

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
March 29, 1977

TO ORGANIZERS AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION DIRECTORS

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed is a report on our women's liberation work.

Comradely,

Cindy Jaquith
Cindy Jaquith
National Office

Report on Women's Liberation Work

by Cindy Jaquith, March 24, 1977

Results of International Women's Day Protests--As reported in the Militant, women's protests around March 8, International Women's Day, focused this year in many cities on the theme "Stop the Attacks on Women's Rights." Among the central issues were abortion, forced sterilization, the Equal Rights Amendment, child care, and maternity rights.

Many protests drew two to three hundred and in New York and San Francisco, the actions were each one thousand. Hundreds of students attended teach-ins and speakouts during the week on the campuses.

One of the most important new features of the actions was the role played by Black, Chicana, and Puerto Rican women in several cities. In New York, a Minority Women's Task Force organized a contingent and built the action in the Black and Puerto Rican communities. Its accomplishments were particularly reflected in the rally speakers, who included a representative of the Puerto Rican Socialist party; a leader of the school struggle in District 1; the leader of the Hostos Community College struggle; a prominent spokeswoman in the campaign against forced sterilization; and a Black official in the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) who is active in a local pregnancy rights coalition. The main theme of the rally was that the entire women's movement must unite to defend the main victims of the recent government attacks--the oppressed nationalities and other working women.

In Los Angeles, a Chicana conference the week before attracted 300 women. (A separate report on this conference is being sent out by the YSA National Office.)

These events are an initial confirmation of the fact that the government's attacks on the feminist movement have begun to evoke a response from women, including a new layer of Blacks, Chicanas, and Puerto Ricans. Chapters of the National Organization for Women (NOW) participated in some of these actions. The success of International Women's Day will have an impact on the discussions inside NOW leading to its April national conference.

NARAL Action call--The National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) has called for "women's right to choose" protests on Mother's Day, May 8. NARAL leaders see these actions as focusing on the Hyde Amendment, which they expect will be reintroduced into Congress in June. While NARAL favors local protests in as many cities as possible, they do not plan to coordinate these activities or give direction to them. Thus it will be up to women in local areas to get these activities off the ground.

In cities where it is possible, we should help initiate actions around May 8, in cooperation with NARAL affiliates, NOW, and groups we worked with around March 8. It will be important to include the demand of "no forced sterilization" in these actions. Also, by including demands relating to the attacks on maternity rights--another aspect of women's right to choose--these actions can better draw in trade unions and local chapters of CLUW, which are particularly concerned with this issue. We hope the NOW national conference will take up the NARAL call and vote to support it in every area where May 8 protests are planned.

NOW discussion--The perspectives resolution submitted to the NOW national conference by Clare Fraenzl and Rhonda Rutherford has stimulated political discussion in many NOW chapters. This has taken different forms: in Denver, the discussion focused on lobbying; in Washington, D.C., on the role of Black women in the movement; in St. Louis, around the question of whether abortion demands "hurt" the ERA fight.

These discussions have opened the eyes of NOW members to what the real strategy of the NOW leadership is. The class and race bias of the leadership has surfaced in these local debates, in the form of sharp--and in some cases openly racist--resistance to an orientation toward working-class and Black women. This has helped convince serious feminists in NOW that a thorough change of perspectives for the organization is vitally needed.

The sharpest political debate has taken place in Minneapolis, around the anti-Black affirmative action report published by a task force of Twin Cities NOW. (See April 1 Militant.) The chapter leadership has blocked any debate on this report, which the membership has never had an opportunity to discuss or vote on. As a result, NOW members who oppose the report, and support affirmative action for both Blacks and women, have begun a public campaign to educate around this important issue. These NOW members held a news conference to express their disagreement with the report and have submitted a resolution to the national NOW conference on this issue. (A copy is enclosed.) This "Resolution for Equal Justice for Women and Oppressed Nationalities" will be an important focus of discussion in NOW chapters and at the national conference. Signers of the resolution urge the national conference to dissociate itself from the report. They are seeking the endorsement of local NOW members and chapters around the country, and urge that letters protesting the report be sent to Twin Cities NOW, P.O. Box 9629, Minneapolis, Minn. 55440. Copies of such letters, and the names of signers of the resolution, should be sent to resolution sponsor Gillian Furst, 3716 Portland Ave., Minneapolis, Minn. 55407.

Discussions such as the one in Minneapolis have begun to attract the attention of women outside NOW, who, under the pressure of the government attacks, are looking for a fighting feminist organization to join. Participants in the New York Minority Task Force for International Women's Day are considering organizing projects to bring more Black, Puerto Rican, and Chinese women into NOW. In Pittsburgh, a new NOW chapter is forming in the Black community. The majority of its membership and leadership is Black. Active in the chapter are women who organized the August 1976 Black NOW conference. In Newark, feminists at Rutgers University have formed a campus-based NOW chapter that carries on daily activities and has attracted both Black and Puerto Rican students.

NOW and the ERA--Another issue attracting NOW members to the Fraenzl-Rutherford resolution is the ERA. The defeat of the ERA in state after state this year has begun to unmask the NOW leadership's strategy of relying on Carter to "give" women the ERA. Disillusionment with this strategy is spreading in the ranks of NOW.

In response to this pressure, the NOW leadership has made a tactical shift toward favoring a few public activities around the ERA. NOW leaders have called for the ERA vigil to be reinstated at the White House. However, in an interview with the Washington Post, Eleanor Smeal, chairperson of the NOW national board, said the picketers would praise Carter for his pro-ERA efforts and urge him to do more. In Florida, NOW has called for pro-ERA actions on April 3.

Certainly a return to the streets by supporters of the ERA is desperately needed if the amendment is to be ratified by 1979. At the same time, the NOW leadership has given no indication of changing its basic strategy of relying on Carter to get the ERA ratified. Nor has it changed its line that raising abortion or other issues "hurts" the ERA struggle. Thus the questions of how to win the ERA, and whether NOW can ignore the Hyde Amendment and other attacks to placate capitalist politicians, are bound to be central issues debated at the national conference.

The Fraenzl-Rutherford proposal, and the action resolution submitted by Dianne Feeley, stress that NOW must respond to all the attacks on women's rights. They point out that the government aims to divide the women's movement by attacking abortion rights of Black women, or maternity rights of working-class women, in the hopes that more privileged women will not fight back. To counterpose action around the ERA to these other issues, or to use ERA activities as a cover for doing nothing about the Hyde Amendment, is to fall right into the Carter trap.

NOW conference agenda--An obstacle to discussing these questions of strategy is the proposed agenda for the national conference. Resolutions have been placed at the very end of the conference, in a clear attempt to avoid any genuine discussion of the political crisis confronting the women's movement. The attacks on women--and NOW's response--should be the central question dealt with by conference delegates. The only way to guarantee that such a discussion takes place is for political resolutions to be taken up on Saturday, April 23. Most of this day is presently set aside for the election of national officers. To assure a full and democratic discussion of all the different resolutions before the conference the order of the agenda should be reversed, placing the elections on Sunday and the resolutions on Saturday. This is something we can discuss now with delegates and others attending the national conference.

MOTIVATION

WHAT KIND OF REACTION HAS THE TWIN CITIES NOW REPORT PRODUCED?

KAREN DE CROW, NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF NOW, sent a telegram disassociating herself from the report.

URBAN LEAGUE OF MINNEAPOLIS: "We feel that the whole effort of this report was directed at making Black men and Black women responsible for the inability of white women to find employment...."

GLEASON GLOVER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE MINNEAPOLIS URBAN LEAGUE: "It distorts the employment problems of Blacks, Native Americans, minorities, and women through omissions and manipulation of available state employment statistics."

URBAN COALITION OF MINNEAPOLIS: "The report has the potential of being very damaging to racial minorities, and that the authors should publicly acknowledge." The Urban Coalition board voted to recommend that NOW "retract" the report.

ART CUNNINGHAM, PRESIDENT OF THE MINNEAPOLIS NAACP IN 1976: The report "is reaffirming in some Black people's minds that NOW is a white female organization uninterested in the aspirations of the Black community."

RAMONA AUSTIN, COORDINATOR OF THE NOW MINORITY TASK FORCE, says the report has made it embarrassing for Blacks to be in NOW.

SHIRLEY HUGHES ENGLISH, a Black feminist, spoke at an Urban League/Urban Coalition forum on the report and said, "The underlying assumptions of the report are erroneous. The comparisons should have been made with majority males. The whole emphasis of the report is aimed at Black males. They are made the culprits and scapegoats."

"I just about had a stroke when I read about the report. I'm very pro women's rights. This report calls for open warfare between Blacks and women. It's going to make me careful about which groups I associate with."

ST. PAUL NOW, upon hearing about the report, immediately held a news conference to express its opposition to it.

WHY YOU SHOULD SUPPORT THE RESOLUTION FOR EQUAL JUSTICE

The supporters of the Resolution for Equal Justice believe that the Twin Cities NOW report on employment is extremely divisive and believe it is essential that the report be repudiated. The document runs counter to the guidelines set forth in NOW's "Statement of Purpose" that expresses our support for the rights of all oppressed nationalities.

A resolution "that the Twin Cities chapter of NOW disassociate itself from the Employment Task Force report and withdraw its name from the document" was presented at a special February 27 meeting of Twin Cities NOW, which was designed specifically to enable a full and democratic discussion of the report. Unfortunately, undemocratic procedures were used at the meeting to prevent the resolution from even reaching the floor for discussion.

This is why we are now presenting the Resolution for Equal Justice to the national NOW conference. Only by publicly withdrawing NOW's support for the report, can we take the first step to heal the wounds that have already been created. Then we can continue our activities in defense of the rights of all women, especially Black women who have faced the brunt of attacks on their rights, through building united action of all those concerned with women's equality to win ratification of the ERA, the right to choose abortion, adequate childcare, and effective affirmative action.

RESOLUTION FOR EQUAL JUSTICE FOR WOMEN AND OPPRESSED NATIONALITIES

The National Organization for Women "Statement of Purpose" says that "Recognizing women's problems are linked to broader questions of social justice and convinced that human rights are indivisible, NOW actively supports efforts to eradicate racism...and promote the common cause of equal rights for all who suffer discrimination, deprivation and exclusion."

In October, 1976 the Twin Cities chapter of NOW published a report prepared by its Employment Task Force entitled "The Position of Women as a Disadvantaged Group in Minnesota State Government Employment," which stands contrary to this Purpose. The report concludes:

"1. Disadvantages due to sex are greater than those due to race. For example, employment patterns of minority women are far more similar to those of white women than they are to those of minority men.

"2. Among the racial minority groups, blacks are in a far better position than American Indians and those with Spanish surname. In fact, on some criteria (sections 5 and 8), black men are in a more favorable position than white men.

"3. Current affirmative action efforts are directed disproportionately toward racial minorities with little attention given to the problems of women. Among the racial minorities, blacks are over-represented among affirmative action officers." (our emphasis)

We believe that NOW should lead the struggle, in alliance with other feminist forces, for effective affirmative action for women. We should also solidarize ourselves with the organizations of the Black, American Indian, Chicano, and Puerto Rican communities in their struggle to win affirmative action gains.

Regardless of the intention of the report, its effect has been to divide the women's movement from the Black movement. By comparing women's employment status to that of Blacks, rather than men, the report directly counterposes the fight for women's affirmative action to the affirmative action programs that Blacks have already won. We should applaud, not complain about, the gains of oppressed nationalities at the same time that we fight for women's rights.

The document places our Black sisters, and sisters of other oppressed nationalities, in an impossible position. They are forced to choose their allegiance to either the Black struggle or the women's movement, rather than being wholeheartedly supported by NOW in their fight to overcome discrimination against both women and Blacks in employment. In addition, the report compromises the position of all NOW members who stand firmly on the side of oppressed nationalities in their struggle for human rights.

Resolution: That the April 1977 conference of the National Organization for Women reaffirms the "Statement of Purpose" and disassociate NOW from the report entitled "The Position of Women as a Disadvantaged Group in Minnesota State Government Employment," urging the Twin Cities chapter of NOW to withdraw its name from the document.

Submitted by: Gillian Furst, ERA Representative, Twin Cities NOW
Lorraine Page, Twin Cities NOW (also Minority Women's Task Force, St. Paul NOW)