



INSIDE-OUT

Same Struggle - Same Fight!

no.8 VVAW-WSO Newsletter for Prisoners

Jan 75

VVAW/WSO National Office, 827 West Newport, Chicago, Ill. 60657

January 6, 1975

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Our revolutionary thanks to those of you who sent us holiday greetings, cards, etc. And our apologies for sending his mass response as opposed to answering the cards individually. As we will discuss later in this newsletter, we just got back from our National Steering Committee meeting in St Louis. This meant not only spending the six days of actual meetings and travel, but also several weeks of preparation. So, for the year 1975, we wish to all our brothers and sisters, a year filled with resolute struggle against our common enemy, and a year filled also with continued victories in that struggle.

In Continued Solidarity,

The VVAW/WSO National
Collective

PS The same meeting kept us from sending out this newsletter and the January issue of Winter Soldier until now. With the next issue we will get back on the track and mail to you as soon as possible after the paper is printed.



Gary Lawton Trial Begins

Gary Lawton, black community activist from Riverside, California, begins his third trial on a trumped-up murder charge in Riverside on January 6th. As covered in Winter Soldier, these trials have been going on now for almost four years as more and more people join Gary in his struggle against the racism and repression of the system. Charges against two other brothers, originally named as co-defendants in this case, have been dropped and it is clear that the state is now focusing all of its attention on Gary.

The defense of Gary Lawton has been a national project of VVAW/WSO for approximately three years; chapters and members have done various amounts of work around the case such as talking about the trials and the reasons behind them, sponsor-

ing speaking tours for Gary, carrying consistent stories about Gary in Winter Soldier, raising money and writing letters to help with the struggle, etc. Clearly, VVAW/WSO has not yet done enough. To help correct that situation, the organization passed a four-part program around the Lawton defense at our National Steering Committee Meeting in St. Louis.

"To develop the awareness around Gary Lawton's case, we will put into effect the following minimum program:"

1. Every member of VVAW/WSO will take at least one petition and complete it.
2. At rallies and demonstrations around repression, chapters will raise signs and banners demanding the freeing of Gary Lawton.
3. Leafletting will take place at these demonstrations and in the community around Gary's case.
4. Nationwide picketing will take place at federal buildings, courthouses, etc. on February 1st in support of Gary's case.

The Riverside Political Prisoners Defense Committee (RPPDC) and the National Office of VVAW/WSO are asking for your help also. A copy of the petition, designed to be sent to the RPPDC, is included in this newsletter. We hope that you will add your names and your support to the growing list of people who are helping Gary Lawton in his struggle -- which is the struggle of all of us.

While we increase our work around the case of Gary Lawton, we also realize that the country is filled with political prisoners, the victims of the imperialist state which will go to any lengths to stop the movement of the people. VVAW/WSO members are among those being attacked by police: two weeks ago in Milwaukee, a demonstration outside the Veterans Administration hospital was attacked by police. After 25 minutes of hand-to-hand combat, 11 people were arrested. Injuries were all on the side of the police who were thrown against their cars, knocked to the sidewalk, and generally got the worse of the confrontation. Two days later, the same people were attacked as they were demonstrating at the local courthouse.

We understand that, at this time, we cannot build defense efforts around every case of repression, or even around a substantial number of them. As the imperialists see more and more clearly that their days are coming to an end, they will become increasingly brutal in their attempts to quell the tide of rising people, and there will be more political prisoners. They clearly hope to intimidate the people and to tie up time and energy in the courts; our response will be to build larger and more militant defense efforts, to make the tactics of the imperialists work against them until they see that their tactics will not work -- that it is the people who are strong and who will continue to unite around cases like that of Gary Lawton until political prisoners all over the country are free. In the words of Gary Lawton,

FREEDOM FOR ONE IS NOT ENOUGH -- FREE US ALL, SAY ON!!

**FREE ALL POLITICAL
PRISONERS!**

Charges Dropped Against Stephen Kessler & Joe Martinez--a People's Victory

The following is a reprint of a letter from the Stephen Kessler-Joe Martinez Defense Committee:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On December 10, 1974, all charges were dropped against Stephen Kessler and Joe Martinez. Massive public support, which was beginning to expose the non-existent government case was the main cause of the people's victory and the government's shameful defeat.

Joe is now at home in San Antonio, after having been imprisoned 15 years, and Stephen is being transported back to the Oregon State Penitentiary where he will be due for parole.

You, the people were the prime movers in the case. The masses worked on the case and won the case. People signed petitions, wrote letters to the prosecution, telephoned the prosecutor, contributed time to the development and distribution of literature, contributed money to the defense effort and participated in fund-raising activities.

In the vanguard of the peoples efforts were prisoners and prisoners families in all parts of the nation. This collective movement has demonstrated once again that families and friends of prisoners can win victories over the external forces of repression and at the same time over the internal feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and isolation.

Working together is the only way to win! The peoples victory in this case teaches us several lessons:

1. The people united will never be defeated.
2. The powerful and oppressive government forces are not invincible.
3. The prison struggle must continue inside and outside--inside by courageous brothers and sisters, and outside by the masses of the people. The prison struggle must not be isolated from the general struggle against U. S. imperialism.
4. The people should be encouraged through the use of defense committees to give direct aid to the prison struggle.
5. Radical lawyers and radical law students play a vital role in prison struggle struggles and in the daily outside struggle against repression, and must be constantly encouraged to continue to fight against elitism and to work daily for the people.

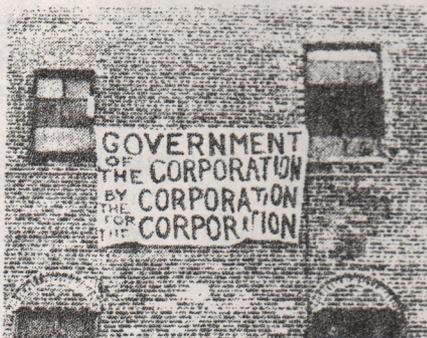
The case of Stephen and Joe Martinez must not be looked on as an isolated victory or the end in itself. As the resistance against political repression grows, more people will be victims of similar despicable government attacks. We cannot let our support end with Stephen and Joe but must continue to strive for freedom and justice for all people.

If we dare to struggle, we will sure win--

Stephen Kessler-Joe Martinez
Defense Committee
P. O. Box 22
Corvallis, Oregon 97330

Stephen Kessler and Joe Martinez were being framed for their political activities, on a trumped-up charge of murder (one that was 6 years old at the time they were charged); even the government must have finally realized that the charge could not be made credible.

Stephen Kessler, since his imprisonment in 1967, has been working in the struggle to unite people of all colors in the fight against prison repression. While imprisoned in Atlanta he helped organize the Church of the New Song, of which Joe is also a member. The Church is a prisoner organization founded on the principles of freedom of religion and the right to peacefully assemble. Stephen has also successfully challenged the prison system through the courts. In 1973 he won a major lawsuit which significantly restricted the prison system's ability to arbitrarily transfer prisoners. These are the real reasons Stephen and Joe were charged. (This paragraph also comes from a publication of the Kessler-Martinez Defense Committee, to which we also send our revolutionary greetings and congratulations on a job well done.)



Comments???

In the enclosed issue of Winter Soldier, there is an article concerning capitalism in prison -- the way in which the U. S. corporate interests are more and more moving toward the slave labor of the prison population in order to continue to increase their profits. Much of the information in the article came through your letters -- we put it together and tried to explain what we saw happening in a way that would let the readers of Winter Soldier get an understanding of what is going on.

We have run a number of articles in the past which speak to the brutality and the repression which are common in the American prison system. Several years ago, we used to speak out against the U. S. atrocities in Vietnam which many of us saw or participated in. But what mobilized the American people to support the struggle of the Indochinese people in bringing to an end the American combat presence in Indochina was the understanding of the role which imperialism played in that war. It was that same understanding of the nature of imperialism which brought many people out of the anti-war movement and into the fight against the whole imperialist system -- of which prisons are one part. In order to bring the understanding of what prisons are used for, and to create the kind of mass pressure which will bring about some of the badly needed changes, we believe that we have to write about and talk about what prisons are being used for.

We would appreciate your comments, both on what is said here, and on what is put forward in the article; it is your input that will allow us to do more propaganda work around issues like these in the future.

VVAW/WSO National Meeting

The VVAW/WSO National Steering Committee, made up of delegates from all regions of the organization, is the highest policy-making body of the organization. The 14th meeting of the NSC took place during the last week of December in St. Louis, Missouri.

The major decision made at that meeting was the determination of the definition of VVAW/WSO -- that we are a "mass, anti-imperialist organization with a veterans and GI base and focus." Following this formulation, we spent much time figuring out just how to implement a focus on veterans and GIs in an anti-imperialist way. As a result of much discussion, we adopted a program for work around veterans (centering on the entire VA system) and the basis for a program of work for GIs and active-duty organizing, which includes a campaign for building Armed Forces Day demonstrations this coming May. (Both programs will be covered in more detail in the next issue of Winter Soldier). Among other major decisions and discussions which occurred at this 14th National Steering Committee Meeting were the taking of a basic position on the situation in the Middle East, a proposal concerning the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (more about this later) and discussion around how we can make VVAW/WSO a more thoroughly multi-national organization.

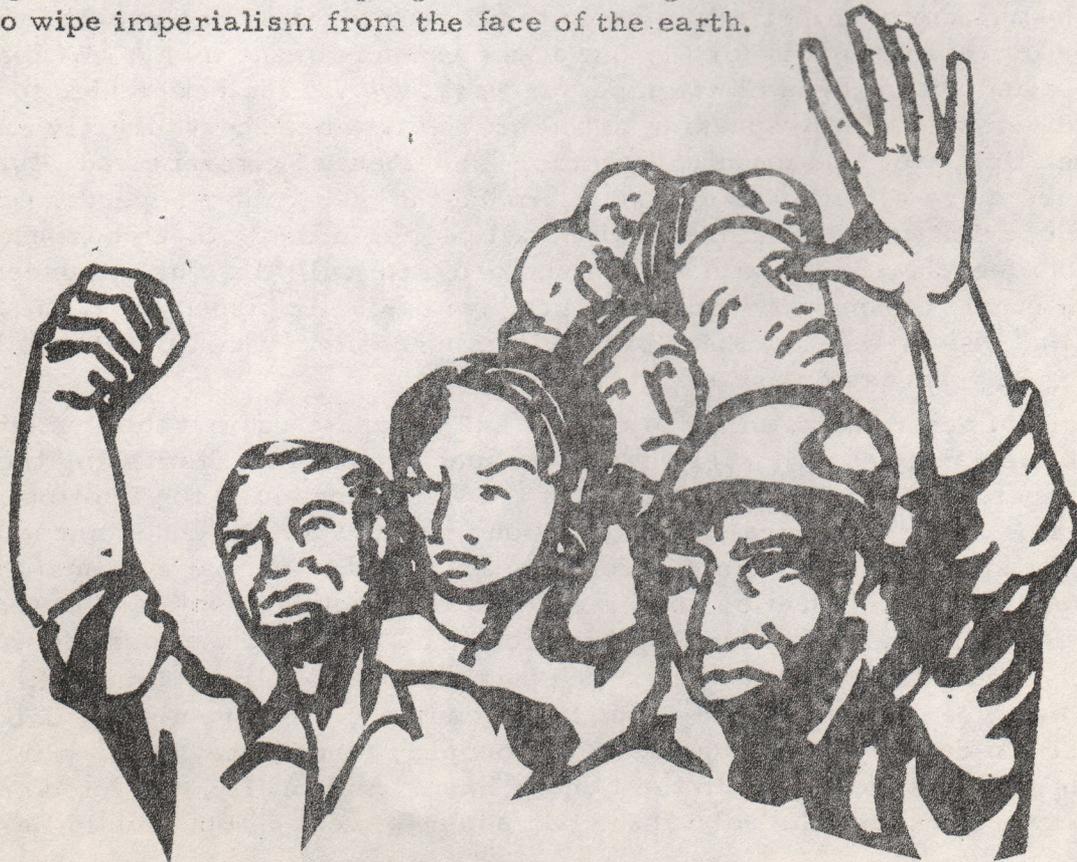
The decision around the definition of VVAW/WSO has been the center of an internal struggle for the past 6-8 months, and this struggle was resolved at this meeting by an over two-thirds vote of the regions on the second day of our meeting. We in the National Collective, who have been fighting for this position for some time now, feel that this decision marks an important new direction for the organization as we will now be doing a more effective job of reaching out to the masses of vets (there are 6.8 million Vietnam-era veterans and some 42 million vets from previous imperialist wars) and GIs, as well as to others concerned with the struggles of vets and GIs, and organizing them into the fight against U. S. imperialism. While we will be putting forward demands such as "Decent Benefits for All Vets," we will be using the demand to show how the system of imperialism exploits all poor and working people in its constant drive for increased profits for the few at the expense of the many. With a focus on vets and GIs and with programs to guide our work, we will be better able to reach the millions of vets and GIs by speaking to the problems which most directly affect them. Through this, we hope to build a fighting movement of veterans and GIs, and by doing this, be more effective in our work around the many other aspects and manifestations of imperialism which come down on all people in the U. S. and around the world. We also feel that this new direction and program will allow us to concentrate our organizing on the masses of people who are now basically pissed off at the system, and through this, show them how their particular oppression is part of a much larger system of racism, repression and exploitation.

In light of our responsibility to expose and organize against the system of imperialism however it rears its ugly head, we spent much time discussing the Middle East and the great possibilities of that area of the world becoming the ignition point for a major war. In the historical tradition of our support for the Indochinese peoples in their struggle against imperialist aggression, we voted to take an organizational position in support of the liberation struggle of the Palestinian people and of their government, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). As part of our increasing work with active-duty GIs, we also supported a position on No U. S. Troops in the Middle East; many of us have already seen the uses of the military arm of U. S. imperialism to try to destroy the struggles of the people in Indochina, and realize that the same thing could happen again in the Middle East. And finally, we voted on a position which would expose the role of the two super-powers in the Middle East in

stirring up war; the Middle East is something more than a liberation war, but is the point at which the U. S. and the U. S. S. R. are in most direct conflict, and that the contention and collusion between these two super powers could break out into a major war. We took the following statement as a starting point for further investigation: "The American people are in great danger of being dragged into a war in the Middle East. This could result from either of two different contradictions: 1) Contention between the two superpowers (the US and the USSR) for political hegemony and economic control of the Middle East. 2) The U. S. intervening in the Middle East to suppress national liberation struggles, of which the most important is the struggle of the Palestinian people. This war could take one of three forms: 1) A war in comprador form. In this case Israel and/or Iran would be most likely to be the agent of U. S. imperialism. 2) Direct U. S. intervention in a limited war in the Middle East. This could involve only air and naval power, or ground troops as well. 3) A world-wide nuclear war between the two super powers."

If any of you have spent time studying the situation in the Middle East, we would appreciate your ideas. All of us at the meeting recognized that despite the vital importance of this area of the world, few of us know as much as we should; we will be doing more work and study around this question in the future.

Overall, we believe that this Steering Committee meeting was of great importance to us as an organization since it set our direction firmly along the path of a working class outlook. Specific programs and campaigns will replace the more general attacks on the system of imperialism that we had been involved with in the past, and this will allow us to really fight imperialism where it is immediately present rather than just talking about the general imperialist system. By no means does this mean that we will ignore the many struggles being conducted against the system and encouraging all people to fight back against that system; but it does mean that our work will be more directed, so that the blows against the system will be more effective. Much of our meeting was taken up with people talking about their practice during the past months, and judging from that, our new programs will bring all of us closer to victory in the struggle to wipe imperialism from the face of the earth.



National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression

We have received a number of letters from you talking about the need for unity, for working together against our common enemy, and further talking about the inability of the left in America to get beyond internal fighting. We recognize the validity of many of these statements; the people's movement, with all its great potential, and with its rapid growth, is still small in comparison to what it will become; we need all the allies we can bring together. We hope that we are being extremely cautious in determining who are our friends and who are our enemies; in general, we always considered other anti-war, anti-imperialist, or "left" groups as friends until they have given us indisputable proof that they are not. It is also true that, as an organization, we have not developed any high level of political theory (though there are a number of people in the organization who have), so that we judge groups or individuals primarily by their practice--we listen to what they say and then see how their practice backs up their words.

Several years ago, during the height of the anti-war movement, we saw that a number of Trotskyist groups refused to support the Indochinese people and their demands that the US sign the Paris agreements. This political position, we found, went right along with the tactics which these groups used in terms of splitting and wrecking the anti-war movement, trying to make their own organizations grow at the expense of other organizations, and without any real concern for the end of the Indochina war. As a result, VVAW/WSO took a stand against them, and we have seen no reason to change that position over the past year and a half--in fact, the reasons to follow that course have grown stronger with time.

In the August issue of "In side/Out," we described the history of our relations with the NAARPR, particularly around the cases of Gary Lawton and the defense of the Leavenworth Brothers. Since that time the situation has gotten worse and, as a result, the Steering Committee, after a period of discussion, passed the following resolution:

"We condemn Angela Davis, Charlene Mitchell, the Southern California Alliance, the National Alliance, and the Communist Party, U. S. A. for opportunistically using the Alliance as a vehicle to attack Gary Lawton, the Leavenworth Brothers Offense/Defense Committee, and VVAW/WSO. We criticize the other leaders of the Alliance for not fully investigating the charges made against VVAW/WSO in the Alliance's "Open Letter to VVAW/WSO." We condemn the CPUSA for diverting the just struggles of political prisoners for their own self-seeking motives, weakening the anti-imperialist struggle. We wish to make a very clear distinction between the National Alliance, its leadership, and its political outlook from the affiliate organizations within the Alliance and their political outlook."

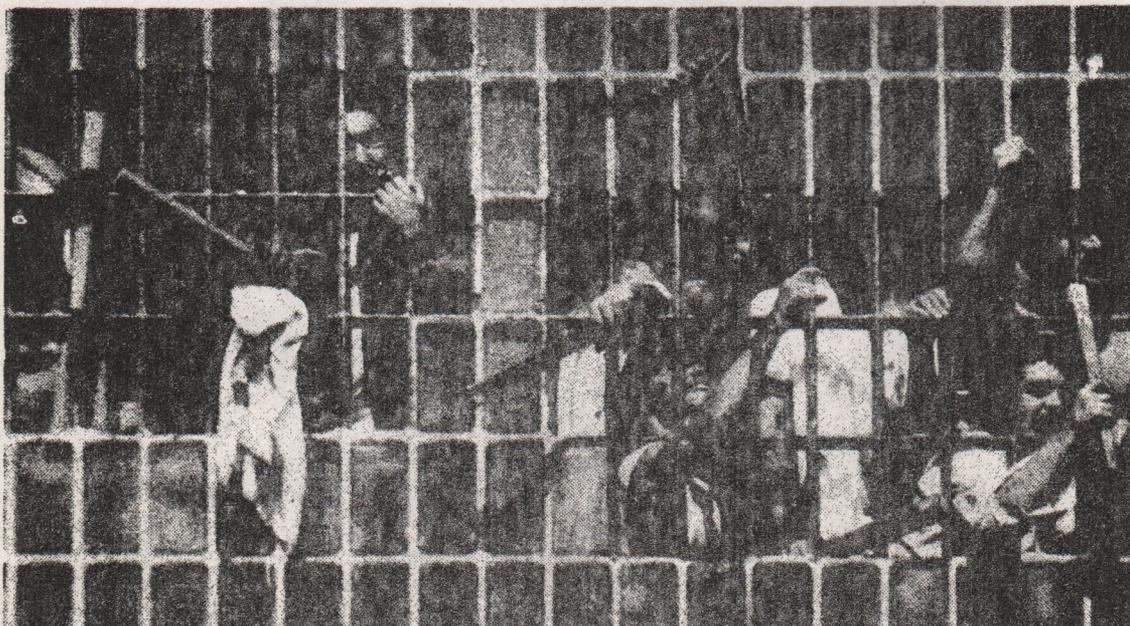
The "Open Letter" referred to was sent to us by the Executive Committee of the Alliance in response to several of our internal documents. In this letter, they attempt to justify a number of criticisms we have made of their practice, but instead of actually speaking about the criticism, they use the letter to attack VVAW/WSO. The logic of their letter says that since the government and the FBI attacks the Alliance, and since VVAW/WSO criticizes the Alliance, then VVAW/WSO and the government are playing the same role. The logic stinks; but what is even sadder is their inability to accept criticism and deal with it rather than turning their response into an attack.

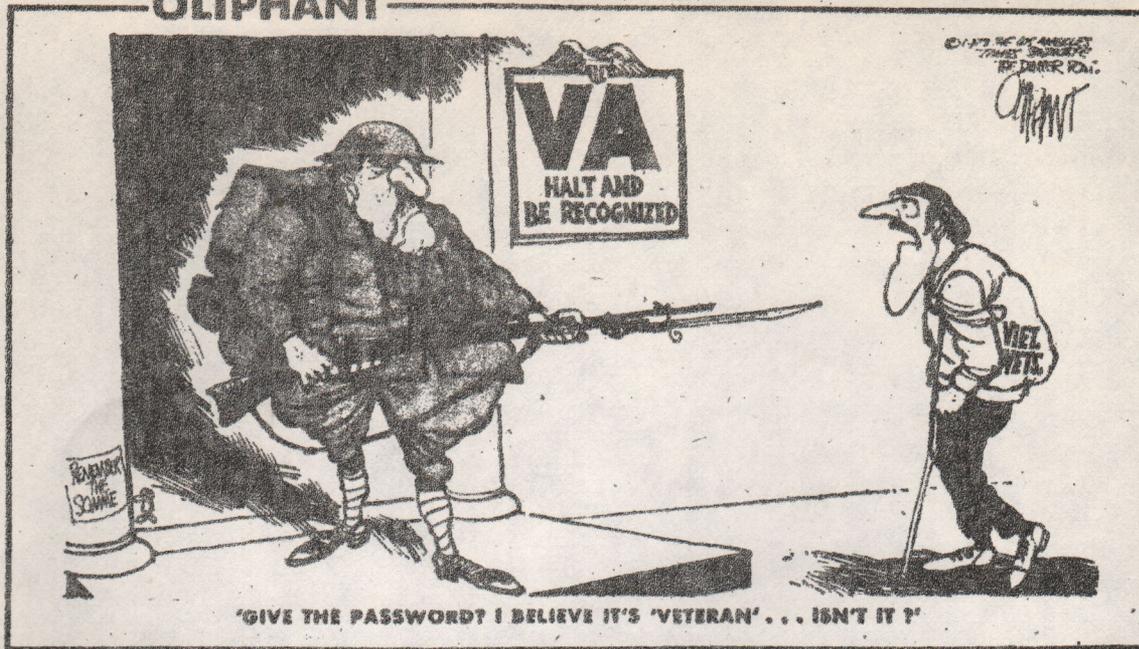
While there are many people in VVAW/WSO who have serious disagreements with the political line of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) (which plays a major role in the Alliance, particularly in the leadership), our basic reasons for the resolution come from the practice of the Alliance. We see the Alliance dividing its specific areas of focus (such as political prisoners in North Carolina) from other struggles going on around the world and, thereby, misleading people. We see that they no longer attack the system of imperialism and therefore give people the impression that the prison system can be reformed through a couple of court decisions rather than by the overthrow of the system. And finally, we see the Alliance using the cases of political prisoners in order to exaggerate the effectiveness and the scope of the Alliance's activities and thus draw members and money into that organization.

In the resolution and the discussion which went on around the resolution, we consistently made the distinction between the leadership of the Alliance (especially the representatives of the CPUSA) and the many organizations which are affiliated with the Alliance. And, while we have serious disagreements with the Alliance leadership, we still hope to be able to work in a principled way with the Alliance in the future.

This is not a resolution which we put forward easily; nor are we taking our statement or that of the Alliance lightly. If we did not find that the practice of the Alliance has amply demonstrated that it no longer puts first the interests of the people it pretends to help, if we did not feel that the Alliance is misleading people and holding back the struggle, we would not make these statements.

This is a relatively brief discussion of what is a complicated issue; we have written a detailed letter to the Alliance in which all of the things said here are expanded and fully discussed. People who would like copies of that letter and of the original Alliance letter can write to us and we will send copies. As always, we are interested in your comments.





VA Hospitals Turn into Jails

Pat Byrd, a patient at Hines Veterans Hospital in Chicago, was confined to his bed for three weeks over Christmas by the hospital administrator as a result of breaking one of the hospital rules. Byrd was caught having a drink while waiting to make a phone call; alcoholic beverages are banned at the hospital. Though the officials there say that he was drunk and abusive, Byrd states that he only had one drink. According to one of the nurses there, "Yes, he broke the rules, and now he must pay his debt to society. His fine and sentence is three weeks in bed... a bed where he has already been confined these many months. Does the punishment match the offense?" (Byrd has been confined to bed, more or less constantly for the past 14 months as a result of a series of hip operations and a recent appendectomy).

When the story got into the local newspapers and the administrators looked like total fools, they backed down to the extent of cutting the confinement from three weeks to only two weeks.

Around the country, vets in the hospitals of the VA system are faced with similar harassment, since the system is not able to deal with the real problems of vets -- just as the system of imperialism as a whole is incapable of dealing with the real needs of the people of this country. But, in conjunction with support from the outside, the patients are fighting back. In the demonstration held in Milwaukee mentioned earlier, patients from the VA hospital were outside in their hospital gowns to take part in the rally, despite threats from guards (who, for instance, threatened to cut off the methadone for some patients undergoing methadone maintenance). While there are not yet bars on the windows and doors of the VA hospitals, repression is the only way the VA knows of as they try to deal with the resistance of the patients.

We know of many veterans groups in prisons around the country and also are aware that many of the brothers and sisters who receive this newsletter are veterans of the military. We would like to find out what, if any, experience you have had with the Veterans Administration -- particularly if and how the VA is functioning within your prison. We know, for instance, of a campaign in one prison to get the VA to provide treatment for prisoners/vets, but would be interested in finding out more. So, let us know what you know about things like this and we'll see if there is something we can do to help out. Also, any ideas about this would be appreciated.

