Summing Up Advanced Experience

The High Road In Vets’ Work

Ed. Note: The following article was submitted by Party members active in building the struggle of veterans in California. At the time of the formation of the RCP, many activists from the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) joined the Party. Since that time the leadership of the Party has attached importance to building the struggle of veterans and VVAW at a mass organization level working in unity with the working class against the imperialist system. As the article points out, this line has met resistance from the revisionist headquaters that developed within the Party, which held that VVAW should, for all practical purposes, be liquidated and only a shell retained to be used to bolster some political gimmick. Despite this line, work among veterans developed in several places--most notably California where work began with VVAW having one small chapter in one city and now three vigorous chapters edited with regular regional coordination of activities. The work in California is a good, if only beginning, example of the revolutionary potential that exists among veterans and which can be unleashed by persistent work under the guidance of a correct line.

In the California area over the last two years and more, significant advances have been achieved and important lessons learned in the Party’s work among veterans, especially in helping to build the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) as a key mass organization to tap the revolutionary reservoir of veteran activists. The key to advancing the Party’s work has been the deepening grasp of the Party’s line--particularly sticking to the hard, high road of revolutionary work in today’s non-revolutionary situation. This has involved struggling with both Party and non-Party comrades against pragmatism and chauvinism, a tendency that arises spontaneously from the work but which was increasingly championed by the revisionist headquarters in the Party.

As we have more and more developed our work to organize veterans, going deep into the day-to-day struggles of veterans and attempting to lead them in waging the economic and political battles against the capitalists, there has been a struggle among comrades to come to an understanding of how to correctly apply the Party’s line in our work.

The Programme of the Revolutionary Communist Party states: “As the working class and its Party increasingly takes up and leads the struggle of veterans and the struggle of our immediate class--the masses of working people--consciously aimed against the imperialist system, veterans become a force for the entire working class movement.”

Implementing this more than anything has been a battle against pragmatism and chauvinism, and a battle to carry out the three objectives laid out in the Party Programme: to organize and lead; to build a mass international; to prepare the immediate battle and weaken the enemy; to raise the general level of consciousness and sense of organization of the struggling masses and confide in them the revolutionary outlook of the proletariat; and to develop the most active and advanced in these struggles into communists, recruit them into the Party and train them as revolutionary leaders.” (p. 102)

Our understanding of the importance of work among veterans, and the correct line which must lead this work, has been continually deepened and developed through the course of our work and the struggle to apply our Party’s line. Though this has been no straight line forward, the gains made in this way serve as proof that, as Mao Tsetung says, “The correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line decides everything.”

Taking Up July 4th

In early 1976, in one of the California chapters, and on through that summer, we began building for the Battle of the Bicentennial. It was during this period, in our struggle politically within the Party and in VVAW, that we began to gain a better understanding of the “use once and throw away” reality of veterans. Before this period we led the chapter to concentrate almost exclusively and very narrowly on the “thrown away” aspect--in particular doing work only to extend and expand the GI Bill. The chapter went out to a number of colleges, including one where every single vet had been cut off the GI Bill, while the Veterans Administration (VA) and the college blamed each other, and the vets for the costs. In the course of this work, through struggle within the Party we started to understand that while it was correct to build fights like this it was incorrect to take up only those kinds of battles and to take them up divorced from other things affecting vets. We saw more clearly the need to link battles around vets being “thrown away” with the way imperialism had “used” us, and continues to try to use us as a weapon of political forces.

As VVAW got more involved in the July 4th campaign against the bourgeoisie’s Bicentennial celebration -- July 4th delights, the chapter began to more clearly speak about why “We Won’t Fight Another Rich Man’s War” -- why we won’t be used by the capitalists’ cannon fodder in their wars of plunder--and to better understand the special ability of veterans to speak on this question. This helped us better link up the Philly campaign for the fight against the Memorial Day cutoffs--3.7 million vets cut off the GI Bill--to put forward how these cutoffs represented yet another abuse from the rule of the bourgeoisie.

On Memorial Day itself, in 1976, there was a large demonstration at the VA in Los Angeles with many new veterans coming in to demonstrate. Many vets and hacks cried crocodile tears and spread warmongering tripe over our veterans’ graves, all the while stabbings us in the back with anti-caribou. By continuing this, VVAW was also able to bring out the real nature of the capitalists’ Bicentennial celebration, and put forward the slogan “--We’ve Carried the Rich for 200 Years, Let’s Get Them Off Our Backs!”

These struggles, combined with sharp discussion within the Party around veterans work, helped us better understand how the “use once” and “throw away” aspects of veteran experience interact and interrelate with each other. We could not just build battle around the “thrown away” aspect (say, the GI Bill cuts, or jobs) and divide this from the way vets have been used. To divorce them would lead to falling into a more militant form of the bourgeois line that veterans deserve special favors because they “served their country.” In addition, we saw much more sharply the need for veterans to speak from their experience against the question of war.

Ashby Leach Campaign

Our understanding about doing revolutionary work developed again in the period after the July 4th demonstration, and especially in the way we handled the campaign to free Ashby Leach. (See Revolution, particularly Vol. 2, No. 6 & 7). Key to this was struggle to better grasp the mass significance of the Leach campaign, and how to turn it to the Party. Particularly our work with the advanced moved forward as we struggled to go deeply into political questions, release oppressed veterans, and get on to help build VVAW and the Leach campaign. By this time, active work was going on in three major cities in the state. The work included open discussion on the GI Bill, battling campus administrators who tried to shut off one chapter, and extensive work around the Ashby Leach campaign. We put out a big national question as a concentrated example of the conditions many veterans face and the fighting anger they feel. Many speaking engagements have been held in schools and in working class neighborhoods, with as many as 300 people attending. In one city, on the weekend before Leach’s trial began, we ran a call to action on the VA’s front lawn, demanding his freedom and an end to the attacks on all veterans.

Building the Revolutionary Movement among Veterans

During this period we became consciously struggling to center the meetings and the life of VVAW generally around political work, and concerning questions coming up in the work and in society.

We then came to more consciously integrate discussion about where we saw the struggle being played out in the broader question of revolution with VVAW’s daily activities. For the first time over the last few years of the largest chapter, we made sure there was at least one commune who opened their commune to discussion of the questions of revolution and an active social life with each other. We were able to bring a large number of members to May Day celebrations that year, and went on to build a Party-led Maoist-Leninist study group of veterans.

This was an important step in the struggle to overcome rightist and programmatic tendencies: the “class consciousness and revolutionary unity” of both comrades and the vvas was advanced in the struggle with us. In one of the chapters in the state, we had a fine, sharp example of rightism surfaced, with some comrades saying, in effect, “how can we be Maoists if we don’t come out for the 4th?”

It was important to bring out the nature of U.S. imperialism, the military and their puppets in the Klan, but the Pendleton Cutbacks were much more than that. It offered the raw material to bring out in a graphic way how capitalism breeds discrimination and racism and above all the dependence on national oppression for its survival. Capitalism reaps superprofits off keeping minorities and whole nations in oppressive conditions where they can work their misery, pay them their oppressors higher prices and exorbitant rents and much more.

The military in turn takes advantage of the divisions created by capitalism to maintain control over the troops.

As comrades deepened their understanding of the questions we had to deal with, we were able to bring VVAW to help build the Pendleton 14 case into a large social issue in southern California. Members of VVAW also saw that to deal with discrimination, active work was always the best by what we called “the revolving door” -- having forces in and around VVAW, but also regularly losing old forces as new ones came forward while it was still possible.

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williness to bend its "principles" when the question of a few more cues-paying warm bodies are at stake. But more serious and exposing is the overall unity on lining concerning the question of youth (and other things) between the self-styled former PCYB radicalists and the CPML. For instance, they both reverse course, siding with the police in student struggles of the '60s. The CPML, reprinting a page from Klonsky's social pacifism in SDS days, criticizes the observation by PCYB leaders of a public demonstration of youth polecism on the formation of the RCYB that advanced ideas and actions, like carrying NRF and red flags in the anti-war marches, had a "bracketed" effect—and in much the same way, so would open use of the name "communist." In fact, experience has shown that a "bracketed" action can angered some people, but also spurred many other "patriots" who were already questioning what the hell was going on—to check out further who was being willing to risk heckling and opposition for such a controversial question.

Of course, this is not (and was not portrayed) as the main way to bring down the masses of youth—but the opportunists stand on this question clearly betrays their right-wing essence. Bringing communistic unity on the question of the masses as a concrete task of the RCYB, not a "fraid" to be "converted in "traites" or just "drawn out of their experiences" is the anti-war marches, had a brave name, and negating the propaganda of the ideology of communism

The RCYB...

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The RCYB, a radical rightist vein, goes on to attack as an "idealistic notion" the line in the RCYB Programme that while youth face many problems, "the most basic problem the masses of young people face is the fact that imperialism is unable to offer them a life with a purpose." (p. 157) This attack is in fundamental unity with the present outlook of the former NO clique. Particular attacks must of course be fought, but underlying all this is the basic fact that imperialism can offer youth no purpose. All of this can offer a lifetime of exploitation and oppression because of its very nature. This is perceived by youth to a certain degree, but it is a truth that must be brought home to them and raised to a rational level in their understanding.

In the Cal's Meshavski search for something palpable and concrete, these rightists narrow down and underplay the great potential for the proletariat to riot and guide youth's "enthusiasm, its innovativeness, its daring and its determination to change the world" (Programme, p. 168) for the revolutionary overture of the capitalist system by proletarian revolution. Such a line can in no way grasp why and how Mao Tsetung could have stated in "Orientation on the Way to Establish a People's Army" that in a way play a role in the revolutionary struggle struggle—a struggle whose main force and leadership in this country is the working class.

One other way the CPML tries to struggle up the defeated faction is by worshiping bourgeois democracy to defeat democratic revolution. They quote the RCP document which says that the line put forward there is not for "free debate" as evidence that dictatorship exists within the RCP. This is ironic, because in fact this question had been discussed and debated among comrades doing youth work for the line of the "Appeal" that was written part of that process, and the RCP document was the summation of the line, as deepstreamed through that process, which was then to be implemented at the convention. It was precisely because some of the opportunists clique's factional machinations during this period had been uncovered that it was necessary for this document to clearly spell out that comrades must firmly unite to carry out the line, which is hereby a restatement of a Leninist principle of democratic centralism.

The workers party and its vanilla party, the RCP, so the gains of the recent Cincinnati conference as a real victory—not only for the youth in the RCYB, but for all classes of youth as a whole. Defeating the attempt at an opportunist coup within the party, upholding the criticism of the clique's revisionist line, and grasping and further developing the correct line of the RCP will ensure that the RCYB will hold steady, its revolutionary path charted at its founding convention.

This gene type of organization that can really serve the interests of our class, the type of organization that sons and daughters of the working class and other youth definitive fighting for its revolutionary cause in the neighborhoods and campuses can join with pride. Not only will it fight for better conditions for young people, more than that, it will provide a real alternative to the decadence and decay in leadership that exists today. The ruling class tries to train and coarsen youth, with the masses of people, to accept as "the only way" and the "natural order of things". The Communist Party has complete confidence that this final battle will continue to be the place youth will truly find a line with a purpose, it helping to accomplish the historic task of the working class—making proletarian revolution, and freeing all of mankind.

For us, in everything we do, we are building a revolution that is not just a struggle, but the fulfillment of the struggle among all people at all times.

We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predominant part of the working class. The most important and decisive factor in the revolutionary process is the struggle of the working class. We believe that large and active young people are the predomin
Vets picket Senator Cranston's office in San Francisco, March 1977. Demanding freedom for Ashley Leach who represented the fighting anger many veterans feel at having been used and thrown away.

The Party and the revolutionary goal came out in integral terms of the life of VWAV, not that people had to agree with them, but that they were a part of the struggle over the road forward. It also created a lot of controversy, and that too was a good thing.

As we said in the beginning, our struggle to keep to the high, hard road to revolution has been marked by much sharp struggle, mostly against reaction. It has been exactly this struggle that has propelled our work forward. Without it, as we become clear in some other parts of the country where this rightness has been en- couraged, we would be doomed to the low road towards opportunism and revolutionism. As the article in the September issue of Revolution on the "Tasks of Party Branches" put it, "The point is that without the leadership of the Party, without the guidance of its ideological and political line representing the revolutionary outlook and interests of the working class, there is no way that mass struggle can continue to advance through ups and downs, no way the struggling masses can thoroughly distinguish real friends from real enemies and build the broadest unity against the enemy, and certainly no way the struggle can be carried forward to achieve the his- toric mission of the working class, the abolition of class society."

The revisionist line, the low road, reaps what it sows. It says the masses can't understand all this political stuff, so "leave it to us hot-shot." It hides the political goals and outlook of the working class in the name of turning out numbers to jockmick events, and it can't even turn out numbers on a long-term basis as our "re- volution's doing" experience showed. In its substitution of quantity for quality, it negates both, and leads people into a dead end. It would inevitably lead to a VWAV consisting of a small clump of officers and no troops.

Our overall experience, which became so sharply fo- cused around Veterans Day, really showed us something. The masses of people have the misery this system heaps on them, and we can tap this hatred and turn it on the system itself. We can do revolutionary work in a non- revolutionary situation and prepare our own ranks and the masses for revolution—and our work among veterans is one important part of this.