

December 3, 1974

TO ALL ORGANIZERS

Attached is a letter from Frank Lovell to a CLUW activist in Washington, D.C., in response to an inquiry regarding CLUW.

The letter should be shared with those involved in CLUW activities.

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December 3, 1974

Washington, D.C.

This is an attempt to answer some of the basic questions raised in your letter of November 20 about CLUW and our participation in it.

What is CLUW?

1) CLUW is an organization of trade union women, open to all women who are members of unions. (Only union women are eligible for membership.) It was formed on the initiative of the trade union bureaucracy in response to pressures of the modern feminist movement, as the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists was established by the trade union bureaucracy in response to the new Black consciousness.

2) CLUW is staffed almost entirely by staff women who work for and are not elected officials of various unions representing large numbers of women workers. Membership dues are not sufficient to sustain a full-time staff, and most CLUW activities are subsidized directly or indirectly by union contributions.

3) The CLUW chapters vary greatly from city to city. New York CLUW is not typical, neither are the Washington, D.C., or Philadelphia chapters. The organization of new chapters is reported occasionally in AFL-CIO News. Some of these are in small, highly unionized communities. Others are in major industrial centers where the union movement is weak. We have no first-hand reports of these CLUW chapters, but it is not likely that they are artificial creations of the union bureaucracy or that they are inspired by some isolated radical feminists. Women in unions feel a need for an organization like CLUW and that is most probably why small chapters are being organized in all parts of the country.

What about the future of CLUW?

1) The character, power of attraction, and scope of CLUW influence has yet to be established, developed, and extended. This will be determined partly by what activities CLUW engages in, but to a greater extent it will depend upon the developing feminist consciousness and the increased participation of women in the trade union movement and in the class struggle. In the final analysis, the future of CLUW is linked to the future of the union movement and depends upon what changes the unions undergo and whether they are able to organize the unorganized and embark upon a course of independent political action. The development of CLUW is part of this process.

2) We believe there is a need for an organization like CLUW and we think this organization has a promising future because of the large number of working women, the rising feminist conscious-

ness, and the sharpening of the class struggle. This is why we urge all working women to find jobs in union-protected shops and offices if possible, to undertake organizing drives at unorganized workplaces, and to participate in CLUW or seek the aid of CLUW whenever necessary.

3) Here in New York several of our friends are actively engaged in organizing drives. These often proceed slowly, depending on the circumstances of the company, the mood of the workers, and the techniques and determination of the union organizers.

We encourage inside organizing committees consisting of militants among those workers who are being signed up with the union. Members of these organizing committees are usually interested in social conflicts and in politics that go beyond the immediate task of organizing their shop. This gives us an opportunity to interest them in our politics. At some stage they will be interested in the work of CLUW, in asking CLUW for support of their organizing drive, and all of them are potential members of CLUW.

What about the leadership of CLUW?

1) We are not at this stage very much interested in the small-time politics of CLUW, centered upon who will be the officials of the organization. All we want is an opportunity to meet with women in our different unions as CLUW members, participate in some of the CLUW committees, and bring more of our friends and acquaintances into CLUW.

2) The sects and few independent radical women have a mistaken understanding of what CLUW is and what it is likely to become. They think CLUW can have a life of its own independent of the unions -- and right away.

3) At this stage CLUW is entirely dependent upon the unions, and will develop a more independent existence only when it grows numerically. It is true that the heavy-handed actions of some of the union staff women discourage growth of CLUW as we have seen in some chapters. No doubt some of these union staffers would like to scuttle CLUW because they find it a nuisance or fear what it may become.

It is also true that the sectarians, who have tried to convert CLUW into a narrow radical women's caucus, would divorce it from the union movement and destroy it.

4) Those women who want to win recognition in CLUW will do so commensurate with the work they do to build CLUW and the numbers of women workers they can persuade to join CLUW and become active in it. This means work in every union to bring new members to CLUW.

Women workers in the industrial unions such as Auto, Steel, Oil and Chemical, etc., have not yet played a very active part in CLUW, but they will be among the most active when they learn about it. We should introduce these women to CLUW whenever possible.

Wherever we are working in a unionized shop or office, we should explore the possibilities of organizing a women's committee. This may be a committee of CLUW women, and it may also include others. In any case, we should try to interest all union women in CLUW activities.

In the recent period here in New York CLUW activity has centered upon discussion of "CLUW structure," organizing the "founding conference," and a certain amount of jockeying for position to determine who will control CLUW if and when it is finally established as a functioning organization. At the meeting here on November 23 New York CLUW received its charter. Election of local officers occurs at the next meeting. It should then be possible for CLUW to develop some activities that will attract union women.

What kind of activities should CLUW undertake?

1) CLUW activities in its formative stages have been of two kinds, educational and support actions of strikes and of union organizing campaigns. In New York, CLUW has endorsed and participated in support activities for the United Farm Workers, the boycott of Farah pants, and strikes at both Harper & Row and Macmillan. It adopted a motion in support of the miners' strike and prepared to organize meetings for representatives of the mine workers in case the strike continues and comes under attack. It debated and decided not to support the December 14 demonstration against racism in Boston.

When national events and strikes take place, such as the miners strike, these can provide exciting activity for CLUW. If the mine strike continues CLUW could organize, or help to organize, big support meetings. Boston is another example.

As these protest demonstrations and strikes occur -- and there will be many more -- they will change the character of CLUW activities from small local support actions to nationally coordinated participation in broad protest and strike solidarity movements.

2) The more mundane "educational activities" are also very important for the building of CLUW. New York women held some successful educational conferences on women in unions, the need for demands relating specifically to women to be included in union contracts, parliamentary procedure, etc. Washington, D.C. and other areas have also held some good educational forums and conferences.

It is possible to organize CLUW seminars on women in unions, the problem of women in union leadership positions (why are there so few women union officials even in those unions where women are a majority?), the pattern of union negotiations (why are women's demands commonly omitted from union contracts?), the fight for jobs (why are women always squeezed out when the job market tightens up? and what can be done about this?).

These are legitimate CLUW activities. CLUW is not exclusively an "activists organization," and is not likely to be so

in the immediate future. It needs to conduct some educational and recruitment activities as part of its regular existence.

Our main focus is to build CLUW, but what does that mean in the concrete?

1) CLUW will develop as a viable women's organization to the extent that women in unions participate in it and begin to see it as their organization.

In your situation it should be possible to interest teachers whom you know in the schools and others who may already be active in the Teachers Union. They may be attracted by support of actions like the anti-inflation demonstration you mentioned. If so, they would certainly favor a motion in your union supporting the demonstration.

Women in your union may also want to attend CLUW educational conferences. A recent meeting (Nov. 24) of teachers to fight sexism in the schools was held in Old Westbury, Long Island, attended by women teachers from most sections of the country. One of the women who attended that conference was Shirley McCune, director of the Resource Center on Sex Roles and Education in Washington, D.C. She may be willing to report on this at a meeting of CLUW. If so, such a meeting could attract teachers and others who have not previously attended CLUW functions and perhaps never heard of CLUW.

2) We should pay close attention to any developments around issues of special concern to women within the unions. For instance, in Detroit a woman in the Postal Workers Union was fired because she was pregnant; in the Bay Area a class action suit has been filed on behalf of women unionists fired as a result of the lay-offs; in New York and San Francisco the child-care issue has involved women unionists; and there have been several fights around the rights of women to enter traditionally male jobs. These kinds of issues as they develop could provide a good focus for a CLUW chapter.

3) Women who are in unions should be encouraged to join CLUW and make of it the kind of organization that fulfills their needs in the union movement. They will be much more comfortable in their unions if they can meet with CLUW women and talk about the special conditions of women on the job, and about the problem women have of getting a hearing and some representation in their own unions.

In Solidarity,
s/Frank Lovell