

LINK with GIs

Fifth Estate Collective

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Marches, demonstrations, and other anti-war actions are a credit to the Peace Movement, but have not had enough impact on the men in uniform. This is the view of a group of Vietnam veterans opposed to the war who have formed an agency to build communication between servicemen and peace organizations. They call themselves the Servicemen's LINK to Peace.

"The purpose of LINK," says Vietnam veteran Carl Rogers, "is to break through the wall of isolation which separates military life from the civilian community. In the case of Vietnam, servicemen fear the unknown of life in combat; they are ignorant not only of their rights but also of the policies which have sent them there," said Rogers. He and the Vietnam veterans who have organized LINK are attempting to inform, educate, and motivate servicemen with respect to the Peace Movement.

There is no denying that dissension in the ranks has increased tremendously as our commitment in Vietnam has grown. How much it's increased is difficult to assess but the support for a chain of antiwar coffeehouses outside several military bases at home and the increasing membership in a servicemen's union give proof of the sentiment of thousands of disillusioned men in uniform. LINK knows that this dissension is leading to action by individual GIs and the veterans of the LINK project want to see that it is constructively supported by the Peace Movement.

LINK has compiled the names of several thousand servicemen who have shown an interest in the Peace Movement. Many of the several anti-war newspapers, of which the largest is the Vietnam GI, edited by other Vietnam veterans. "By working with the Vietnam GI and the other serviceman's papers," says Rogers, "we expect to increase the number of men being reached through the mail, but to demonstrate more visibly support for the men LINK plans to open a number of information centers in the cities of Southeast Asia where servicemen take their R&R (Rest and Recuperation) holidays from Vietnam."

Rogers points out that while men are in the service they are exposed not only to what he considers the "one-sided position of the military" but also to such "para-military organizations as the American Legion, the V.F.W. and the U.S.O.. all of which maintain contact and support through letters, publications and celebrity tours. Our LINK Information Centers can serve to counteract this sort of activity," he says, "and more importantly, they can be our means of highly visible support for the troops."

The first of the centers is soon to open in Hawaii and will be staffed by Vietnam veterans, under Rogers' direction, and will have American girls serving as hostesses.

One of LINK's most important services will be the arrangement of speaking tours across the United States by veterans who have just returned from the war. These tours will be arranged for some of LINK's sponsoring peace organizations.

"The great potential strength of this project lies in its opportunity for the Peace Movement to show visible support for the GIs now," says Rogers. Ultimately he feels the hope for new life in the Peace Movement and for its continued growth in the future may very well depend on how successful they are in getting the men who've experienced Vietnam committed to joining with them in acting against not only this war but also future wars and their causes.

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