

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
March 23, 1978

TO ORGANIZERS AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION WORK DIRECTORS

Political Nonexclusion in NOW

Dear Comrades,

At their March 18-19 special meeting, the national board of the National Organization for Women (NOW) heard the grievance committee report on Philadelphia. This committee, as the March 24 Militant explained, was appointed at the February 25 board meeting after the special Philadelphia fact-finding committee turned in its sealed report.

The oral report of the grievance committee took note of the seven officer resignations in Philadelphia, the press coverage, the officers' incompetence, and their mismanagement of chapter funds. The report then absolved the former chapter leaders of any wrongdoing, including their attacks on the chapter members in the press.

The report also stated that one of the factors contributing to the tension and confusion in the Philadelphia chapter was the "perception" some members had of the "SWP faction" in Philadelphia NOW. However, the committee concluded that "no Philadelphia NOW member acted in violation of NOW's feminist goals." A written version of this report is scheduled to be distributed to board members shortly.

The report of the grievance committee formally closed the Philadelphia controversy. The national leadership of NOW clearly decided to back off from any attempt to utilize the public red-baiting campaign of the former Philadelphia leadership to escalate the anti-SWP witch-hunt. Getting out the facts about what was happening in Philadelphia and collecting signatures on the nonexclusion petitions had an effect in blocking this campaign.

At the same time, the references to an undefined "SWP faction" make it clear that NOW members who express disagreement with the views of the national leadership will continue to be considered suspect. Fostering of such an atmosphere in NOW is a serious erosion of democracy within the organization. This makes the discussion on nonexclusion especially important.

Two state organizations, the New Jersey state conference and the New York state council, have both adopted resolutions requesting that the national NOW by-laws be changed to specify

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that political affiliation cannot be the grounds for discrimination against any member. A copy of the resolution is enclosed.

Milwaukee NOW launched a campaign in February to get as many chapters as possible to pass a similar nonexclusion resolution. If fifty chapters (or two state organizations) adopt such a request to change the by-laws, it must be voted on at the October national NOW conference. A red-baiting attack on NOW members in Milwaukee prompted this response. A copy of their letter is also enclosed.

The deadline for notifying the by-laws chairperson that two state organizations or fifty chapters are requesting a by-laws change is April 15. But this discussion on political nonexclusion and the support reflected by the number of chapters that adopt the resolution will be important right up to the October conference.

Comradely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Willie Mae Reid".

Willie Mae Reid
Women's Liberation Work
Director

February 1978

RE: PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO NOW NATIONAL BY-LAWS

Dear NOW Members,

Within the past year there have been various challenges to sisters on the basis of political affiliation, and attempts, sometimes successful, to exclude willing workers from active participation in the movement. Two specific incidents are: 1) the motion passed at the NOW National Conference last April condemning SWP (Socialist Workers Party) tactics and 2) the resignation of the chapter president and other officers of Philadelphia NOW because, according to newspaper accounts, "they were fed up with the increasing involvement of SWP members in the chapter," and with "Lengthy debates about mass action as a political tool."

We find the current situation extremely divisive, destructive and demoralizing. And, too sadly, reminiscent of past problems. During one period, lesbians were not welcome. Events over time have shown us that discrimination on the basis of sexual preference is destructive.

NOW is an action oriented organization based on issues. Our thrust is to get the work done, debate democratically, formulate strategy and organize around the issues. We think it important for NOW to make it clear that all women who want to participate in winning the fight against discrimination and to achieve liberation are welcome in NOW, regardless of sex, race, age, nationality, religion, sexual preference or political affiliation. We are at a crisis period in our herstory and need every willing person to mobilize for our challenge.

For these reasons, we are proposing to amend NOW's National By-Laws to include the phrase "political affiliation" in its statements on purpose and membership. The deadline for proposing amendments is April 15, and an amendment can be proposed by 50 NOW chapters, 500 members, 2 state organizations or the majority of the National Board. We feel that a broad discussion of this issue is important and that the best way to get this discussion going is to reach out to chapters. So, we are asking that NOW chapters schedule time to talk about these proposed amendments and endorse them. Attached is a copy of the two sections and the amendments we propose and a coupon for endorsement.

Please consider this proposal seriously. The National By-Laws state that local chapters shall formulate by-laws consistent with national by-laws. Feel free to contact us if you have any questions or comments. For us, it is a matter of simple justice.

In sisterhood,

The Milwaukee Chapter of the National Organization for Women

Adrienne Kaplan, Sue Miess, Linda Stitt
414-224-9516 414-453-3604

RESOLUTION ON NONEXCLUSION

Whereas: NOW is an action oriented organization based on issues. To get our work done we need to debate democratically, formulate strategy, and organize around the issues. It is important for NOW to make clear that all women who want to participate in winning the fight against discrimination and to achieve liberation are welcome in NOW, regardless of political affiliation.

Therefore be it resolved: That the following amendment be made to the NOW National By-laws:

ARTICLE III. MEMBERSHIP

Any person who subscribes to NOW's purpose shall be eligible to become a member of NOW and upon payment of National dues shall be enrolled as a member with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities thereof. All members of subunits of NOW must be members of National NOW. No person shall be excluded from membership, segregated or otherwise discriminated against, within the organization because of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, economic status, marital status, parenthood, affectional preference, lifestyle or political affiliation.
addition: political affiliation.

Adopted by the New Jersey
NOW state conference,
March 5, 1978

Adopted by the New York
state NOW Council meeting,
March 11, 1978