

14 Charles Lane
New York, New York 10014
February 17, 1977

TO ORGANIZERS AND NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

On February 5, the Los Angeles Times ran a front page story on 1,377 FBI documents on the women's liberation movement released under the Freedom of Information Act. We have been able to obtain a set of these documents. Although not referred to in the original LA Times story, the Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialist Alliance are mentioned with great frequency in these files.

A sample selection of the documents is enclosed. The Militant, beginning with issue #7, will be running a series analyzing the complete set. There are a number of ways local areas may be able to take advantage of the documents.

The Militant series will be the most comprehensive coverage the documents will receive. Party branches can use this series in conjunction with the Militant sales campaign, especially to get these issues into the hands of activists in the women's movement.

In some cases we may be able to put together panel discussions on FBI surveillance of the women's movement, holding public meetings either at our Friday night forum series or broadly sponsored community or campus meetings. Many women consider these files as the women's liberation files, distinct from SWP or other files, and hopefully would agree to respond jointly with us in protest.

Cities "targeted" for FBI surveillance may want to hold broad press conferences to release files to the press. We may be able to approach some TV or radio talk shows to do some interviews based on the files and our prominence in them. In general, the files on the women's movement will increase interest in the Socialist Workers Party suit and may be a good occasion to try to promote some media coverage for candidates or local spokespeople.

In discussing these files with activists in the women's movement, we should ask everyone to endorse the Political Rights Defense Fund.

One possible result of these files will be concern by some women to determine "who the agent was" or some other

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form of "agent hunt." The FBI doctors these files before they are released to the public, and, while it is clear there were informers, it is impossible to determine who they were from these files. The point the women's liberation movement should be making about these files is that they demonstrate FBI surveillance; to try to determine who informed would simply play into the government's hands by dividing the movement.

Comradely,

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SUMMARY OF FBI FILES ON THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

This summary is meant to be a brief supplement to the Militant series on the FBI files on the women's liberation movement which will appear beginning with issue #7. It is included as an aid in discussions with activists in the women's movement.

The two most notable aspects of the files are 1) their sheer volume and 2) their gaps, which indicate that only a small portion of what exists has been made public.

The files demonstrate that the FBI followed in detail the growth and development of the women's liberation movement. It is apparent from the files that, at least for the period covered, the FBI carried out surveillance of consciousness raising groups; women's conferences, such as the 1969 Congress to United Women; planning meetings, such as those for the massive August 26, 1970 demonstration in New York; the National Organization for Women (NOW) and its leaders, including Betty Friedan; large and small demonstrations, such as the famous demonstration at the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1970; and campus women's liberation groups. The name of any woman or man concerned with issues raised by the feminist movement was liable to find its way into FBI files.

The bulk of the files are summary reports from field offices carrying out surveillance. Cities reported on include New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Nashville and Portland, Oregon. We know that files are withheld because the women's liberation movement flourished in many other cities, such as Atlanta and Minneapolis. In addition, while some of the women's liberation files released to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the LA Times are the same, those released to the Senate Committee contain some pages deleted in the Times' copies.

It is also clear that the FBI was alarmed at the potential for cooperation between the Black, antiwar and women's liberation movements. The files include extensive reports on the New Haven demonstration in support of jailed Black Panther members Erica Huggins and Joan Bird. They also include reports showing extensive surveillance of those building the April 10, 1971 antiwar demonstration, sponsored and built by Women's Strike for Peace. There are numerous reports on the United

Women's Contingent, which participated in the April 24, 1971 march on Washington, sponsored by the National Peace Action Coalition.

On May 11, 1970 J. Edgar Hoover wrote to the Chicago FBI office: "...it is absolutely essential that we conduct sufficient investigation to clearly establish subversive ramifications of the WLM (sic) and to determine the potential for violence presented by the various groups connected with this movement as well as any possible threat they may represent to the internal security of the United States." The groups named are SDS, the Black Panther Party and the Socialist Workers Party. On the basis of this memo and the hundreds of references to the Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialist Alliance, it is obvious that the FBI feared both the revolutionary potential of the women's liberation movement as well as the role played by members of the left in the fight for women's liberation.

The files include a number of reports of internal meetings of the Socialist Workers Party at which women's liberation activities were discussed.

Cointelpro-type disruptive activity by the FBI against the women's movement, or against the Socialist Workers Party in the movement, is not documented. However, the FBI does manifest concern with what they term in their summaries "factionalism" within the movement -- between the Socialist Workers Party, the Young Socialist Alliance and activists in the women's movement; between gay women and heterosexuals; between "liberals" and "radicals."

The existence of these FBI files is an outrage. The women's movement must unite in opposition to FBI spying by demanding that the FBI make public all its files on the women's liberation movement and immediately cease its surveillance and harassment. The best answer to the FBI is to build a strong movement in defense of those rights now under attack - the right to abortion, to equal treatment under the law, to child care and equal pay.