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Edited transcript of
REPORT TO PANEL ON WOMEN'S LIBERATION
(23rd National SWP Convention, 1969)

By Mary-Alice Waters

I want to make some brief opening remarks this evening, putting the developing women's liberation movement in perspective.

First of all, the issue of women's liberation is not a new one for revolutionary Marxists. Our traditional interest in this question goes back to the very beginnings of the Marxist movement over a century ago, and a great deal of analysis has been done and literature written during this period of time. Throughout the history of our own party the same thing is true. From its inception the SWP has been concerned with the struggle for women's liberation and various comrades have done a great deal of work and research on it. Most of the comrades are familiar with Evelyn Reed's work which has been the most outstanding, but you can also go back through the ISR's and Militants and find additional valuable material on the question of women's oppression.

Women's liberation is an issue that comes to the fore during every period of radicalization. This has been true throughout American history -- for example, particularly during the pre-Civil War abolitionist struggle, and in the early part of this century when women's suffrage was finally won. It's been true internationally as well -- in the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the Cuban, Algerian, and others. Any revolutionary organization that fails to recognize the oppression of women, and the potential that exists for struggle by women, will be unable to fully mobilize the revolutionary energies of half the population, half the available forces.

So for us, women's liberation is an important question, and we approach it seriously. We approach it with the same seriousness that we show towards any developing struggle that is potentially anticapitalist in its thrust and revolutionary in its implications.

At the same time, we also recognize that it is a very explosive issue, that the question of women's oppression is shrouded by, and grounded in, all types of irrational attitudes. That the struggle for liberation cuts deeply into emotional and psychological problems and into personal relationships. It means uprooting some of the most deeply ingrained prejudices and misconceptions which have historical roots going back far before

capitalist society, to the very beginnings of class society itself. Such problems must be kept in mind in approaching the women's liberation struggle.

As the general political resolution for this convention spells out, this is a period of deepening radicalization, a radicalization that continues to spread, to reach new issues, new layers of society, that leads toward new struggles, and challenges more and more of the tolerated norms of our society. It's in this context that the women's liberation struggle is beginning to emerge on a new level. It's one more indication, one more sign of the deepening radicalization. It's an arena where the potential exists for mass struggle around many different issues -- such as jobs, pay, working conditions, inflation, abortion and birth control, education, and all the more subtle forms of oppression.

Because the issue of women's liberation is emerging for the first time in our generation of radicals there is a tendency on the part of some men and women to reject the question of women's liberation as a phony issue, as irrelevant and unimportant, as a distraction from the real revolutionary struggles that are going on. Those who hold that view are simply not thinking the question out very thoroughly. Is it "phony" that women can't get the kinds of jobs they're qualified to fill? Is it a phony issue that once a woman gets a job, even the most de-meaning and mind-rotting kind of job, she is paid only a fraction of what a man would get if he were holding that same job? Is it a phony issue that even after a woman gets a bad job at lower pay she then goes home and does most of the work of raising a family and keeping a home? Is the right of a woman to have control over her own body a phony issue? Is the degrading and inferior family-and-home oriented education that women receive a phony issue? Is the psychological and emotional conditioning that women are subjected to from the day that they are born a phony issue?

For Marxists, of course, the answer is clear. These are not phony issues, they are very real, important and basic issues affecting the day to day lives and abilities of half the population. Struggle against all the myriad forms of women's oppression attacks some of the most basic underpinnings of capitalist society. Our general approach to the women's libera-

tion development is to see it as opening new opportunities for us, as well as new responsibilities for the revolutionary movement -- a whole new field of struggle that we want to help develop, to promote. It offers us the chance to win new recruits to the revolutionary movement, to win greater influence in the radical milieu, and to help develop this struggle in a revolutionary direction.

What is the women's liberation movement as it exists today? Comrades will have a much clearer picture of it after hearing the reports that will be given from the various areas of the country tonight, but I want to make a couple of observations based on the reports that have come in to the national office so far.

The women's liberation movement has emerged primarily in the last year, although there were beginnings and rumblings in the period before that. It emerged out of the general radical milieu that exists. That is, up to now the majority of the women who have been involved in initiating women's liberation groups have usually come out of or had some association with SDS, the Resistance, the antiwar movement, and other radical organizations. The bulk of them are young, in their early twenties, and many of them are activists looking for something to do. Frequently they are women who have been radicalized on a whole range of issues already. That is, the majority probably still come to the radical movement on the basis of many issues, not simply women's liberation. Many are willing to consider revolutionary answers to the whole range of problems they are becoming aware of. They tend to be open to a class analysis of the question of women's oppression and to be willing to consider it very seriously.

Many of them have turned towards the women's liberation movement because they became disillusioned by the attitudes of the men in organizations like SDS. They expected that in the radical movement it would be different from the rest of society, that they would be accepted as equals, not as women; that they would be able to contribute to the full extent of their abilities; that they would be able to play leadership roles; that they would not be subjected to all of the male chauvinist attitudes and insults that are prevalent in the rest of society. They rapidly learned that the radical movement didn't live up to their expectations, that the attitudes of the men in the radical movement were not all that different from the attitudes they encountered elsewhere. So many women began to look for other solutions, other ways to utilize their abilities. They began to organize women's liberation groups.

Roughly, such has been the origin of most of the women's liberation organizations so far, but we should certainly expect that as the movement develops this will begin to change. More and more the movement will begin to involve women who did not go through this kind of evolution, but came to the women's liberation movement directly, without an extended radical history.

Once organized groups emerged, of course, a whole range of questions rapidly came to the fore, and the groups began to evolve, some in one direction, some in another. Some groups evolved toward a kind of group therapy approach, soul-searching, and trying to solve all the psychological and emotional problems of women in capitalist society. Others evolved towards participation in the general radical movement -- that is as a caucus of SDS, or primarily organizing women for the purpose of participation in the antiwar movement, the black liberation struggle, various campus struggles, etc. Still other groups decided to rule out participation in other struggles, like the antiwar movement, and to restrict themselves solely to problems of women's oppression. Sharp debates have also emerged on other issues, such as the attitude women's liberation groups should have towards men -- some even limiting the percentage of their membership that can be married or living with a man.

All these questions of attitude and approach are very much unresolved by the women's liberation movement as a whole. It is still at a very amorphous stage, with every conceivable political idea entered in the competition for influence. Different groups, representing the various tendencies, often exist side by side in each city, competing for membership.

The women's liberation movement is also very uneven from one area to another. In some cities it is quite well organized -- as in Boston and San Francisco. In other areas, like Cleveland, it has barely gotten off the ground yet.

What is our approach to the women's liberation movement? Leaving aside some of the tactical problems which by and large will have to be solved on the local level, the most important thing is for us to step back for a moment and look at our general orientation.

Our approach to the women's liberation struggle is based on the same considerations as our approach to any other struggle with revolutionary potential. We utilize the basic tools of Marxism, the approach that's outlined and developed in our transitional program. We try to reach out to the movement at its present

level, recognizing it has a tempo of its own, and we orient our intervention so as to help raise the consciousness of the forces involved. That is, we try to help develop the struggle, to help lead it to a higher level, and eventually to a revolutionary perspective. We start from the fact that women are oppressed in capitalist society. And within the United States there is the additional factor of the triple exploitation of the women of the national minorities, who are oppressed as women, as Afro-Americans or members of other national minorities, and also as workers. We take that into account as an additional very explosive factor in the United States.

We also take into account the growing contradictions that exist for women in the United States today due to (1) the rising level of education for women -- not only college women, but the majority of women who today receive a high school education (or close to it); (2) the declining, though still considerable, burden of housework; (3) the increasing control women have over their own bodies; and other factors. As women gain this kind of education and control over their lives, the contradictions increase between their expectations and the role they are permitted by society to play.

All these factors provide the objective basis for the new rise of the women's liberation movement and its development, and from them we conclude that the conditions do exist for mobilizing women to struggle on a whole range of issues that affect them directly.

Fundamental to our approach is the understanding that the full emancipation of women is unrealizable short of the socialist revolution, and women must be recruited to the revolutionary party and involved in the revolutionary struggle. We reject the approach of simply trying to change one's "life style," of dealing primarily or solely with the psychological and emotional problems created by women's oppression. We're not trying to build a new utopia under capitalism based on a vision of the future. Unfortunately, the revolutionary organizations that we build and use as the tools in our struggle are going to reflect the society in which we still live, because our forms of struggle are determined not by the nature of the society which will someday emerge but by the nature of the fight to be waged against the existing society. Our job is not to bemoan what class society has done to us, but to educate and to organize and eventually to lead the masses in struggle to abolish class society.

Many comrades have raised questions about the demands we should be putting forward within the women's liberation

movement, whether or not we should write out a transitional program at this stage.

First of all, a note of caution. At this convention we are considering a transitional program for the black liberation struggle; and for several months the sections and sympathizing parties of the International have been discussing a transitional program for the student struggle. But we shouldn't try to rush into one for women's liberation. We were involved in the black liberation and student movements for a long time before we attempted to set down transitional programs. The same process is going to take place in relation to women's liberation. Our job at this point, where the women's liberation movement is in an embryonic form, is not to sit down and start writing a full-blown program, but to begin getting involved in it, learning about it, and thinking about it. As the movement evolves and as our participation and knowledge deepen, we will be in a much better position to develop such a program. It would be a mistake to try to guess, which is what we would have to do to some extent at this initial stage of the struggle.

Expressing that note of caution, however, doesn't mean we have no idea what kind of demands to raise. Again, this is not a "new" question for us.

In recent years the Canadian comrades have done some of the most valuable work on the problems of women's liberation. Many comrades may be familiar with the brief that was prepared by the comrades of the LSA-ISO, and submitted to the Royal Commission on Women in Canada. It is now out in pamphlet form, "The Status of Women in Canada," and provides some valuable guidelines. Designed for broad popular appeal, it explains some of the most basic aspects of women's oppression and raises a number of key demands.

They fall into four different categories. One is the necessity of freeing women from the total responsibility of caring for the families. The relevant demands raised are for government financed schools, day care centers, and wages for homemakers.

The second category is the responsibility of the government to provide free birth control information and birth control centers for the entire population.

The third category is education, with demands for free and unlimited education for everyone, including women; a living wage for students; coed education in all schools and all classes; special encouragement for women to enter analytical fields, and all the areas of study

which women are traditionally steered away from and told that they are not intelligent enough to be able to master; the teaching of the true history of women's struggles and the role of women in society.

The fourth category includes the demands for equal employment opportunities, equal pay for women, equal minimum wages, the elimination of sex discrimination in employment, maternity leaves with full pay and a number of other demands that fall under the general category of equality for working women.

The brief prepared by the Canadian comrades provides a very good example of our basic approach to women's liberation. So far the demands raised most persistently and widely have been those relating to abortion and birth control, and the need to attack the educational and psychological oppression of women. However, which of the demands, or what combination of them, will emerge as the central ones for us in the immediate period is not yet clear, and in that respect it would be a mistake to guess.

The final question I want to deal with is our own tasks. What should we be doing? Our tasks are essentially quite modest at this stage; an initial step. First, it is important for us to begin, or where we have already begun to continue, exploring the existing groups. We should learn what they're doing, who they're attracting, the differences between them, the issues that separate them, how viable they are, and so forth.

Secondly, we should begin to work with these groups and to join them where they are viable and worthwhile. At this stage whether to join one or another group will have to be determined on a local level. With few exceptions, none of the existing groups is national in scope, and even the one or two that are national vary considerably from one city to another.

A third, and very important task is education, both for ourselves and also for the women's liberation movement as a whole. Where it hasn't been done already, branches should organize internal educationals on all the aspects of women's liberation, so that everyone becomes familiar with the history and problems of the struggle, and feels comfortable with the political and theoretical problems involved.

Outside of our own movement, in the the emerging groups, there are tremendous contributions we can make on this question in helping to develop educational programs for the women's liberation movement. In several areas of the country, like Boston, the comrades have already

been doing this, and I'm sure opportunities exist elsewhere.

Fourthly, where we have the forces, and where there are real openings, we should join in and help initiate various actions around demands that are being raised. This again is the kind of thing that has to be evaluated, judged and decided on the local level.

Fifthly, we must use our press and our election campaigns, our forums, and our literature, and all of our other party activities to intervene in the women's liberation struggle, to bring our ideas to it. Our press should cover the activities that are going on in the women's liberation movements around the country and publish educational articles. Our election campaigns should raise the kinds of demands that are the most important and most directly relevant to the women's liberation movement today -- as several have done this year, demanding abortion reform, day care centers, free birth control information, etc. Our forums should involve representatives of the women's liberation movement and deal with activities taking place.

If we successfully carry out these initial tasks in relation to the women's liberation movement we will be laying a firm foundation for the future development of the women's liberation struggle.

* * *

A final note on the nature of the panel. Comrades from different branches and locals around the country reported on the women's liberation groups that exist in each area, what we have been doing and the experiences we have had in using our forums, classes, literature, election campaigns, and other activities. These reports were followed by a brief period of further questions and discussion.

The panel was not intended to be, nor was it, a substitute for branch educationals on the political and theoretical problems of women's liberation, or a discussion on tactical problems, but an attempt to make a first step toward developing a basic orientation and providing all the comrades with an initial exchange of information.

Rather than transcribe and distribute all the reports given at the panel, which have already been outdated by new developments this fall, the national office plans to send out reports of interest on women's liberation activities around the country as they are sent in.

November 2, 1969

REPORT ON SAN FRANCISCO WOMEN'S LIBERATION WORK

By Debbie Woodroofe

October 20, 1969

Internal Evaluation

The party and YSA organizers, and the comrades most involved in women's liberation work, met to discuss the current stage of the movement in San Francisco, our tactical orientation at the present time, and to draw up a report for the branch.

The developing women's liberation movement was seen as paralleling the early stages of the antiwar movement in several important respects. It is spontaneous and burgeoning. It is outside the programmatic control of any one political tendency and is becoming an arena where several tendencies are competing for leadership. We should push for united front type formations, with education on women's oppression by the society necessary. We want the movement to become a mass movement, independent and nonexclusionary and action oriented. Expanding the movement through a huge teach-in which would bring people from all over the country was discussed.

Everyone agreed that the small group structure which has dominated the women's movement in the Bay Area will not lead towards building a mass movement and that we should try to push these women into action.

We decided to encourage the women's groups to endorse the Fall Offensive, but we also agreed that the antiwar movement should not be the axis of our intervention. Women can be organized around their oppression as women, and can raise their own demands.

We decided that San Francisco State College should be the focus of our intervention this fall as there will be several groups on campus. Being in the campus context, the women will be pushed to respond to campus issues and are more likely to move into action.

Until further evaluation, a two-pronged approach was decided upon for recommendation to the branch: (1) continued probing, through participation with our ideas and literature, in all open meetings and conferences; and (2) the necessity of broadening the number of comrades who are knowledgeable on the movement. A series of educational on the theory and history of the woman question will be scheduled.

NOW Conference

The National Organization for Women

held a conference on September 28, 1969. Two hundred women's organizations (from the League of Women Voters to the Girl Scouts) were invited to send delegates to represent their program. Fifteen groups were actually represented; about 100 women attended, most of whom were independent women from the campuses who were looking for a group to join. The conference was publicized only through letters to groups and by word of mouth.

NOW realizes that the campus is the focal point for politics in this period and is concerned with recruiting more youth. Although the conference was ostensibly an attempt to build a coalition of women's organizations, recruitment of a campus chapter of NOW was also an objective.

One session of the conference was devoted to presentations by representatives of the invited organizations, each explaining their programs. Those who spoke included representatives from Women's Liberation (the small group tendency), Women Incorporated of the Western Pulp and Paper Union, the Women's Caucus of the Sociology Department at the University of California at Berkeley (they are writing "A Counter-Introduction to Sociology" correcting the myths about women that are taught in social science courses), The San Francisco City Club, the Daughters of Bilitis (lesbians), a couple of abortion reform groups, and the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women.

Afternoon workshops on various topics were each asked to decide on a demand that could be presented to the general meeting for approval. The demands taken together were to form the basis for a coalition of women's groups. In the workshops NOW's politics came out very clearly. Their demand for full and equal participation for women in public life came across as meaningful equality in the Democratic Party and in reformist poverty programs.

An action program was decided on, based on the workshop recommendations, but only about half the people were there for that session. The projected actions included: protesting cases of discrimination against women workers; extending protective legislation to male workers as well; promoting women's caucuses in unions and political parties; protesting mass media portrayal of women as mindless sex objects; the concept of child care centers as community resources, much like parks and libraries; legalized abortion.

The coalition has turned out to be fairly meaningless in terms of actual implementation, but NOW did gain quite a bit of status for its attempts to get the many women's groups together. Several campus women said that they recognized NOW's politics were reformist, but they might join anyway because it was the only group that seemed to do anything.

The SWP/YSA had a literature table which was very successful. We had only 24 of the Evelyn Reed pamphlets with us, and we sold them all. This means one out of very four women there got one. Total literature sales were \$48.10 and the breakdown was also very significant: 24 Evelyn Reed; 2 books on the abolitionists, 1 Harriet Tubman; 2 Origins of the Family, 1 Second Sex; 4 ISR's Rosa Luxemburg issue; 2 What is Economics by Rosa Luxemburg; 6 Militants, 5 Young Socialists, and 6 subscriptions.

Women's Antiwar Task Force

As an experiment, a "Women and the War" workshop was added to the Regional SMC Conference held in San Francisco September 29. Thirty women attended; none were women's liberation activists. The tone of the workshop was that women are moving into action, they have traditionally been isolated from political participation, and the war is something they can be organized around. The decision of the workshop was to set up a Women's Task Force within SMC which would organize a women's contingent for the November 15 march. A leaflet directed to women was put out, and a speakers bureau set up to solicit the endorsement and participation of women's groups in the march.

The Task Force has involved an active core of a dozen or more independents, including students, secretaries, women-for-peace types, a hospital worker, and Women's Liberation Union. The WLU has endorsed the Task Force and put out its own leaflet. (WLU exists only in San Jose. Their approach is to appeal to American housewives to recognize that the Vietnamese women are attaining their liberation through revolutionary struggle, but they make this error more through lack of political understanding than anything else.) WLU is taking charge of organizing child care centers along the march route and in nearby cities.

The Women's Task Force has been one of the most active, productive subcommittees for the mobilization, receiving wide publicity.

Women's Liberation

Several months ago Women's Liberation was the major organization in this area, but this has changed graphically. During the summer the leadership of Women's

Liberation developed a well codified theory on the need for and role of the small group structure, even defining the various stages of evolution -- opening up, sharing, analyzing and abstracting. The assumption underneath it all is that feelings are the most important source of political understanding.

There are about 25 small groups in the area and in mid-October they held an internal conference on the "Function and Evolution of the Small Group." The main topic discussed was the viability of the small group, indicating that many of the women involved do in fact see the small group as a dead end, especially now that other groups are moving into action. A woman from the antiwar Task Force went and asked for their participation but only two said they were interested.

They half-heartedly attempted to organize something at San Francisco State this fall, but then never contacted the women who indicated they were interested. They refused to call an open meeting because they were afraid of PL. The more isolated they become from the growing women's liberation activity, the more hostile they become.

WSA-PL

The Worker-Student Alliance-Progressive Labor line is to sectarianly use women's liberation to build the SDS, but following an initial abortive attempt at the beginning of the semester to call an organizational meeting for those interested in a "women's caucus" (caucus of what was never made clear) they have done virtually nothing, except have about ten people participate in a class on women in the Social Science Department.

Class on "Women as an Oppressed Minority"

This fall a new class on "Women as an Oppressed Minority" was established in the Social Science Department at State. Registration closed at 80, and an estimated 200 women were turned away. The course outline indicated that the class would focus on whether women were in fact oppressed and compare them to various ethnic minorities.

We decided to take a "red university" approach to the class. At the first session we pointed out the significance of the size of the class -- the only one in the catalog dealing with women's oppression. We proposed that the scope of the course be broadened to include study of the origins of the family, the suffrage movement, women in socialist countries, women workers, etc., in addition to comparing women to oppressed minorities. We proposed that the class should in fact become a vehicle for educating the rest of the campus on the history of

women and their struggle. The department's mimeographing facilities should be made available to us to distribute the research we do, and money provided for speakers. A women's studies department might come out of the class.

The teacher didn't like it at all. We compared the struggle to the one for a black studies department and demanded that the students enrolled in the class be allowed to vote. The perspective of broadening the focus and readings and making the class an organizing center for the campus won overwhelmingly. The teacher finally agreed to break the class into three study groups -- definition of women's role, developing patterns in women's status, and implementation of a program for women's liberation.

Fifty of the 80 women chose the implementation group and they are all activist types. The first meeting decided to research topics like the ratio of women faculty, day care facilities, the number of female graduate students, financial aid available to women. We decided to circulate a petition demanding a department of women's studies.

The idea of this type of organizing coming out of her class was too threatening for the teacher, who decided to cancel the study groups. Since then she has been

bringing in guest lecturers -- nutritionists, women scientists, etc. But the group has continued to meet on its own.

Right now we are planning a huge teach-in, hopefully in the spring, which would give sufficient time to build it. But enthusiasm is so high that we may not be able to hold people back until then.

The WSA-PLers in the group have been trying to prevent the teach-in, saying it's too early to discuss anything concrete. They are opposed to demanding more women professors, and say that making women indignant over their oppression simply creates family problems and alienates women from their husbands.

This class will be the major focus of our intervention in women's liberation work on campus.

Women's Liberation Forum

In early October we held a very successful women's liberation forum, attended by more than 100. As a result of the forum, Diane Feeley has received many invitations to speak on campuses, and a number of people asked for reprints of her talk. The idea that all previous knowledge is male dominated, and therefore suspect, is a great entree for our ideas. Everything is up for grabs.

REPORT TO NEW YORK BRANCH ON WOMEN'S LIBERATION

By Judy White

October 27, 1969

For about two months now several comrades in the branch and YSA local have been assigned to find out about the various women's liberation groups in New York so that the branch can evaluate our work and make further recommendations concerning our intervention in this new movement.

First, I'd like to give a brief description of the groups we have been following. The Citywide Women's Liberation Movement is made up of representatives of about 20 to 25 smaller groups called collectives throughout the city. About 50 to 80 people attend their bi-weekly meetings which serve to coordinate some of the women's liberation activities going on around the city. Some sections of this group have been actively involved in one of the abortion suits filed in the New York courts. (See The Militant, October 17 and November 28.) Some of them participated in the women's contingent at the Fort Dix 38 demonstration and plan to participate in a November 22 demonstration demanding freedom for the Panther women in jail in Connecticut. The CP participates in this formation along with SDS types and a number of young women completely new to politics.

We have also attended meetings of a new group being formed at New York University which is dominated by RYM II women, but has attracted some new people. They had 25 women at their founding meeting and are planning a women's liberation week on campus with various panels, workshops, etc. They are involved in the Panther demonstration also. Even though this group is dominated by RYM II, the women are quite open to our participation and, at our suggestion, are planning to discuss Novack's article on the revolutionary dynamics of women's liberation, along with an article in Leviathan, at their next meeting.

One of the comrades attended a class on women's liberation sponsored by the CP. There were 25 women in attendance at the first class in the series -- all of them were CPers except for our comrade. Interestingly enough, their discussion centered around problems of male chauvinism in the CP and how to deal with them.

The other group we have been involved with so far is a coalition of groups initiated by NOW [National Organization of Women] which is planning a three-day conference on women's liberation for late November. The coalition involves people from several NOW chapters, people from citywide WLM, some from vari-

ous lesbian groups, the Feminists (a radical anti-male group), and marginally, people from groups like the Unitarian Women, YWCA, WITCH and other groups.

We also know of the existence of women's liberation groups on a number of other campuses in the city as well as in a few high schools, but we haven't attended any of their meetings yet. There are some professional women's groupings -- like the Media Women -- and some communes organized around childcare.

The people who are involved in the groups whose meetings we've been attending fall into three categories: (1) The new people. We have been surprised at how many women who don't seem to have been involved in any other organized antiwar committee or radical group are coming around women's liberation. These women are very open to our press and ideas but tend to be turned off by the lack of structure and nebulous orientation of many of the women's liberation groups. (2) The opponents. The CP and a lot of SDS types are quite involved in the movement as well as the NOW liberals. So far, they have organizational control over most of the larger groups and activities that are going on. (3) The nuts. In this category I would put the small fringe element of unstable or unserious people such as you find in every movement. There are also many young women in the movement who are at the extreme anti-male level of understanding of women's oppression, but in the main this is because they don't fully comprehend the causes of their oppression. Actually, considering the fact that this is such a new, formless movement, there is a very low percentage of phonies compared to the early stages of other movements in which we've been involved.

There are three general types of structures within the women's liberation organizations in which we've been involved. There is the "collective," which is a group organized around some job category or problem area, like the health care collective, the daycare collective, etc. That is, they are relatively small groups -- of 10 to 20 women -- organized around an area of activity.

Secondly there is the "small group" which is mainly for discussing the nature and causes of oppression of women and serves the positive function of making it clear to women that what they were always taught were their own neurotic, personal problems are actually social problems shared by all women. The small groups

often tend to degenerate into soul sessions and not lead to outward organizing, but they do serve this important function that I mentioned.

The campus groups tend to combine features of these two types -- discussion and action.

Thirdly, there are the larger formations like the citywide group I described or like the coalition initiated by NOW which are mainly for exchange of information and coordination of activities. The NOW-initiated coalition, called the Congress to Unite Women, is apparently part of a national orientation of NOW to attract more youth to their organization. We have received reports that they have tried to initiate similar coalitions that would involve the younger women in the movement in other areas of the country too.

The various groups in New York are working on, or at least are thinking about, things like abortion repeal, employment, women and the law, politics, childcare, education, media, life style, how women are divided among themselves (class, race, etc.), sex and love.

The women's liberation movement here has these characteristics: it is largely underground -- almost all information about groups, meetings, actions, etc. is spread by word of mouth. There are no offices for any of the groups, or even phone numbers in most cases.

Secondly, it is a very self-conscious movement. The women involved in it, for good reasons resulting from the depth of their oppression, feel very defensive about the ridicule that they have to face for being involved in such a movement. We had an experience at the planning meetings for the Congress to Unite Women that epitomizes this feeling of insecurity.

Channel 5 TV is doing a 90-minute documentary on the American Woman 1969. They wanted to do a five-minute segment on the women's liberation movement and thought that the idea of women getting together to plan a conference on their problems would be a good way to do it. The women in the coalition spent at least three hours at two different meetings discussing whether they wanted to be televised. Even with all kinds of conditions granted -- like editing privileges on the film, etc. -- they could not agree to being televised. The media has distorted women so badly that they just felt unwilling to participate in this documentary, even though it would have been publicity for the movement and their conference.

One striking characteristic of the people participating in this movement is their seriousness about women's liberation. Even though the organizational level of the movement is abysmal and filled with new-left and anarchist hang-ups, there is a constant effort to deal with the desires of the activists to involve more people in the movement.

The final thing that characterizes the New York movement is the attitude of our opponents. Our opponents in women's liberation are very unsectarian. Even the RYM II types, who refuse to work with us on any other project, insist that, within the women's liberation groups, everyone must be involved and listened to. Any time someone has objected to the participation of some tendency or other, there has been vociferous objection to exclusion. I think this is because the women involved in this movement are very anxious to understand the causes of their oppression and are open to all thinking on this question and on questions of how to deal with women's oppression.

Of course, as the movement develops and thinking on some of these questions crystallizes, these attitudes will most likely change, but right now this lack of sectarianism gives us a good opportunity to work with some of our opponents and make some headway on weakening them and maybe even recruiting some of them to our movement.

As I mentioned before, I think that part of the reason for the backwardness of this movement politically and organizationally stems from the lack of understanding of the nature and causes of women's oppression in class society. The level of analysis of the causes of women's oppression is very nebulous, even among the more political people in the movement. They generally think in terms of men being the enemy. But, at the same time, there is the consciousness in large sections of the movement that they have to get themselves together as women and then look for allies among men and other movements.

Another factor explaining the low political and organizational level of the movement is that it is basically composed of SDS types and completely inexperienced people.

In evaluating where the movement can go, we have to keep in mind that despite the possibility that it could get bogged down in some areas around the soul session syndrome, the issues the movement is dealing with are very basic ones with mass appeal that cuts across class lines. There are a whole number of issues that really hit the system hard -- for example,

the demand for pay for the "slave labor" that is performed in the home by women or for state- and industry-financed child-care facilities. So the movement has the potential to become massive, although which issue or issues will be the central ones around which major actions will be built is still unclear.

Keeping this potential and the basic character of the movement in mind, we have to decide the most effective way for the party and YSA to intervene at this stage. Given the organizational problems of the movement and its diffuse character, right now the executive committee feels we should continue to attend meetings of the various women's liberation groups and orient toward an aggressive propaganda intervention -- through our own institutions, like our forums, our press, our election campaigns, etc., and through the institutions of the women's liberation movement -- speaking at their meetings, writing for women's liberation journals and newsletters, etc.

The level of our propaganda intervention is very important. It should be around the very basic questions -- like are women oppressed? How? Why? At the same time, we have to establish a dialog with the women's liberation movement. There are a lot of things we can teach this movement, but there are some things we are going to learn from it, like we did from the black nationalist movement.

We also should keep alert for areas where we can do more than make a propaganda intervention, like the way we have gotten involved in the abortion repeal suit where Pat Grogan, one of our candidates, has become a plaintiff. We should watch for campus women's liberation

groups that we can co-sponsor forums and other activities with, and when we find a group working on a project we think is worthwhile -- like the Congress to Unite Women -- we should work with them to build that action.

Within the party, the executive committee proposes that we set up a study class on women's liberation for the party and YSA members so we can familiarize ourselves with the theory and history of women's struggles.

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Note: Since this report was given quite a few comrades from the New York branch and YSA participated in the large and successful Northeastern-area Congress to Unite Women held in New York November 21-23. (See article in The Militant, December 5, 1969 and report on the Congress in an upcoming YSA preconvention discussion bulletin.) After discussing and evaluating the Congress and the continuing development of the women's liberation movement, the branch passed the following motions at its December 1 meeting:

(1) To encourage all comrades to familiarize themselves with the women's liberation movement (by attending meetings, reading the literature, etc.).

(2) To assign some comrades to actively participate in some of the women's liberation groups.

(3) To set up a joint SWP-YSA fraction to organize our intervention in the women's liberation movement.

December 2, 1969