

ANTI-WAR

LABOR

ORGANIZING

prepared by

Vietnam Summer

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## Introduction

The anti-war movement began principally among students and intellectuals. It has been largely confined to the middle class and, more recently, has made some efforts to reach poor blacks. Very little effort, however, has yet been made to reach white working class people although they form a very large proportion of the population and could be a strong voice in the movement. An image of white workers as hopelessly and irrationally hawkish has developed, and has prevented people from trying to reach workers. This image has been found to be generally false by those who have tried.

This pamphlet is aimed at the white middle-class students and academics who constitute the bulk of the organizers in the movement. It was put together on the theory that what these organizers need most is examples and concrete suggestions on how to go about reaching workers. It therefore contains three project profiles which should be studied closely by any prospective organizer.

The problem arising from the profiles could be put thus: we have not yet on the whole been able to get working people to join the anti-war organizations or to get more than a few local unions to take strong stands against the war, while at the same time we find that a very large number of the people in union plants, in non-union plants, and in working-class neighborhoods are strongly against the war.

In the depths of his frustration, the organizer should remember that labor unions represent a potentially powerful anti-war force. Politicians and political machines listen to unions, counting the number of resolutions that unions have passed against the war. The non-cooperation-- even if only that-- of unions with the war effort and the war economy is perhaps the strongest possible pressure that can be put against the war. Only imagine if there had been enough local dissatisfaction with the war among the ranks of railroad workers to keep the leadership from accepting the recent injunction.

We would recommend that prospective organizers first develop a pilot project with the help of the ideas in this pamphlet. Then, before going on, evaluate the program and seek advice from experienced organizers. One can usually learn more from an afternoon of canvassing than from four books on how to canvass. Communication with other established projects will be most useful when you have some experience of your own to refer to.

Much of the material in the following few sections is from "Unions and the War" by Paul Booth, which appeared in Inter/Change (vol. 2, no. 1).

## Labor and Politics

Although a few unions with left-wing (notably Communist) leadership undertook to campaign against U.S. foreign policy in the post World War II period, by and large the American labor movement has no recent history of resistance to its country's international activity. On the contrary, the American Federation of Labor, and anti-Communists in the Congress of Industrial Organizations maintain to this day an active support of what they call "internationalism," but which is better described as Cold War interventionism, throughout the world. George Meany's pride in the CIA-sponsored activities of his union is the dominant attitude in the trade union movement.

There is another attitude, based on the same internationalist impulse but tempered with a humanitarian, liberal spirit. It differentiates itself

from the interventionist anti-communism of the AFL-CIO international affairs department, which it describes as "blind" and paranoid." It would allocate the 23% of AFL-CIO income now devoted to foreign activity into a domestic crusade to organize the unorganized. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and the United Packinghouse Workers have both adopted anti-war resolutions, as have many large locals of the American Federation of Teachers; these are all "social unions," committed to advancing a program of social reform.

### Structure of the Labor Movement

The basic unit of all labor unions is the local. Some have as few as fifteen members, others more than 10,000, such as steelworkers local 1190 in Gary, or UAW local 600 (Ford River Rouge) with 50,000 members.

Characteristically, the local union is tightly organized. Whether the local has considerable democratic participation or none at all, the elected executive committee and the shop stewards generally have a firm hand on inter-union politics. Almost no unions have caucuses or factions with their own leadership. In the plant, the key to the organization of the union is the steward system. Because grievances are the major continuing business of a local union, the "griever" may be a more important leader than the local president.

Locals have membership meetings once a month on a designated day (the third Tuesday, the second Friday, etc.). Attendance is typically light, and the local executive committee probably tries to keep the meetings short in order to get maximum attendance. Corrupt locals are just as happy not to have many members present.

Larger locals often have pensioners groups and ladies auxiliaries, which also have regular meetings. Outside speakers are scheduled at these regular meetings, if at all.

Each local is represented on a district council or Joint Board of the union; the district may include all the locals in a city or metropolitan area, or all the locals in a region of several states. The district council will have a full-time staff of field representatives, officers, and office staff. Typically, these are all unionists who have come up through the ranks.

A large proportion of the local unions in a city or a country will be affiliated with a Central Labor Council (there are about 800 of these in the U.S.). Frequently the central labor body includes locals of independent (non AFL-CIO) unions. These councils also meet regularly, and are frequently functioning bodies in the political sphere, co-ordinating the Committee on Political Education. There are also state AFL-CIO councils, which also play a primarily political role.

Almost all state councils, most central labor bodies, most district councils, and many larger locals publish tabloid newspapers or newsletters for their membership. Principally, these labor papers contain news of the activity of locals and report on speeches and travels of the officers. In addition, often as much to fill up space as to educate and agitate the membership, they carry political news taken from the AFL-CIO News, the AFL-CIO Federationist, and international union organs. Very few accept letters to the editor, even from members, or carry debate (although this may be due as much to nobody ever having suggested it as to compulsive efforts at consensus), or accept political ads other than those of electoral office-seekers.

District and state councils have annual conventions, at which political resolutions have an important share of the attention, and district councils usually run summer camps for stewards and local union officers. In union with politically minded education and program staffs, the camps will take up broad social questions for discussion as well as carrying out instruction in the ways and means of grievances and organization.

Delegates from local unions gather in conventions of their international every year or every two years to adopt union policy for the next period. Similarly, the AFL-CIO brings together its 120 member unions in convention every two years. In between, business is transacted by union and AFL-CIO executive committees, composed of the weightiest higher-ups.

### Organizing from within

Union members have obvious advantages over outsiders in working to educate workers about the war. They have access to their local meetings, and to their local and district officers. They "know the ropes." They can initiate resolutions, and determine the best strategy depending on the attitudes of the union leadership and the prospects for changing them.

In the American Federation of Teachers, a particularly open union, a committee to end the war has placed anti-war ads in the monthly membership paper, and in a series of locals has secured the adoption of strong anti-war resolutions after considerable debate. In the Social Service Employees Union in New York, the anti-war group held a forum before the 1967 officers election at which candidates on all five slates stated their views on the Vietnam question.

Local labor leaders in five cities created anti-war committees early in 1967, and held anti-war rallies and conferences. In connection with the April 15 anti-war Mobilization, several dozen local unions declared official organizational support and brought delegations of members to the March. In these cases, those anti-war leaders who felt they could obtain the support of their members went before their local membership meetings to ask for endorsement of the March.

In New York a number of locals and joint boards also sponsored a well-attended debate on the war, with two unionists supporting the war and two opposing it.

### Organizing from outside

Four international unions have adopted anti-war resolutions-- United Packinghouse Workers, Amalgamated Clothing Workers, United Electrical Workers, and International Longshoremen and Warehousemen-- and these resolutions are a basis of entree to all the locals of these unions.

If your county doesn't have a local of any of these unions, your first step is to find the names (local liberals will know who these are) of local trade unionists who would be open-minded enough to let you pass out a leaflet to their membership on the effects of the war on the union movement, or would invite in a speaker or allow a debate on the war. (If your anti-war expert is a union member-- many university faculty members are organizing AFT locals-- this is a distinct advantage.) If this is successful, the second step is to stage a meeting at which those you have reached are urged to bring friends from other unions. If this is successful, further steps can be outlined for meeting with other locals and their leaders.

Many locals won't be interested in hearing only one side of the story but will be open to hearing a debate. When you ask for a debate to be held, you can be in a stronger position than when you request an invitation to speak; it's much harder to say that the members shouldn't be allowed to hear a debate.

In many areas, the labor movement includes only the building trades and one large local representing the employees of a big manufacturing plant, the town's "big industry." None of the locals may be interested in hearing a speaker or a debate about the war. At that point, your group should attempt to reach the workers outside their union structure. This can be done with leaflets raising questions about the war and announcing an open meeting, handed out door-to-door in working class neighborhoods and at plant gates.

In almost every place you will work, the organized labor movement represents less than a third of the working class. This is plenty of reason for working directly in working class neighborhoods even if you have excellent access to local unions.

### Talking with Workers

If you are going to try to organize workers, you have to respect them. Intellectuals are usually more articulate than factory workers, but that doesn't mean workers are stupid, and certainly not illogical. Listen. If you are talking to someone who seems to be making no sense, the chances are you are not listening closely enough to understand the premises on which he is building his argument. Try to understand his point of view well enough so that you could argue his side.

Many people will tell you "we have to support our boys all the way." Don't stop there. Many of these people are still strongly against the war. Keep discussing until you get a more complete picture of how the person feels about the war. Then try to speak to the points which matter to him. For example, many people are bitter about the lack of enthusiasm of the South Vietnamese soldiers in fighting the war. You can try to explain why that is by arguing that the South Vietnamese don't like their military and landlord-run government. Point out that the Viet Cong soldiers do fight hard, because the NLF has promised real reforms and carried them out in their areas. You can't create concerns on the door-steps--- work with those you find.

Avoid legalistic arguments. It is important that the South Vietnamese governments we have supported never dared to hold free elections in which all groups were allowed to run candidates; but it is not so important that the U.S. broke its pledge not to interfere with the Geneva Accords. Legalistic arguments wouldn't convince you, and they won't convince the person you're talking to.

Try to draw comparisons between Vietnam and the worker's own experience. Talk about the conditions which led to revolt: landlords, low wages. People tend to respond better to concrete example than to abstract argument.

Be careful about your attitude toward draft card burners and "We Won't Go" ads. The fact is that for every student who doesn't go, a worker's son will, so don't expect workers to be too sympathetic. On the other hand, draft resistance work among working youth, helping them not to go, is a promising program that is just beginning to be tried out. (see Cleveland profile)

Try hard to involve community people in the project. Workers are suspicious of outside students. The Pittsburgh people found that a person known

in the community, even though she wasn't a worker, was an immense help. Try to involve local clergy, PTA and community center officers, etc. Obviously, if a local institution sponsors one of your meetings, you're way ahead of the game.

### Leafletting at Plant Gates

If the plant is new, it may have a parking lot inside the gates. In that case, the workers will be driving through the gate, and it may be hard to give them leaflets without backing up traffic. It can be done, but beginners should start at walk-in gates. Sometimes, though, if the company allows the union to give out things inside the gates, between the parking lot and the plant itself, the company may be legalling required to let anybody give things out there. Check with a lawyer if you have your eye on a drive-in plant.

Don't try to hit everybody. 50% is just fine. The workers' jobs are unlikely to be very exciting, and they will talk about the leaflet as they work. They will probably even leave a lot of copies lying around, so that the next shift will see them, too.

Know somethings about the union and the company before you leaflet. Find out if their contract is set to expire, and whether they are likely to face an injunction because of the war if they strike. If they do strike, offer to help.

There are sample leaflets in the Pittsburgh and Cleveland profiles, which show two very different approaches to leaflet style. Another good idea is to use excerpts from several trade union statements against the war. This, of course, is especially good if the owrkers you are leafletting belong to one of these trade unions.

### Useful Anti-war Arguments

It is crucial that peace people get a feel of how workers think about the war and general questions before beginning even the most modest organizing effort. Taking a regular job and talking to fellow-workers can be a good way to do this, especially if you don't go in with the idea of shaking up the whole labor establishment. Spending a few days in the bar across from the plant, or at the bowling alley where the league bowls is another way. To approach workers directly, students might represent themselves as reporters for the college paper doing a story on what workers think about Vietnam.

An excellent environment to meet workers and talk with them is on their picket line. After all, the peace movement is asking workers to join its marches, even if the issue may seem remote-- shouldn't peace people join in union fights, even if the issue seems narrow?

What follows is a summary of arguments about the war that are particularly applicable to working-class audiences.

A. Inflation. War- induced inflation is chapping away at the economic security of the working class. The regional office of the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics can supply you with the figures on the rise in the Consumer Price Index for you area since 1964, and with figures on the increase in production worker earnings over the same period. For purposes of comparison, Business Week has published articles on defense-industry profits due to the war. Another impact of the high Vietnam war spending is on the Federal budget, which is running a deficit of approximately \$20 billion. Somebody has to pay for this and President Johnson's proposed 10% tax increase would put a heavy burden on workers, as well as everyone else.

B. Starvation of Public Services. The \$30 billion that is going to the war every year is \$30 billion that could be spent on the construction of schools and hospitals, and other measures to reduce "public squalor." Testimony by Harvard economist Wassily Leontief before the Joint Economic Committee of Congress in April, 1967, gave estimates of the impact of a \$19 billion de-escalation in the war on different industries, and different states, focusing particularly on employment (the hearings are published and available in larger libraries). Construction workers particularly would benefit from a program to channel war spending into civilian public sector pursuits, because the most obvious targets of public spending are in the backlog of construction needs in housing, schools, libraries, etc.

C. The Draft. The inequities of the selective service system, even after the modifications in the current legislation, will still be stacked in favor of well-to-do families and families with pull, and against working-class and poor families.

D. The Strengthening of the Right Wing. In order to pursue the war, President Johnson has had to become comfortable with reactionary and anti-labor forces in the country. This was the cause of the defeat in Congress of organized labor's number one political goal, the repeal of the "right-to-work" section of the Taft-Hartley law. Workers must be brought to understand that as long as the war and the Cold War remain the number one priority on the national agenda, their needs and the needs of the union movement take a back seat.

E. Compulsory Arbitration. This is seen most dramatically in the creeping extension of compulsory arbitration, under cover of the "national emergency" argument. A dozen strikes have been called off during the war under the Taft-Hartley 80-day cooling-off period provisions, which apply to national emergencies, and this number is bound to increase. The particular danger at this time is that under the cover of war, anti-labor forces in Congress will be able to pass a permanent law limiting national strikes.

F. Labor Internationalism. No anti-war speech to a group of workers should fail to illustrate the nature of the Thieu-Ky regime, through a discussion of the absence of any free labor movement in South Vietnam. Vietnamese workers have no love for the continued destruction of their country, and have participated actively in the Buddhist movements against the military dictatorship. There are no workers or peasants in the "Constituent Assembly" there. Only government-controlled labor unions can exist, and strikes have been broken using the draft. The constitution that has just been adopted guarantees the right to strike only insofar as the regime determines it to be in the national interest. To the extent that American workers want free labor movements to flourish throughout the world, they need to detach their international operations from U.S. foreign policy.

G. The Nature of the "Enemy". Workers who have been through strikes know how the press distorts the nature of their own movements, and may be able to make the analogy to what is going on in Vietnam. The press is always looking for a devil theory to explain both labor action and the war. Because they don't understand the genuine motivations that make workers join in struggles, they always are trying to find "agitators" and "manipulators" to explain trouble. The same is true in Vietnam, where there are real "nuts-and-bolts" reasons behind the war.

H. Employer Influence on Foreign Policy. By and large, the foreign policy makers are corporate leaders like McNamara. Their biases can be made clear to workers.

I. Patriotism. Many workers are veterans; all in all, you'll run up against deeply rooted patriotism, as well as a good deal of flag-waving. The safest response is to argue about what the U.S. national interest really is, showing perhaps how France's withdrawal helped her prestige. Show how the war is

leading us inevitably toward being an occupying army, and argue that this is not in America's self-interest. Find out if there is a Veterans for Peace group in your area. If so, get them to help you follow up veterans and publish literature for you. If not, try to set one up with the contacts you have made in the union and with other anti-war people. Even if the veterans in the group aren't all workers, they can be of immense help.

## PROJECT PROFILES

The following three sections of the pamphlet are project profiles. The organizer is well advised to read these carefully, using them as models and learning from their mistakes.

### Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh Vietnam Summer is trying to reach an integrated working-class community in Hazelwood in several different ways: by canvassing them at home, leafletting at the factory where they work, and holding public meetings.

After some pilot canvassing, the Pittsburgh VNS people decided to concentrate in a public housing project for three reasons: (1) they had found that those who lived in nicer homes were more likely to support the war; (2) most of the people in the housing project worked in one large factory, so they could be reached at the factory as well as in their homes; (3) they wanted to concentrate in a small area and generate neighborhood talk in advance of their visits. Thus, if they made a good impression on the first few homes, things would be easier later on. Of course, the reverse could also happen.

A Typical Interview. Most of the Pittsburgh VNS canvassers are students. They approach workers as students taking a poll. A typical interview starts like this: "My name is Sam. I'm taking a survey on what people's opinions are on the war in Vietnam. Do you think we should stay in Vietnam or end the war and bring our boys home?" The interview then proceeds according to the nature of the response.

The canvassers do not talk much about Vietnam Summer. National Vietnam Summer publicity did not reach this area and the words Vietnam Summer mean nothing to people here. But in Negro homes they often talk about Martin Luther King. To explain who they are, they often refer to local clergy and professors who are sponsoring the local Vietnam Summer project. They always let people know that they are against the war, but not in the first sentence. They feel it is important that even strong supporters of the war meet sane, friendly people who oppose it.

The canvasser asks whether the canvasee is a trade union member (and if so, which union), whether he is a veteran, and who his minister is. If the person is a union member, the project sends him special literature concerning trade union statements against the war. They also talk about the local Trade Unionists for Peace group. Unfortunately this group has not been active over the summer, but they are keeping the names for future projects. If the person is a veteran, they give his name to Pittsburgh Veterans for Peace, which then contacts him. They ask about ministers in order to ascertain in which churches to hold community meetings.

The canvassers also ask what the person thought of peace demonstrations and peace candidates. In general, they have found that most people against the war in this working-class area don't like demonstrations, but do favor running peace candidates. But the canvassers were not only out to get infor-

mation. After finding out what the canvasee thought about the war, they tried to get him to talk about it. They explained their position, and connected their position with civil rights and the right to strike.

Literature. The canvasser usually gives some anti-war literature to the canvasses, or offers to send him some. The project sends a letter to each canvassed person, thinking him for talking to the canvasser and enclosing information about the war, geared to his interest and knowledge. They have had good results with reprints of the Harrison Salisbury N.Y. Times articles. They have also used the reprint of the Howard Zinn article published by the Cleveland Plaindealer, Martin Luther King's Riverside speech, and "We Burnt Every Hut," which they renamed "A Letter from a GI." On follow-up visits the only bad comments they got were on the last article. People didn't believe it, unless they were already predisposed to accept it.

The letter accompanying the literature also invites the person to come to the VNS office, and tells him that the project will be holding a community meeting about the war. The canvassers have been well-received in most homes. If someone doesn't want to talk, however, they just move on.

A Break. In conversations with community people while canvassing the project people heard about a young anti-war seminary student who worked at the local Presbyterian church. She set up an informal meeting on the draft with some young neighborhood men at a playground. The seminary student has also done some canvassing with the project. People seem to respond better to her, because they tend to see the project people as outside students.

The First Community Meeting. After canvassing about two hundred people, the project re-canvassed about fifty anti-war people to ask them to its first community meeting, held in a recreation center run by the Presbyterian Church. The seminary went to the Presbyterian board of trustees to get permission to use the center as a meeting place. She had a hard struggle, but won on the basis of the recent Presbyterian statement concerning support for the right to dissent. Ten young Negro men (about half college students) and one old Negro man and an elderly Italian lady showed up. Some of the young men came because they heard about the playground meeting and got interested in the project.

At the meeting, they discussed showing Vietnam films outdoors on a playground, a letter campaign, and a public meeting at a church. The second meeting was billed as a letter-writing session. Only five people showed up, probably because it was raining hard, and because people were invited by letter instead of by door-to-door visit.

A Public Meeting. They are now working on getting a public meeting in a community church. Most of the people in the community are Catholic. The priest gave them permission to hold a debate in his church, but has since backed out. The project is planning to contact the other ministers on their list and will advertise through door-to-door visits and phone calling. It will probably not be a debate unless that is the only way the minister will accept it, because they have had trouble finding a pro-war speaker, especially one who would not incite the crowd against the VNS people by appeals to patriotism or by red-baiting.

As of now, about 700 people have been canvassed, and the project will continue during the fall.

Leafletting at Plant Gates. The Pittsburgh project has also leafletted at plant gates, including the plant at which most of the Hazelwood workers work. A copy (a bit reduced in size) of their latest leaflet is included in this pamphlet. About a dozen people mailed in the coupon on the leaflet. The project has mailed them a letter with information on various Trade Unionists for Peace groups, plus an issue of the magazine Labor Today, which concentrated on the war. A Pittsburgh trade unionist working with the project

will visit them all.

### Cleveland

Cleveland Labor Against the war is a small group of young men, some laborers, some students, which started organizing working people against the war this summer. Several approaches were tried:

(1) The major steel and auto plants in the city were leafleted. Plants where contract negotiations are imminent and plants where the unions have an existing radical membership were chosen. We tried to contact a few people inside several unions, in that way building a rank-and-file group working inside its own union against the war.

Four or five people stood outside the one or two main gates and passed out leaflets. People who received our leaflets while entering the plant and had a chance to discuss them during work responded well, calling us up in the evening. We have also gotten into the habit of offering interested people a stack of leaflets to hand out in their neighborhoods.

Since the purpose of the project was to make contact with people within the union who will later organize discussions or propose anti-war resolutions in union meetings, the materials we used were fairly thorough. We argued that it was a rich man's war which poor men were paying for, that it was a war for the control of cheap labor in Southeast Asia, that working people were doing most of the fighting, and that it was a war against people fighting for their freedom.

Aside from a few hostile reactions, the men generally took the leaflets, read them as they went in, and were never heard from again. A few, however, stopped and talked, and a few called up later, and we were able to make some personal contacts.

We are convinced that there is an anti-war sentiment in the unions, but that working people are not interested in joining groups which do nothing but put out anti-war propaganda. Still, the leaflets are read, and the issue of the war is brought into the plant and the union.

(2) We tried to organize a SANO leadership group against the war. This has gone very slowly, mainly because it is difficult to get busy union staff people together. Some general meetings are planned for the fall, and a few local unions are projecting educational programs about the war. Other projects could best attempt such organizing by contacting the Trade Union division of SANE.

(3) Those in the group who were working in shops spent long hours in discussion about the war and were able to convince some of their co-workers to attend informal talk-sessions about the war. These people found it important to join their co-workers in agitating around shop issues such as the election of shop stewards, and general grievances (ventilation, production speed, safety devices, overtime hours, etc.) in order to win their confidence.

We also found that workers were more likely to adopt an anti-draft position than an anti-war position. Young men and their relatives were desperately trying to find ways of avoiding the draft. Men who thought it futile to protest against the war were willing to commit themselves to the support of men who refused to fight, by taking part in anti-draft demonstrations and talking to young men about avoiding the draft. No matter what they thought of the possibility of the U.S. getting out of Vietnam (and in most cases they felt powerless to affect that decision), they were convinced that the war was not being fought in the interests of the working people and therefore that work-

ing people shouldn't be forced to fight in it.

Naturally there are a great number of people in the plant who regard draft resistance either as treason or cowardice, but we found that those who support draft resistance will stand up to the others, whereas they are not so willing to make an issue of the morality or practicality of the war.

We are also finding that men and women who get interested in draft resistance for a while eventually begin to push for an anti-war position in their union, their plant, and their neighborhood. It seems to be a question of breaking through the heavy cynicism about the people's control of their government and the dominating sense of powerlessness that the working person feels. You can break through best by touching the issue closest to them: the drafting of their sons and relatives to die in a rich man's war.

In the future we will concentrate more and more on urging support of draft resistance in our leaflets and conversations. Hopefully, working people's participation in draft resistance and draft information groups will provide a kind of intermediate step to anti-war groups, both inside and outside the union.

(4) Finally, the group has been leafletting in public places, such as the outdoor market, in predominantly working class neighborhoods. A few contacts have been made and we hope to build anti-draft, anti-war community groups from these contacts.

Below is the content of the leaflet used by the Cleveland group.

#### WORKING PEOPLE SHOULD TAKE A STAND AGAINST THE WAR IN VIETNAM

\*The war in Vietnam is a war against the Vietnamese people's struggle for independence and self-determination.

\*We are told that it is a war to protect us from communist aggression. We do not believe that communist countries are attacking the United States. It is the United States which is involved militarily in a foreign country. It is hard for us to believe that a country fighting for its independence is a threat to our national security.

\*We can only believe that the United States government is fighting the war in Vietnam in order to build a business empire in Southeast Asia. Working people have no stake in that empire.

#### WORKING PEOPLE ARE DOING THE FIGHTING

The sons of business are protected by the 2-S "college" deferment.

#### WORKING PEOPLE ARE PAYING FOR THE WAR

The war in Vietnam means higher taxes, higher prices, higher profits but lower real wages. The war gives the government the excuse to lay down minimum 3.2% wage guidelines and to slap on the injunction against attempts to strike. What happened to railroad workers is going to happen to steelworkers and auto workers come the next contract time.

#### WORKING PEOPLE SHOULD REFUSE TO BE USED IN THIS WAR

There are things we can do. Call for your local to pass a resolution against the war. Set up groups of people to learn the facts about the war. Appear as a block representing labor in anti-war demonstrations. Learn the possibilities of draft resistance and make an organized effort to keep young men of draft age from being sent to Vietnam.

LET'S MAKE OUR FIGHT AT HOME, FOR A DECENT LIFE!

Call us if you are interested in learning more about the war or if you want to begin to organize against U.S. participation in this war.

Call: 721-1869  
Write: 10616 Euclid Ave., Rm 317  
Cleveland Labor Against the War

\* \* \* \* \*

Cambridge, Massachusetts

A campaign to reach large numbers of people, especially industrial workers, with a strong anti-imperialist statement against the war, the Cambridge Vote on Vietnam ran from February to September 1, finishing with 8000 signatures to this petition:

We, the undersigned, petition the Cambridge City Council to adopt the following resolution:

WE ARE OPPOSED TO THE U.S. POLICY IN VIETNAM. THE WAR IN VIETNAM IS AGAINST THE INTERESTS OF AMERICAN WORKERS AND STUDENTS BECAUSE IT SPENDS OUR MEN AND OUR MONEY TO SUPPRESS THE VIETNAMESE. THE WAR SERVES ONLY THE INTERESTS OF BUSINESS. THE U.S. SHOULD GET OUT OF VIETNAM.

Under the City Charter, if 3,600 registered voters sign it, this statement should go on the ballot as a referendum in November. As of this writing the city has not yet ruled on the number of valid signatures on the petition and is maintaining that the petition is not acceptable because of the incorrect positioning and addresses of the three initial signers. Should such obstructionism continue, the CVV plans to put out a mass mailing to its 8000 signers, attempt to speak at City Council, and otherwise apply public pressure on the city to put the petition on the ballot.

Use of Electoral Politics

The CVV did not believe in deluding people about electoral politics; we argued that we could never vote the U.S. out of Vietnam. But we used the form of a referendum campaign for several reasons. First, to get the war out in the open, especially in workers' communities subjected to continual reactionary propaganda. Second, to lay the foundation for further organizing. A referendum unites people; it helps to overcome the defeatism and frustration which many feel as a result of isolation from the movement. Third, the referendum provided a good opportunity for students to talk to workers, and thus the class barrier was partially effaced.

First Phase of the Campaign

From February to July, our goal was quality over quantity. In the door-to-door canvassing we tried hard for good discussions, really listening to people, going into their ideas and problems as deeply as possible, and searching for ways to counter their arguments, doubts, and frustration. We spent a lot of time neutralizing reactionary ideas, trying to explain that these ideas are imposed from without and do not serve the real interests of the workers. The door-to-door work took precedence over signature-gathering on the street. since the street was less suited to careful discussion. In

street work, we talked to everyone, whether Cambridge resident or not; we made no attempt to cut short discussion in order to reach more people for signatures. Increasingly, in June and July, we devoted much time to follow-ups, going back where we had met a good response with a short booklet on the war and the campaign and for more discussion. We showed a film, The Threatening Sky ( a documentary from NLF and DRV sources), to several small groups of follow-ups. We held two meetings which drew very small attendance (four people each) but which were a great advance for the few who came; they responded well to the group situation and we had quite wide-ranging discussions.

Internally, we concentrated in these months on strengthening our understanding of the war, on working out answers to the questions we met, and on sharing experiences systematically. We held one all-day conference to go more deeply into our anti-imperialist position and also held workshops to improve our style of work. A steering committee handled the tasks of book-keeping and put out an internal newsletter; but every volunteer took part in policy decisions, usually in lengthy meetings for that purpose. One practice which was a great strength to us was meeting together informally after each night's work to talk it over. No one felt he was carrying out a bureaucratically assigned job of routine work, and no one felt isolated. We functioned as a collective.

#### Second Phase of the Campaign

In July and August the campaign changed somewhat. We realized we had to step up the rate of signature-gathering to get on the ballot, since this victory would both encourage those we had reached and also make possible further work and more contacts in a campaign to get votes in November. We decided to do a lot of street work. We scouted the streets for good places, and started off with a leaflet campaign, giving out a series of five connected leaflets on the war and the project. Then we moved in to gather signatures. We began to be known in Cambridge, as thousands of residents read our leaflets and saw us out there day after day. As the deadline approached, we were more selective about signatures, making sure people were registered to vote in Cambridge. We also spent less time in long neutralizing or theoretical discussions. This street campaign, which became highly organized and efficient in August, was very successful; and our signatures poured in. People would stop to wish us luck, to say they had signed, or to comment on some recent development in the war. We also met some hostility, but kept this to a minimum by being very sensitive to people's reactions as we saturated an area.

We continued the door-to-door work and stepped it up. The faster pace grew quite demanding of time and energy, and as we became well known in Cambridge (partly through an ad and an article in the local paper) we found it harder to reach people who had already made up their minds to have nothing to do with us. But we also found encouraging responses from those who had heard of us or seen us in the street.

The follow-up slowed down in the second phase of the campaign: we had no time. But three community people went door-to-door with us towards the end, and we still have the basis for good contacts. We can pick up this aspect-- the most important long-range aspect-- of the campaign in the coming months.

Internally, the group set up regular discussion meetings late in June to evaluate and discuss the campaign, to lay plans for the new phase in it, and to try to put the CVV in perspective. These meetings were an advance on our earlier informal talks, which became more difficult to manage as the campaign picked up speed.

### Continuation of the Project

Most of the CVV workers want to continue in some form after the referendum. This is being worked out now, with some difficulty. Some kind of community work seems like the best prospect. A meeting will be held at the end of September to decide.

### Reports of Typical CVV Experiences

Mr. M.: Rejected the position after reading first sentence, "opposed to the U.S. policy in Vietnam." At this point we pushed for idscussion, and after talking ten minutes in the doorway, he invited us in and we continued another twenty minutes. Some excerpts--

He didn't like Johnson but felt that since he was elected in a free election all Americans should abide by his decisions. Doesn't like peace marchers, "We Won't Go" signers, war protesters. Agrees that business makes vast profits in Asia and other underdeveloped areas, but also feels that U.S. industry has helped people in various countries (Japan for example).

Strongly anti-communist, said he would throw us out if we were communists, but later softened this, saying that he meant he would not give money or support to communist actions. A good dent was made in this attitude when we related some U.S. communist history, especially that fact that communists led in the forming of industrial unions in the 30's.

Feels we must stop communism and that if communism wins in Vietnam it will spread into neighboring countries and eventually threaten us. Drew analogy to espansion of Hitler and Japan. He was surprised when told that (1) many of the NLF are not communists; (2) Eisenhower said Ho would have been elected by a large majority in 1956. Still he felt that if most South Vietnamese favored or supported communism, it was mainly because they had been led astray by propaganda. Felt that people given a choice would never prefer communism. Pointed to the flow of people from East to West Berlin and out of Cuba. He asserted a lack of civil liberties in communist countries as compared to the U.S. Realizes that American elections don't provide real alternatives but sees not way around this. "No politician is for workers. The best you can do is get someone who is willing to give the workers some crumbs, like Gurley of Boston." He didn't agree that elections are necessarily determined by having lots of money behind the campaign. If people work together on an election they can win. Therefore he respected the Referendum project since he saw the parallel to what we're doing. Was impressed by his neighbors' having signed.

Mr. M. was very friendly throughout and would be willing to talk some more. Said we cleared up some points for him.

Mr. S.: Mr. S. is a route man for a dry-cleaning outfit. He's opposed to the war and speaks to many of the people he makes deliveries to every day. Discusses the war a lot with them. "People have really turned against the war in the last year. People who use to say that I talk like a communist because I was against the war, now say that I was right."

Mr. S.'s own position is that the U.S. has to get out of Vietnam. He was unusual in his identification with, and support for, the Vietnamese. "They'll never give up. Why should they? It's their country." The British learned that you can't keep an empire. The U.S. will have to learn too-- the hard way!"

Mr. S. thought that U.S. politicians would eventually recognize this reality and in 1968 a Republican would be elected President on the basis of pulling the U.S. out of Vietnam. "It happened in Korea." We weren't able to make any headway against this outlook.

Although not himself in a union, Mr. S. was fiercely pro-union and couldn't conceive of anti-strike laws ever being imposed. We met this reaction from Wagn militant unionists, especially some teamsters: "They wouldn't dare pass anti-strike laws!" Therefore we armed ourselves with information on government anti-strike actions.

The Korean Veteran, Mr. G.

He's for the war. It's to stop communism, like the Korean war. If you don't stop the communists in Korea or Vietnam, you'll have to fight them in America. He fought in Korea and he would fight in Vietnam. He was for escalation in Korea: drawing a line on a parallel, "arguing about a piece of paper," makes no sense, you should go in to win. And he's for escalation in Vietnam, though he thinks the U.S. will end up drawing another parallel line there as they did in Korea. Other things he doesn't like are the Ky government (but soon they'll have an elected government instead), and the situation in China; he has great sympathy for the Chinese who are suffering under communism. He sympathizes, too, with the fight of the Viet Minh as Vietnamese patriots. We're in Vietnam to help the people throw out communism and set up democracy, because there's no freedom under communism; American is the guarantor of democracy everywhere and the foe of communism. You can't be an American and a communist.

It's very hard to argue because he's very articulate (a youngish self-employed guy) and rushes on, though he doesn't deliberately try to shut you up. You try to distinguish between "communists": in Vietnam, the communists are the peasants and workers who have been fighting Japanese, French colonialists, and the coalition of native traitors and Yankee imperialism for over twenty years. You can't really get this point across. He's on to another argument before you can nail that one down. You say it is possible to be an American and a communist. He shies away from that, asking if you believe American is a democracy (we have a vote here, they don't get a vote under communism). You say no, American is not a democracy. The vote means practically nothing, power is in the hands of a few, politicians run the country for the corporations; America is not a democracy for American working people, only a democracy for the rich. He asks you if you believe that. You say yes. Then you say that the anti-communist propaganda about this war is used as a smoke-screen for the real reasons the government is in Vietnam: we are fighting communists, but scarcely out of devotion to freedom. You describe imperialism and the wars that are now and then necessary to make Guatemala safe for United Fruit, or Thailand safe for Union Carbide. You quote some Vietnam GI's you've met who say Saigon is ringed with American-owned textile and paper factories where Vietnamese workers make \$1.40 a day. At this he says yes, he thinks Asian workers are badly underpaid, but that's their problem, that's for them to work out. Before you can point out that the NLF is trying to solve it by kicking out the Yankee bosses and building up the country under socialism, he's off on another tack. You say you think the Vietnamese war is like what the U.S. does in Latin America; he agrees, mentions the "trouble" the U.S. had in Latin America in Teddy Roosevelt's time. He grants the point of U.S. profiteering abroad, but says you just have to go along with it: history has always been like that, it's just us instead of the Greeks or Romans. When you begin to talk about who benefits from imperialism and who doesn't, and how it can be defeated and by whom, he says he's sorry, but he's for the war. He thanks you as you leave.

