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February 1, 1973

TO ALL BRANCH ORGANIZERS AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION DIRECTORS

Dear Comrades,

On Monday, January 22, the Supreme Court ruled on the Texas and Georgia abortion cases. They ruled that the right to abortion falls within a woman's constitutional "right to privacy" and in essence ruled that a woman has the right to choose to terminate her pregnancy within the first six months. The ruling was even more liberal than the current New York abortion law.

The Supreme Court did not rule in favor of abortion on the basis of population control or on the basis of "therapy and health." They ruled on the basis of a woman's right to choose. This decision is a tremendous victory for women.

The so-called Right-to-Life forces have been dealt a blow with this decision. The ruling by the Supreme Court specifically took up some of their arguments and dismissed them as metaphysical. They ruled that the word "person" in the Constitution "does not apply to the unborn" and stated that the Court was not in a position to speculate as to when life begins.

Although the reactionary anti-abortion forces have been seriously hampered, we can expect them to try to obstruct the implementation of the decision. To date the only concrete plan they have proposed is a constitutional amendment to declare the fetus a human being with full civil rights. Whereas it is very doubtful that such a move would get very far, they could use referenda to hold meetings, propagandize, and whip up sentiment. We must be prepared to counter their propaganda and defend the ruling against any of their attacks.

In several states abortion law repeal bills have been introduced or are in the process of being introduced. Where repeal bills are introduced we should support them and be identified with them. We should take advantage of a repeal bill to educate about why we are for total repeal. If a fight develops around a repeal bill we want to be involved in that fight. Several groups in addition to ourselves are going ahead with repeal moves. Bella Abzug is continuing with the Abortion Repeal Act in Congress; the National Association for Repeal of Abortion Laws is supporting Bella Abzug's bill as well as the repeal bill introduced in New York; Sarah Weddington (the woman lawyer from Texas who took the Texas case to the Supreme Court) is considering a repeal bill in Texas; and repeal bills are being considered in Oregon, Massachusetts, and a few other states. Although it is unlikely that a large movement will develop around repeal, we want to make our position clear and be involved in those efforts.

WONAAC in New York decided to cancel its January 30 hearings in the state capital in Albany. The hearings were planned as a defense of the liberal abortion law in New York and WONAAC felt that that was no longer necessary. Instead, New York WONAAC is planning a victory rally on Friday, February 2, in New York City. The rally speakers include Bella Abzug, Dr. Barbara Roberts, and Assemblyman Lichter (who has introduced a repeal bill in New York). The rally is planned to explain what the victory means, how and why it was won, and to support the repeal bill in New York.

Similar kinds of rallies or meetings are scheduled in many areas of the country by local affiliates of WONAAC. We should help build those rallies and participate in them.

The national and New York staff of WONAAC has decided to change the character of the International Abortion Tribunal scheduled for March 9-11. The Tribunal was originally planned as a three-day event to hear testimony and to indict the enemies of a woman's right to choose. Because of the change brought about by the Supreme Court decision and the reduced potential for raising funds, WONAAC is sponsoring a different type of meeting on March 10.

Gisele Halimi (the French woman lawyer who won the Marie-Claire Chevalier case in France), as well as Mrs. Chevalier (Marie-Claire's mother who was also a defendant in the case), have agreed to come to New York for the International Women's Day activities. This provides WONAAC with an opportunity to build a large meeting in New York centered around the international abortion fight. The meeting is planned to include international speakers as well as well-known American figures.

WONAAC feels that this will be an excellent opportunity for American women to express their solidarity with the struggles around abortion in other countries and to use the victory here to give impetus to struggles in other countries.

Some local WONAAC affiliates near enough to attend are making plans to come to New York for that meeting. Other local WONAAC affiliates have reported to National WONAAC that they are involved in local International Women's Day activities in which abortion will be a part.

National WONAAC has also reported that given the change in the character of the March 10 meeting as well as the reduced funds coming in that they have cut their full-time staff. They feel that a minimal staff will be adequate to build the March 10 meeting, keep an eye on the Right-to-Life forces, and find out the situation with the repeal bills. They feel that after the March 10 meeting they will be in a better position to discuss what further steps must be taken by WONAAC.

Comradely,

Linda Jenness

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Director