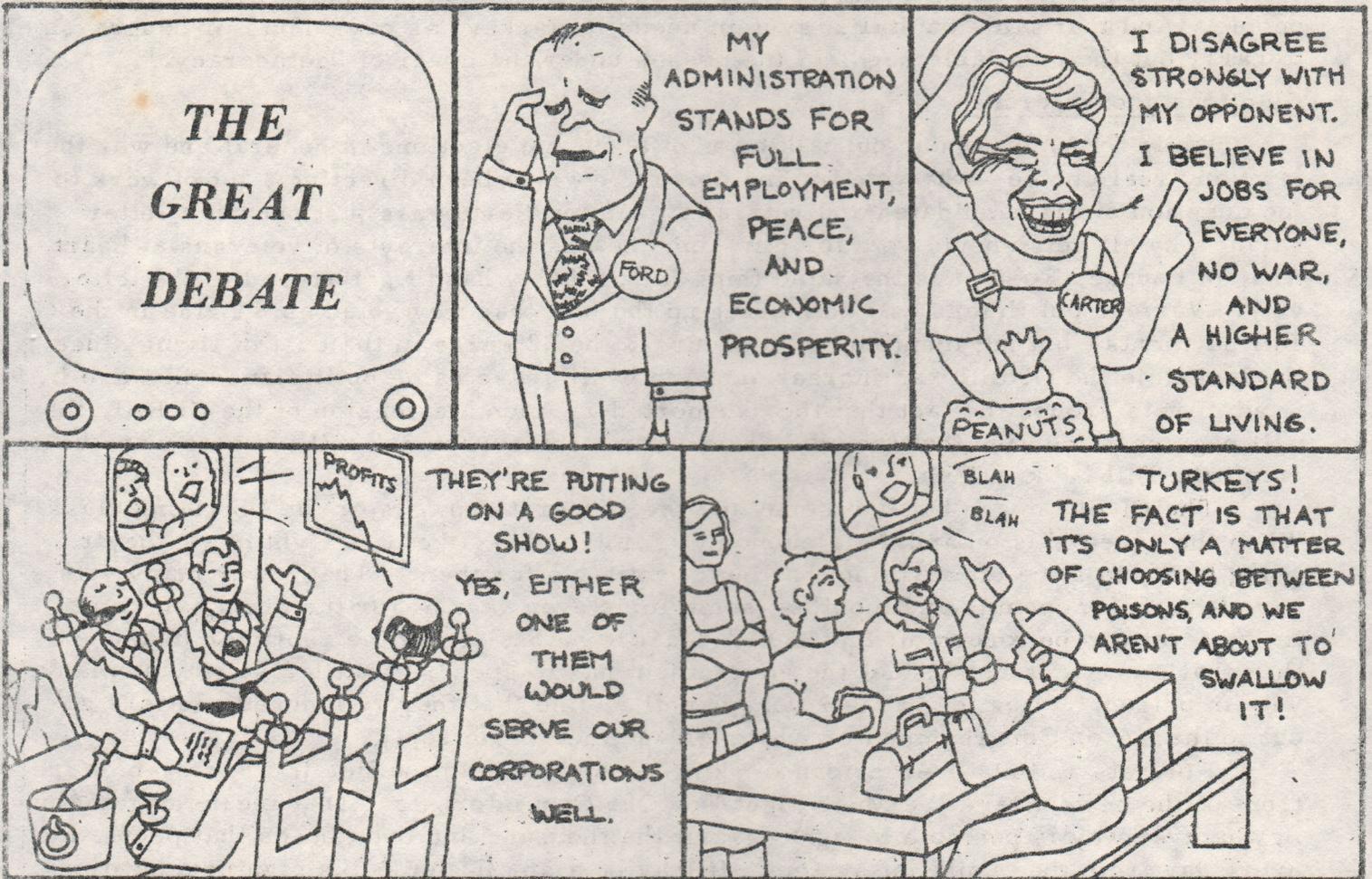




INSIDE / OUT

Same Struggle, Same Fight

No. 18 VVAW Newsletter for Prisoners Oct 76



Politicians Fight for \$\$ Interests We Must Fight For Our Own

ELECTIONS

The cartoon and slogan on the front page of this newsletter pretty much summarize the great elections of Bicentennial 1976. While the politicians push "unity" and "trust," the American voters are planning to stay away from the polls in record numbers. No matter what sweet words the candidates may come out with, they're still going to be serving the same class of people, and that isn't us.

It's a little like some of the great prison "reformers." "If I was the prison warden," these people say, "I'd change this and that, make the prisons 'humane,' prevent riots, etc etc etc." So they get appointed to the job. And things may change--the food may get a little better for awhile, or worse for awhile, or there may be some relaxation of rules, or tightening. But in time it's right back to the same old crap. And there's a reason for that, just like there's a reason why Carter or Ford don't make much difference. The system of capitalism needs prisons to insure their profits--whether it's through squeezing bucks out of cheap prison labor or protecting their "property" on the outside or through having a threat to use to try to control the struggles of the people. And that same capitalist system needs its lackeys as presidents or congressmen to carry out the profitable needs of the bosses under the cover of "democracy."

Elections and Veterans

While VVAW has been out talking a lot about the elections in general and why there isn't any real choice--why vote for the poison? --we've been directing a lot of work to the question of the candidates and veterans. Jimmy Carter has just put out a letter saying why all vets should vote for him since he has the interests of veterans at heart. And, of course, Ford says the same thing (he probably hasn't got around to the letter yet). Various politicians will be holding up the fact that they voted an 8% rise in the GI Bill payments--but not mentioning, of course, the 32% rise in the cost of living since the last time the GI Bill was increased. And while these same politicians will wave in front of vets groups the fact that they supported a 9 month extension of the GI Bill, they will neglect to mention that they didn't do a damn thing when 3.7 million vets were being cutoff the Bill back in May.

The GI Bill doesn't make money for the corporate powers or the US ruling class. When the squeeze is on and their economy is in trouble--like it is right now--they're going to try to slice off anything that isn't profitable for them. That's why many vets have to wait for months and months--sometimes even years--for the checks to come in; if a vet can be forced off the GI Bill because he has to pay the rent, for instance, then that's one less nickle that the government has to spend. That's also why so many vets in prison, trying to get their vets benefits, find that they're ignored--letters go out to the VA or Congressmen or whatever and there's no reply.

For vets as for all American working people the solution lies in the slogan on the front of the newsletter--We Must Fight For Our Own Interests. That means organizing in whatever way is possible to fight against the thousand and one abuses that people face every day from the capitalist system. It may be a small step--like signing a petition around the GI Bill--or a larger one like the struggle at Attica on the next page. But they are all steps.

Our thanks to all of you who took time to get the petitions, sent out with the last newsletter, circulated and signed and sent back to us. As one brother in Jackson, Mich, put it: "Although some may feel petitions to be a trivial thing, there are some of us who see them as blows against the empire and to me, even one signature is victory in the sense of individual awareness and growth in confronting oppression that is holding us down."



ABOVE LEFT: OVER 2000 DEMONSTRATED IN SUPPORT OF THE ATTICA BROTHERS IN BUFFALO, N.Y. IN SEPTEMBER, 1974. RIGHT: ATTICA PRISON REBELLION OF 1971 BECAME A BATTLECRY SPARKING PRISON REBELLIONS AND MASS SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

"Because all other methods have failed (writs, proposals, seminars, conferences, etc.) like many others, we will go on strike to resolve our problems: on the 23rd day of August, 1976, we, the undersigned inmates of Attica State Prison will go on GENERAL STRIKE and we will continue the survival action until the listed demands are satisfied.. The strike will continue as long as necessary."

So read the demands of the Attica prisoners, who have been striking since August 23. Participation by the prisoners in the strike has been over 90%--leaving yards, mess halls, metal shop and other prison workplaces practically empty. Negotiations continue between the prisoners liaison and grievance committees and Commissioner of Corrections Ward and Attica Prison Warden Smith. In addition, a list of 9 main demands (down from 27 original demands) of the striking inmates has been drawn up, since, as it states, "the elected inmate groups (liaison committee and grievance counsel) are apparently unable or unwilling to get to the real issues." The real issues deal directly with the nature of the prison system itself, like parole and sentencing restructuring, fighting brutality and arbitrariness in prison administra-

tion, for higher wages, against discrimination, etc. The strike was a mass, organized disciplined and well-prepared action.

September 9-13, 1971, the Attica Prison rebellion sent shock waves throughout the ruling class and became a battle cry sparking prison rebellions and mass support throughout the country. Then-governor of New York state Rockefeller, representing the interests of his entire class of bankers and bosses who did not want their power threatened, ordered the retaking of the prison, resulting in 43 deaths of prisoners and hostages. Since then, prison guards, administrators, courts, judges, politicians and newspapers, in short, all the tools at the disposal of the capitalists' class, tried to teach us the "lesson of Attica"--that if you fight back, you die. Five years and millions of dollars, lies, coverups and frameups later, the men of Attica are proving that our unity in struggle is growing and can't be turned back--that Attica is an inspiration to fight back. Even recently, the prison officials transferred some men out of Attica who they thought would be the leading "troublemakers" in hopes of cooling things off. But it didn't work. This strike shows that it's the vast majority of prisoners that are prepared to deal with

the system: not just one or two individuals, not just in 1971, but whenever and wherever they can. The Attica prisoners called for statewide support and already disturbances erupted, at least at Clinton Prison. Attica still means fight back!

Like in 1971, what caused this rebellion was the lousy conditions that the ruling class maintains in prisons. The conditions now are the same or worse than what they were in '71, so resistance was inevitable. The '71 rebellion helped the present one come off because in summing it up, the prisoners learned the need to fight back and the power of our struggle; the people on the outside learned more about the disgusting conditions in prison, and the need to unite with the prisoners' struggle; and the ruling class learned that when they mess with prisoners, they're causing a lot of resistance among broad sections of the people and exposing the real nature of their barbaric system--so they better be careful.

This most recent act of resistance had a string of abuses leading up to it. About 2 months ago, Brother Colon was murdered in the prison hospital. The prison called it a "heart attack," but the other prisoners had seen him being beaten by guards, and knew he was too young and healthy to just die from a heart attack. The general response of the prisoners was, "who will be next, and when will it happen?" On July 4, a petition of demands concerning health, visitation, early release program, etc., was submitted by prisoners to deal with the situation. Last month, one inmate was stuck in solitary, beaten to unconsciousness, and wheeled around the yard on a garbage truck by guards. This show of arrogance and repression was met with a takeover of the yard by about 200 men on July 11. Brutal beatings were witnessed by prisoners even more recently. Monday, August 23, was the day set to organize this present strike against all these abuses.

Most of the minor issues of the strike have been won by the prisoners: curtains in the cells, wearing street shirts instead of prison shirts, etc. In addition, hearings have been scheduled in New York City to investigate the conditions at Attica from '71 until now.

But the key demands are against the penal system itself, and are far from settled. The bail and legal system is set up so that workers and other people frequently spend long stretches behind bars without ever being convicted of a crime. Nearly all prisoners are brutalized and deprived of the most elementary rights (except Watergate-type pri-

soners, in minimum security with golf and horseback riding.) Capitalist society breeds crime--it even glorifies it in its movies. While criminals prey mainly on workers, the capitalists' prisons do nothing to rehabilitate, but are hell-holes where a "first-timer" can get a full criminal education from the "Pros" --including guards and prison officials. Meanwhile, the biggest criminals of all, the capitalists who live by the legalized robbery of the working class, go free.

The strikers' demands hit right at that system. Basically, they are (1) Sentencing restructure, with 5 year maximum; (2) Parole board reorganization; (3) Day for a day good time (making time subtracted from the sentence more easily earned); (4) Temporary release program extended; (5) Criminal justice advocacy system; (6) Confinement near home, not 400 miles away, like Attica is from New York City; (7) Relaxed and conjugal visitation; (8) real programs of health, education and other social services;

(9) Against brutality, unfair and arbitrary treatment, discrimination--for increased wages ("We too are subject to the effects of inflation, and we pay taxes").

Support for the strike came from inside (certain prisoners with commissary rights stocked up on food to enable all the prisoners to sustain the strike) and the outside (visitors brought food packages in before the strike to help keep it going as long as necessary).

While negotiating, the prison authorities and other arms of the capitalists' rule tried to break the strike. One newspaper played up the fact that one meal the prisoners missed because of striking consisted of Salisbury steak, vegetable, dessert, etc.--like prison is a hotel, so what are they complaining about? That meal, to tempt the strikers out of their cells was not the usual prison dinner--nor was any mention made of the striking prisoners who got baloney sandwiches, not steak!

In '71, it was mainly force that broke the strike. Now, fearing public outrage at them like erupted after the '71 rebellion and the state's massacre which followed it, the ruling class is relying mainly on lies and deceit. Inside the prison, guards try to pit the prisoners against each other by telling D Block that C Block is back in the yard and not striking, then telling A Block that C Block is in the yard, etc. On the outside, the news reported the strike was over in its 4th day, when actually it was still going strong. They also reported that more and more prisoners were going to the yard--an indication, according to them, that the "troublema-

kers" were losing support. The truth is that on the whole, they have been going to the yard, not to quit the strike, but for meetings, to make it stronger.

The press is making a big sensation-
alist deal about finding the list of demands in the cell of the man who was convicted of murdering Kitty Genovese in New York City, to discredit the strike. But what the demands are, and how they stem from the whole history of abuses

leading up to this present strike, have been blacked out of the news.

The ruling class has created a powder keg of resistance at Attica which keeps on blowing up in their faces. While the capitalists keep trying to prove that they're all powerful and unbeatable, Attica keeps showing that it's the people who have the real power to change this rotten system--and we can't be stopped. ■

FREE ASHBY LEACH

In this issue of The Veteran is an article about Ashby Leach, the Vietnam veteran in Cleveland who, after years of trying to get the vets benefits he needed from the Chessie system, finally seized one of the offices in the headquarters building of the huge railroad corporation. VVAW is taking up support for Ashby Leach nationally, seeing his act on behalf of the veterans of the Chessie system as a real spark to the growing veterans struggle all over the country. As Ashby Leach stated, "I know I have stood up not only for the veterans but for the American people as a whole and I am confident the people will stand up for me...."

An Ashby Leach Defense Committee has been set up; in their first newsletter, the ALDC says:

"As of today, Ashby is sitting in the Cuyahoga County Jail (in Cleveland) under \$450,000 bond. He is charged with 16 felony counts, 13 of which are for kidnapping. Absolutely no court proceedings are currently underway and the prosecution hasn't given any indication of scheduling any for the near future. Barring some unforeseen developments it looks like a long drawn out court case is in the offing. On the face of things Ashby's situation doesn't look too good. But we in the ALDC feel there is a heck of a lot we can do to change this. With the work that we have already done we have seen that there is a lot of public opinion in support of Ashby, both from veterans and non-veterans. By building on this support we know that we can go a long ways towards actually freeing him.. The basic understanding the ALDC is operating under is that it is the veterans and people of the US alone that will free Ashby Leach--that is we try to rely on the courts or a 'Clarence Darrow' type lawyer we will only end up getting shot down."

As a first step in building the campaign nationally, VVAW is asking for letters of support to be sent to the Office of the Prosecutor, Cuyahoga County Court, 1200 Ontario, Cleveland, Ohio 44103, and to Cyrus Eaton, Chairman of the Board Emeritis, Chessie System, Room 1319 Terminal Tower, Cleveland, Ohio 44101. Specifically we are demanding that they Free Ashby Leach, and that Chessie Honor Its Promises to Vets, and Extend and Expand the GI Bill.

In the next issue of "Inside Out" we will be including petitions which are now being drawn up as a means of involving as many people as possible; there were thousands of people outside the Terminal Tower when Ashby Leach came out, applauding his act. Now its time for vets and non-vets all over the country to come to his defense.

2



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