important than our self-proclaimed brothers and sisters. VVAW/WSO is not designed for the self-gratification or self-cultivation of our members' egos. Instead, our task is to provide the organizational form for the vet who is unemployed, who is being strung-out on the VA methadone program, who is calling for a nurse in a VA hospital only to find that she was fired in the latest round of cutbacks. We have an obligation to the vet who came home from Vietnam with a drug habit and now sits in isolation in a state prison looking for help. These, and the hundreds and thousands of other vets and GIs, who have immediate and painful experience with repression in its many forms. We can involve them in the fight against these immediate targets and against the system which lies behind them. In fact, that is what is happening in many places around the country today. If to build that fighting movement requires the political decision to throw off the baggage which prevents us from moving faster and in more places, then that is the only correct decision to make, and we say, the sooner the better.

BUILD THE FIGHTING VETS & GI MOVEMENT!

BUILD VVAW/WSO!