

LOUISVILLE SWP

# The Militant Bookstore

## (502) 587-8418

SEP 11 1978

September 5, 1978

TO: The Political Committee  
RE: GI's & membership

Dear comrades,

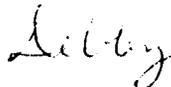
We are in the process of bringing closer one or more GI's to our movement. This has raised the question in the branch as to our policy in relation to GI membership. One comrade in our branch is very familiar with our policy during the war in Vietnam, as he was a member, was drafted, had to quit, and rejoined after he was discharged. That comrade is Jim Surfeind.

Fred Holstead was talking with one of the GI's interested in the SWP during the National Anti-Nuke Strategy Conference here. Fred expressed the opinion that because of the party suit it might be possible to consider bringing GI's into membership. In a telephone call to the national office, Andrea Morell told me that GI's were members of the SWP during WWII.

Since our policy is flexible and determined by the conjuncture of events, we would very much like to hear a proposal and motivation for a current policy on this question. At this point we are going by the policy, and the motivation for that policy, which existed during the war in Vietnam. It seems like there are significant similarities but also significant differences between this period and that one.

We do not feel that this is a pressing question for us at this time. Both the branch and the GI's around us are "happy" with the previous policy at least for the time being. However, in 2 or 3 months I feel it could become a more immediate question for us. For this reason I hope it will be possible to allot the time necessary to discuss this question and clarify it for us as well as other branches. Our experience here makes it obvious that there are radical and radicalizing GI's in the current volunteer army. And with the ever growing imminence of troop intervention in Africa that radicalization will of course deepen. Hopefully many branches will experience what we are experiencing - GI's looking up the Militant bookstore in their area and wanting to hear what we have to say, and most importantly - liking what they hear.

Comradely,



Debby Tarnopol  
SWP organizer  
Louisville branch

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14 Charles Lane  
New York, N.Y. 10014  
October 14, 1978

Debby Tarnopol  
Louisville

Dear Debby,

It's good to hear we are having some luck with a couple of GIs. As far as I know, this is the first experience of that kind since the end of the war.

The party has never had a policy against GIs being members. Our comrades who were drafted remained members of the party, functioned as much as they were able to as socialists, and at every opportunity exercised their constitutional right to win people, including other GIs, to the party. Some of the best known examples are Howard Petrick, who fought against attempted victimization by the army precisely because he was a member of the SWP and the YSA; Joe Miles, Joe Cole, Steve Dash, and other comrades involved in the GIs United Against the War at Fort Jackson--who succeeded in recruiting Andrew Pulley out of that struggle; and a whole list of other comrades, including Ed Jurenas, Eddie Glover, John Singleterry, and others, who we helped wage defense efforts around, always explaining that they were members of the party and/or the YSA.

In one case, we even ran a comrade for public office on the SWP ticket while he was in the army--Steve Wattenmaker, who was stationed, I think, at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio.

We did recruit a few--not many--GIs to the party or the YSA. We certainly tried to recruit as many as we could. We were, of course, a little more cautious about taking GIs in, because of the circumstances they had to function under.

There may be some confusion in the branch because we did have a policy that comrades who were in the service were given leaves of absence from the party for as long as they were in the military. However, they remained members and --as I'm sure you will recall, if you think about the comrades I've mentioned--quite active members.

The reason for the leave of absence was simply to help protect these comrades and the party against victimization by the government. This policy would make it more difficult for the brass to accuse our members of being subject to some other "discipline" than military discipline.

However, the comrades on leave attended branch meetings when they could, distributed literature, including

the Militant, attended party and YSA conventions, participated in national and regional conferences, and carried out many other activities.

It is certainly true, as you point out, that this policy should be flexible and determined by the events, and that the current situation is quite a bit different from the one we faced during the Vietnam War. The political situation is different, the army is different, and our suit does give us a better angle to handle any problems of victimization.

However, I personally am not convinced that there is any reason at this time to modify our policy of leaves of absence. It may be overly cautious but I don't see any reason not to err on the side of caution. A leave of absence need not interfere with any comrade's ability to talk about socialism and explain our ideas to other GIs, and to participate in other party activities.

In any case, it should be clear that there is no policy--and never was--that barred or discouraged GIs from membership. - Good luck with your GI contacts.

Comradely,

*Larry Seigle*  
Larry Seigle