

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014

June 26, 1972

TO ALL BRANCH ORGANIZERS AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION DIRECTORS

Dear Comrades,

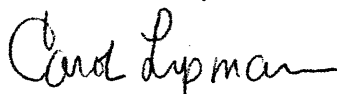
Enclosed is a copy of the Women's Liberation Report approved by the Young Socialist Alliance National Committee Plenum, held June 15-18 in New York. This report centers on the political debate taking place within the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition, and our tasks in helping to build the upcoming WONAAC national conference, scheduled for July 15-16 in New York. This report should be made available to all comrades, especially those assigned to women's liberation work.

Also enclosed are copies of the conference-building materials published by WONAAC. The WONAAC Newsletter is of special importance, as it contains several articles dealing with the political differences which have emerged within WONAAC and which will be among the questions discussed and debated out at the national conference. This and future Newsletters will help provide the basis for discussions in the local coalitions of the political differences in WONAAC. These kinds of pre-conference discussions among WONAAC activists around the country can help convince women of the importance of maintaining WONAAC's independent, mass action perspective and of rejecting red-baiting and any attempt to introduce exclusion into WONAAC, and ensure the clearest possible political discussion at the conference itself.

We are calling upon the Midwest and East Coast branches to mobilize all the forces in their areas to attend the upcoming WONAAC conference. In addition, branches in the Southwest and on the West Coast should make every effort to ensure that the maximum number of women from their areas attend.

It is important for every local area to carefully plan building activities for the final three weeks before the conference. Literature tables on the campuses and in the community, the broad distribution of leaflets and paste-up of conference posters, systematic phone-calls to groups and individuals, fundraising, and well-built meetings of the local WONAAC coalitions are among the activities that should be taking place in every area to inform women of the WONAAC conference and facilitate their attendance.

Comradely,



Carol Lipman
SWP Women's Liberation
Director

WOMEN'S LIBERATION REPORT GIVEN AT YSA PLENUM, JUNE 15-18, 1972

There is an important political debate taking place in the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition. At the last meeting of the WONAAC National Coordinating Committee, held in New York on June 4, a national conference was called for July 15 and 16, just one year after WONAAC's founding conference. Some sharp political differences came out at the meeting. Among the viewpoints raised were the following:

1. WONAAC has placed too much emphasis on developing a national campaign, organizing national conferences and national demonstrations and not enough emphasis on local grass roots organizing.
2. The nationally organized demonstrations WONAAC has held have been small and therefore can hurt the struggle for abortion law repeal.
3. WONAAC didn't organize an effective lobbying campaign when the New York legislature began debate over the liberalized abortion law, thereby contributing to the setback the women's movement took when the legislators voted to repeal the law.
4. WONAAC has stirred up a "hornets nest" of antiabortion organizing on the part of the Catholic hierarchy and answered it ineffectively.
5. WONAAC is "run" and "controlled" by the Young Socialist Alliance and the Socialist Workers Party. It is their perspective - and only their perspective - that has been carried out, therefore they bear the major responsibility for the problems that WONAAC has faced.
6. Because of the "identification" of WONAAC with the YSA and the SWP, it has not been able to play an effective role in uniting the women's liberation movement.
7. WONAAC has been completely ineffectual in its entire history, has had its head in the sand and doesn't recognize reality. It is superfluous to the abortion struggle, has no influence, and it totally isolated from the "real" women's liberation movement.

All the questions that are being raised challenge the basic foundations upon which WONAAC was organized at its founding conference. Among those basic ideas and concepts were: (1) It is essential to develop a nationally coordinated struggle, as opposed to only local, state-by-state organizing, in order to develop an effective campaign on the abortion issue; (2) the independent mass struggle of women must be a central aspect of the abortion campaign; (3) redbaiting and exclusion were totally rejected by the overwhelming majority of women who formed WONAAC in the face of a large scale debate over this question where over 100 women walked out of the founding conference.

The questions being raised not only challenge the perspective around which WONAAC was formed - but essentially, they challenge the development of an independent, united, mass-struggle-oriented women's liberation movement. At this time, WONAAC is the only national organization fighting for this perspective.

As the debate unfolds, we can expect that other questions concerning WONAAC's perspectives will also be raised once again: the value of organizing around a specific question in a coalition; and whether the demand of WONAAC should be focused on free abortion on demand as opposed to total repeal of all abortion laws.

In dealing with this debate, it is important to step back and

take a look at the development of the women's liberation movement over the past year or so, especially since the formation of WONAAC.

Many of the questions raised by some of the members of the WONAAC national staff come from frustration with the fact that WONAAC is not yet bigger, broader, and more influential in American politics.

They are frustrated because the actions that WONAAC has held have not been larger and that there was not a mass united response to the crisis that developed in New York when the legislature repealed the liberalized abortion law and Nixon intervened on behalf of the Catholic Church. There are questions that are being raised in the women's movement as a whole.

There is no question that the interest and impact of the women's liberation movement has continued to deepen among the American people. Far greater numbers of women identify with the goals of the women's liberation movement than did at the time of the first big demonstration in August 1970.

Following the August 1970 demonstrations, political differentiations within the movement began to increase. The question was posed "where do we go from here?" The National Organization for Women (NOW), the organization which made large organizational gains following the demonstration, had gone along only reluctantly with the mass action perspective and rapidly moved away from this perspective following the action. The phenomenon of livingroom feminism and counterinstitutionalism increased after August 26th.

It was clear that a national action perspective was needed. The experience of the women's liberation movement showed that the greatest possibilities for organizing such a united national campaign within the women's movement was over the issue of abortion.

The political differentiations within the women's liberation movement have continued to increase since the formation of WONAAC, particularly under the impact of the 1972 election period. One large section of the women's movement has turned away from the perspective of organizing mass struggle campaigns around specific demands. NOW, which played a leading role in the August 26, 1970 demonstrations, was more and more turning away from any perspective of mass independent struggle and looking to capitalist party politics, particularly through the Democratic Party, as the next stage in the struggle for women's liberation. Their central role in organizing the National Women's Political Caucus was the primary manifestation of this move.

Let's look at the development of NOW's approach as illustrated in their attitude to the August 26 demonstrations over the past three years. It was only through the pressure of the radical section of the women's movement, including the YSA and the SWP, that August 26, 1970, had the character of mass action around specific demands. But NOW played a leading role in that demonstration and without them it would not have been so massive.

August 26, 1971, one year later, was a launching pad for their activities in the 1972 elections. NOW's conception of that action can best be summed up by Betty Freidan's statement which was picked

up by the bourgeois press as the characterization of the demonstration, "women are now moving from women's liberation to women's participation in equal political power."

Although this year's August 26 has not yet been fully defined, Jacqueline Ceballos, the Eastern Regional Director of NOW, probably reflected the sentiment of the majority of the leadership of NOW when she wrote in Majority Report, a feminist newspaper in New York, "we in NOW are going to focus on the political scene. If we raise enough consciousness we can swing the elections...hopefully we'll have someone to swing it to." She goes on to say "I wonder about the march... many women were turned off by last year's rally." The type of activities she raises as an alternative includes art shows, street fairs, ringing bells around the nation at the same time rejoicing that the ERA passed the Senate and to urge its ratification by the states.

The elections are also drawing in a section of the livingroom feminists and counterinstitutionists. The most recent issue of Majority Report has a major focus on the Shirley Chisholm campaign and delegate selection for the Democratic Party convention.

McGovern is viewed by many in the women's movement, and particularly in NOW, as a favorable candidate for women. What is happening to McGovern as the prize of the Democratic Party nomination is moving closer and closer? Recently changing his position on abortion from favoring repeal of all abortion laws, he now states that it is up to individual states to decide this question, and if he were President he would take no position. Our election campaign should be aggressive in exposing such political opportunism. Some women's liberation activists will begin to break from McGovern as this process continues. This may bring some new opportunities for WONAAC, because a layer of women will see the need to support organizations which consistently struggle for women's rights, although they may continue their support for McGovern.

If McGovern wins the nomination, he will continue the process of watering down his more "radical" side. There will be disillusionment with McGovern from a small but very important layer of people, but his nomination will be viewed as a big victory by most, including women's liberation activists. There will be great pressure to excuse his drift to the right by rationalizing the importance of a victory for the liberals.

How does all of this fit into the specific stage of the abortion struggle? There is no question that if NOW had played a vanguard role in responding to the mass mobilization on the part of the antiabortion forces in New York that the demonstrations on or around May 6 would have been qualitatively larger. The women's movement suffered a setback in New York. There was a massive mobilization on the part of the anti-abortion forces, and the legislature voted to repeal the liberalized abortion law in New York, reinstating the 1865 criminal abortion statute. Even though Rockefeller eventually vetoed the antiabortion bill, the abortion movement suffered a setback because there was no real massive response on the part of the women's liberation movement in New York.

How did the leadership of NOW approach this problem? Betty Freidan was quoted in the New York Times recently stating that "women

have quietly begun to raise money, and we have raised now, not the million dollars that the Catholic hierarchy has at its disposal, but shall we say in substantial five figures, and we are spending that and we are deploying our forces to support the brave men and women who voted to retain our right to medical help and abortion and to defeat a picked few of our enemies. I can't give you too many details about that because of the nature of the inflammatory situation, this will have to be a somewhat quiet effort." The key word to remember here is "quiet." This is one of the clearest expressions of NOW's retreat from any struggle perspective. The immersion of NOW and its periphery in capitalist party politics and the elections, and the intimidation by the right wing, prevented them from playing any vanguard role whatsoever in the New York abortion fight. What Freidan is essentially saying is "don't rock the boat, for we might be able to defeat some of those reactionaries in a behind-the-scenes election fight."

Because of this situation, the actions called by WONAAC were smaller and will probably continue to be modest in the coming months preceding the elections. But the importance of such actions is not lessened. WONAAC embodies the mass struggle approach in the concrete. This is the key to its importance.

WONAAC will become especially important as the elections come to a close. Thousands of women across the country have been drawn into activity around the elections through the Women's Political Caucus and view it as their form of women's liberation activity. After the elections they will want to continue their women's liberation activity and will ask the question: what will the women's liberation movement be doing next? WONAAC will be there with a record of consistent struggle. Another aspect, although it may be limited, is that WONAAC will be able to draw some of these women into struggle even now.

Besides the elections there are other factors that play a role in regard to the size and impact of WONAAC's activities. The women's liberation movement is still a new movement. The first big upsurge in the feminist movement took place in the context of the biggest upsurge in the student and antiwar movements that this country has seen. Since then, there has been a lull in the activities of the antiwar and student movements and this has affected the women's movement as well.

There is another section of the women's movement that has also abstained from mobilizing women to fight for the right to abortion and other demands. This grouping has oriented towards creating new life styles and new institutions to serve the needs of women. They counterpose this perspective to making demands on the government. The activities of these women -- such as abortion referral or setting up small day care centers -- have helped small numbers of women but do not change the position of the masses of women. And although this counterinstitution, livingroom feminist grouping within the movement is not as large or as powerful as NOW, they are a factor. Women from both this grouping and from NOW have also carried out a vicious and sustained red-baiting campaign against WONAAC, which has had an effect on WONAAC's

authority.

Before going into the concrete aspects of the debate within WONAAC, it is important to look at where the abortion struggle stands right now and what WONAAC has accomplished over the past year.

The attempt to roll back the gains women made in New York was not an isolated event. The Catholic Church is carrying out a well-financed and well-organized campaign against a woman's right to abortion in almost every state across the country. They are organizing right to life groups, holding demonstrations, lobbying, introducing bills, and filing suits.

Nixon himself has made it clear what the women's movement is up against. Since he has been in office he has made three statements on the abortion issue. First, was the statement on the "sanctity of human life" that was picked up by the press around the country. Second, was his public rejection of his own Population Council's pro-abortion recommendations, recommendations which were based on a woman's right to choose and not on population control. Third, and probably most serious, was his direct intervention into the New York crisis by siding with the Catholic Church hierarchy through his letter to Cardinal Cooke of the New York archdiocese. This made front page news all across the nation.

Women vs. Connecticut won a major victory when the Connecticut courts ruled favorably on their suit, saying that the Connecticut abortion law was unconstitutional and violated a woman's right to privacy. Then through the intervention of the state apparatus and activities on the part of the Catholic Church hierarchy, a special session of the legislature passed a new law even further restricting a woman's right to abortion by making abortion a criminal offense punishable by up to 10 years in prison, except to save the life of the pregnant woman.

A similar development has taken place in New Jersey, where the law has been declared unconstitutional by the courts but the state is appealing the decision and a right-to-life bill is now before the legislature. While this is pending no abortions can be performed in New Jersey.

In Massachusetts the legislature just passed an amendment to the state constitution under a welfare subsection which would prohibit abortions by guaranteeing every fetus from the moment of conception the rights of all citizens. To be made into law, this has to pass the legislature again, and then be approved by the voters of the state through a referendum. And recently seven women in Chicago were arrested for running a self-help abortion clinic.

But there are also victories on the other side. We have just learned that Shirley Wheeler's case in Florida has been dropped. Certain court victories have been won. And more and more organizations, churches, medical societies, and state commissions have taken positions for abortion law repeal.

There is absolutely no question that the abortion issue is now a much sharper issue in American politics than it was when WONAAC was formed. When WONAAC was formed at a conference in New York one year ago, some women in the women's liberation movement argued that it was not necessary to organize such a campaign since New York and a few other states had liberalized abortion laws. They thought the states were moving in the direction of repealing or reforming the abortion laws and that women would win the right to abortion without a fight.

The women's movement cannot underestimate the resistance that the government, the states, and those forces who hold reactionary views on such questions will have to the fight for abortion law repeal. It is going to be a long and hard struggle. More myths surround this question than any other issue of women's oppression, and it is going to be a very difficult but important fight.

So what has WONAAC accomplished? First, over this past year WONAAC's perspective has been confirmed. It is the only organization that is organized nationally to unite women in action on the question of abortion or for that matter on any other aspect of women's oppression. It has built teach-ins and debates with anti-abortion people. It has initiated and coordinated numerous class action suits against reactionary abortion laws across the country. It has demonstrated against state legislatures and mobilized women for legislative hearings on abortion laws. WONAAC worked with Abzug in preparing the National Abortion Rights Act of 1972, which is presently in Congress.

This bill can be an important focus for the entire women's movement to demand that the federal government take action on this question. (It is also something the SWP election campaigns should support and can be used to put the Democratic and Republican parties' candidates on the spot.) WONAAC coalitions have been set up all across the country. WONAAC was the only organization that carried out a public campaign on behalf of Shirley Wheeler.

Through its activities over the past year WONAAC has come to appreciate the importance of raising abortion as an international issue. By calling international abortion actions on November 20 and on May 6 WONAAC has helped inspire the abortion fight and the women's liberation movement in other countries, just as actions of women in France, Germany, Canada and other countries have inspired women here.

When the antiabortion forces were mobilizing in New York, it was WONAAC that provided women with the opportunity to answer the right wing with the May 6 march. The WONAAC demonstrations across the country received considerable coverage on the TV and on the radio. Thousands of people learned that there were women who were prepared to fight for this right in New York and around the world.

WONAAC has provided a vehicle for women who want to struggle on this question including those who are also involved in the elections and counter-institution type activities but feel that

is not enough. Essentially WONAAC has become the abortion coalition and although its activities have been modest, in the broad context of the women's movement as a whole it has played a very important role.

Now, I'd like to go into the specific political debate that is taking place in WONAAC and how we view the upcoming conference. I have already indicated many of the questions that are being raised both formally and informally. And as I have said we expect that many other questions will come up in the course of this fight. Many of the criticisms, including the red-baiting, stem from frustration with the lack of a unified mass response by the women's movement to the antiabortion mobilizations and, in a more general sense, frustration with the fact that WONAAC isn't yet what they would like it to be -- big, broad, and all-encompassing.

These criticisms also reflect a capitulation to the consistent political and red-baiting attacks on WONAAC, the YSA, and the SWP that have been pushed by anti-mass action tendencies in the women's press and by members of NOW since WONAAC was founded. However, this is the first time since the founding conference that those attacks are reflected in any significant way within WONAAC itself. I have already indicated that the elections have played a significant role in this. The questions raised in the dispute within WONAAC are important ones -- questions the entire women's liberation movement will be interested in. Having a clear political debate and a sober and realistic evaluation of the role that WONAAC has played in the past year will be a valuable contribution to the entire development of the women's liberation movement.

We can expect that women from virtually every political tendency and every perspective within the feminist movement will be attending the WONAAC conference.

The WONAAC Newsletter will be carrying out a discussion of the political questions involved before the conference and will be very valuable in helping to clarify the issues in dispute. One of the political questions raised is that WONAAC's national focus detracts from local grass roots organizing. For example, the "June 24-New York" proposal to the June 4 National Coordinating Committee meeting of WONAAC stated that "any demonstrations on a national scale such as November 20 or any nationally coordinated program of demonstrations would only hinder efforts to effect this absolutely necessary decentralization" of WONAAC's work.

Does WONAAC's national focus detract from local organizing? It has been precisely the nationally coordinated campaigns that WONAAC has organized that have helped local organizing. What is being questioned is the need for WONAAC itself. A national campaign helps local organizing because it raises demands directed against the national government. Our enemy is national -- the Church, the government, the courts -- and any local action is more powerful if it is part of a national campaign because it links women across the country in a united manner.

One of the other charges is that WONAAC has not paid serious attention to legislative and legal activities. This is simply untrue. WONAAC has either played a role in or has helped initiate many of the class action suits that exist right now, and we think that such suits are effective tactics. WONAAC has organized and participated in hearings on legislative bills and has attempted to get repeal legislation introduced into the local legislatures. WONAAC has also played a key role in collaborating with Abzug's office in the drafting of the Abortion Rights Act of 1972 as was mentioned earlier in the report.

Another important question that is being raised is the red-baiting. Most of the women in the national office of WONAAC who are retreating from a mass action perspective have been involved in WONAAC for quite a while. They have been involved in both of WONAAC's national conferences and have previously publicly rejected the red-baiting of WONAAC. They are now raising the spectre of "YSA/SWP control" because they have moved away from the political perspective around which WONAAC was formed of which they see the YSA and the SWP being the best organized defenders. It is unfortunately true that right now we are the strongest political organization participating in WONAAC. The reason this is true is not because we choose it to be that way, but because of the default of other sections of the women's movement. We must answer these red-baiting attacks head-on because red-baiting can only help destroy the abortion struggle and the entire women's liberation movement. We must explain how beneath the red-baiting lie political differences. And although it would be best that the discussion be kept on the political differences, those who are questioning this perspective will attempt to cloud the discussion by keeping it on the role of the YSA and the SWP. For example, at the WONAAC NCC meeting, after they presented their political projections, they withdrew their resolution and said that the main issue in dispute is the YSA and the SWP. As well as drawing out the political differences, and presenting positive projections, it will be necessary to deal aggressively with the red-baiting and to explain what is behind it.

At the NCC meeting a proposal was passed which included a number of concrete projections for WONAAC. In the process of helping to build this conference and participating in the political debate, it is important to begin the process of helping to carry out some of these specific campaigns now. One of the projections which was agreed upon was holding a national tribunal in the fall, the character of which will be decided upon by the conference. We think that this could be an important political event which can be of international character.

Also projected was that WONAAC begin a national petition campaign for the Abortion Rights Act of 1972 introduced in Congress by Bella Abzug. Although the size and scope of the campaign will be decided upon by the conference, WONAAC will begin circulating petitions now and hopefully will be able to have a large number of signatures by the time of the conference. This project also gives people some concrete things to have on literature tables while building the conference.

WONAAC also projected sending trailblazing teams to those states where there are major crises developing on the abortion issue and where WONAAC groups either are not yet organized or are very new.

The meeting also called on WONAAC to work locally with NOW and other groups in planning activities for August 26. Discussions are beginning in some cities already, particularly in New York and Philadelphia. It is our opinion that WONAAC affiliates should investigate what possibilities there are for united activities for the women's liberation movement for either demonstrations, public meetings or other activities. The actions on or around August 26 will likely include many of the demands and issues raised by the women's liberation movement. But no matter what issues are raised, abortion will be an important question, particularly in those states where major crises are developing.

One of the things that pro-abortion forces can be doing more of is serious educational work around the question of abortion. We can't assume that everyone understands this question, particularly because of the escalated educational and action campaign on the part of the Catholic Church.

In line with the whole discussion at the plenum about campus activity, many of the activities that are being projected by WONAAC will be effective ways to bring campus women into struggle. One of the campus projects that may be raised for consideration at the conference will be carrying out referenda campaigns for abortion law repeal this fall. The Choice '72 polls carried out on many campuses this spring showed the very broad sentiment that exists for abortion law repeal. The Canadian abortion campaign has found that this is a very useful project for building the abortion campaign on the campuses.

One of the other questions that we have continually discussed in the process of building the abortion campaign is what is the best form through which the abortion struggle can be carried out in the context of the general women's liberation struggle on the campuses.

Women on the campuses are interested in many aspects of women's oppression. In many cities the campuses have provided the backbone for the city-wide abortion coalitions. But the question is posed about the role of the general women's liberation groups or abortion action groups on the campuses. As well as health struggles, gynecological and abortion fights that take place on the campuses -- which an abortion group can quite clearly organize -- there are also many other issues that come up on the campuses that are important.

On some campuses HEW struggles have been initiated demanding more female students in graduate programs, hiring more female professors, equal admissions -- that is, equal opportunities in education and jobs for women on the campuses. Also there have been continuous discussions and campaigns on the campuses for women's studies. General women's liberation educational conferences have been carried out and have been successful. These are all activities

that we want to participate in where possible and help to organize where our forces permit.

Serious radicalizing women don't just think about the abortion issue, especially if there is no sharp crisis around the issue at a given time. The problems of livingroom feminism, demoralization, counter-institutionism have not been as significant within campus women's liberation groups as they have been in most general city-wide women's liberation groups. It may be to our advantage in maximizing the ability of large numbers of women activists on the campuses to participate in the women's liberation movement and to maximize the number of women who can be involved in struggling around the abortion question, where our forces permit and where there is a basis for it, we should be participating in or helping to build general campus women's liberation organizations.

At the University of Minnesota, the Female Liberation group on campus has been the backbone of the city-wide abortion coalition and is carrying out important health struggles on the campus. It has also carried out other activities such as a rape conference which we participated in and helped to build, and a speakers bureau which has been able to reach out to the other campuses and high schools in the region. Similar developments have taken place at Brown University with Women of Brown United which we participate in.

Also, in our general support to women's liberation in the Young Socialists for Jenness and Pulley student government election campaigns and other educational activities such as forums or classes on campus that the YSJP or the YSA carries out, we should be raising all aspects of women's oppression, not only the issue of abortion, particularly issues in relation to the campus situation.

Because of the need to focus this report on the upcoming conference and the importance of the political debate within WONAAC, I was unable to go into other aspects of our women's liberation activity. I would just like to point out here the continuing growth of Chicana feminism that we have seen since the first Chicana conference of 600 in Houston. A midwest Chicana conference is taking place this weekend organized by women connected with the Midwest Council of La Raza. We were able to send YSAers to participate and introduce these women to the SWP election campaign. Representatives of WONAAC were also there with material to encourage Chicanas to come to the WONAAC conference.

Lastly, on our immediate tasks. Our primary work in the next month will be helping to organize and prepare for the WONAAC conference. This means paying especially close attention to this work.

The Militant will be carrying a series of articles dealing with the political questions that have been raised. We should make a special point of selling The Militant and discussing our

ideas with many women who come around.

We should help WONAAC coalitions to go on a vigorous campaign to let women know that this conference is taking place. Tables can be set up on the campuses and around the city. Volunteers can leaflet meetings of the candidates. Representatives from the coalitions could go to NOW and Women's Political Caucus meetings to let women know about the conference.

In addition, a thorough political discussion before and during the WONAAC conference will go a long way to solidify the campaign for abortion law repeal in this country and be a valuable experience for the entire women's liberation movement.