

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014

September 2, 1972

TO BRANCH ORGANIZERS AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION DIRECTORS

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Comrades,

A National Coordinating Committee meeting of WONAAC will take place Saturday, September 9, in Chicago, Illinois. As indicated in the women's liberation report at Oberlin, this is a very important meeting and serious efforts should be made to build it as broadly as possible.

The NCC will have the opportunity to think through and fully evaluate where WONAAC is going, what the current state of the abortion law repeal struggle is, and how the decisions of the July conference are being implemented. Within the leadership of WONAAC, informal discussions have been taking place which we would like to share with the comrades involved in our women's liberation work.

At the NCC a proposal will be made to change the timing of the major action decided upon at the July conference. Concretely it will be proposed that local hearings be the major focus of WONAAC's fall activity, coordinated nationally, on or around October 21-22. These hearings will be major preparatory events leading up to and building the International Tribunal on Abortion, Contraception, and Forced Sterilization to be held in the early spring of 1973. Also, as part of WONAAC's action perspective, it will continue to project a massive petition campaign for the Abortion Rights Act of 1972 and will plan to have a well publicized action in Washington, D.C., when the Supreme Court rehears the Texas and Georgia abortion cases in the fall. The primary motivation for this change is to give WONAAC adequate time to develop the full potential of the International Tribunal as projected at the July conference.

The concrete projections voted on and passed at the national conference were good ones, particularly the International Tribunal. Since the conference, the abortion issue has continued to emerge as the sharpest political demand raised by the women's liberation movement today. The New York fight, the Democratic Party convention platform debate, the intervention of Nixon on this issue, the role of the Catholic hierarchy, and the continuous national debate on the issue -- all these point to its centrality and importance.

An International Tribunal of the kind and scope projected at the conference, is the best possible type of action at this time to express the outrage over this question and take the movement a major stride forward -- just as the teach-ins of the early antiwar movement and such events as the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal were important events marking key stages of the antiwar movement. In the initial steps to build the International Tribunal, WONAAC has already discovered that the action generates considerable enthusiasm. It obviously corresponds to the needs of the movement today, but such an event takes a great deal of preparation and hard work to be a success.

The Tribunal can draw in and gain support from broader forces within the women's liberation movement who are not formally part of WONAAC -- such as NOW, women involved in the Women's Political Caucus, campus women's liberation groups, etc. We should keep in mind that WONAAC is a vanguard force within the women's liberation movement. It alone cannot become the mass movement for abortion law repeal, but it does embody the political approach and method of struggle that will be necessary to build a real mass movement for abortion law repeal. However, it takes time to build the kind of broad support projected for the Tribunal.

In order to draw broader forces into the planning and organizing of the Tribunal, WONAAC has initiated a Tribunal Committee. Individuals and organizations can support and build the Tribunal without taking a formal position of support to WONAAC per se. It is possible that the Tribunal Committee will become the embryo of a future abortion law repeal coalition which would be broader than WONAAC currently is.

In the process of organizing the International Tribunal, though, WONAAC has faced some major obstacles:

To carry out the decisions reached at the conference, and build a successful Tribunal, the seven weeks left are just not enough time. For example, even on the technical level, the WONAAC staff is having difficulty finding an adequate hall in which to hold the Tribunal. More important, however, as WONAAC discussed and defined the character of the Tribunal more thoroughly, it became clear that the potential and scope of the action were greater than originally conceived. Without any real experience in building such an event, WONAAC underestimated the time and resources necessary to carry it out.

The discussion in local areas following the conference indicate that the preliminary hearings for the Tribunal are shaping up quite well. Because of their close proximity to the October dates, however, neither the experience, nor the testimony, nor the impact of the local hearings being organized around the country, would be of real benefit to the International Tribunal. Just the opposite should be the case.

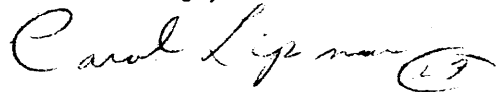
Many of the forces WONAAC wants to reach with the Tribunal to make it a real success will be spending their time and energy this fall working to elect McGovern. Although many individuals will formally endorse the Tribunal, they will not really work to build it in the way they might be willing to after the elections. The projection of nationally coordinated local hearings building up to a national Tribunal in the spring would be more in line with what is possible and would maximize the strengths of both the local hearings and the International Tribunal.

Such a decision -- to change the date of the International Tribunal -- can only be made by the NCC, as the decision-making body of WONAAC between national conferences. It is the obligation of the NCC to seriously review how the decisions of the conference are being carried out, and if necessary, to make changes in timing in order to fully implement the spirit of the decisions reached.

But most importantly, this adjustment in timing is not a proposal to lowkey WONAAC and the abortion law repeal struggle for a few months. A national focus will be fully maintained; hearings will be held simultaneously across the country; more work will be done in the local areas; invaluable experience will be gained; and the building, organizing and publicity for the hearings and the International Tribunal will continue with full force. In short, all of WONAAC's projects will be organized more effectively.

This proposal is presently being discussed on an informal level within WONAAC. Until the NCC, this information should be shared only with the comrades directing the work of the women's fraction and the branch organizers. Comrades attending the NCC should also be informed of the contents of this letter.

Comradely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carol Lipman". The signature is written in dark ink and includes a small circular mark at the end of the name.

Carol Lipman
SWP Women's Liberation Director