

14 Charles Lane  
New York, N.Y. 10014  
October 1, 1977

TO ORGANIZERS AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION DIRECTORS

Houston IWY National Conference

Dear Comrades,

The International Women's Year Conference (IWY) will take place in Houston, Texas, November 18-21. Conference organizers predict a turnout of 20,000, including the 1,900 delegates.

In addition to plenary sessions and special events for delegates and a limited number of observers, official activities are planned for the thousands of non-delegates expected. These include speakouts, workshops, panels, and performances of athletics, drama, and dance. Space has been set aside for booths and tables, and a Houston women's coalition has called a pro-women's rights welcoming rally for Friday afternoon, November 18.

Government-Sponsored

As the cover story in the October 7, 1977, Militant points out, the IWY state and national conferences are sponsored by the same government that has delivered some devastating blows to women's rights. And these conferences are a clever cover for the government and industry drive to reverse public support of the gains women have won.

But the Houston conference, the article also states, is shaping up as the biggest single event for the women's liberation movement this fall. The preparations of the right wing, reported in newspaper articles around the country, indicate that Houston will be the scene of a major national political battle between pro- and anti-women forces.

Women's conferences scheduled over the last three months-- such as NOW state conferences, the convention of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), National Women's Political Caucus convention, Women for Racial and Economic Equality conference, and other women's groups--included workshops and agenda points on the Houston IWY conference. It is widely viewed in the women's movement as the place for women activists to be in November.

Role of the Women's Movement

The IWY national conference presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the organized women's movement. It offers an excellent opportunity for broader political discussion in NOW chapters, campus women's groups, women's rights coalitions, union meetings, and community gatherings. The entire women's movement, especially the National Organization for Women, should be discussing what delegates should stress in Houston. How the issues of ERA ratification, abortion rights, gay rights, must be debated and won. In addition, affirmative action and

the need to overturn the Bakke decision are vitally important issues for the delegates and the women's movement to discuss and take a clear position in favor of. Meetings should be organized with women's groups, on the campus, and in the community to discuss these two issues.

NOW will have a significant presence at the conference. NOW national president, Eleanor Smeal, is an IWY national commissioner and as many as 20% of the delegates are NOW members. NOW has the opportunity to take the lead in Houston in organizing the pro-woman forces for the political battle with the right wing. NOW also has the opportunity to win thousands of new women to conscious support of feminism and to membership in its ranks.

### Travel Costs

Since accommodations and travel from most parts of the country will be costly, a great deal of emphasis is needed on organizing and financing relatively low-cost modes of travel.

Areas some distance away from Houston will need to investigate right away cut-rate air travel including group fares, charters, "no frills" flights and other possible special deals. Areas five driving hours or less from Houston may find trains, chartered buses, or rented cars feasible means of transportation.

Funds raised through special group events or by phoning members or supporters will increase the number of women that can attend the national conference.

Campuses may also be a source of funds to send women to Houston as well--through student governments, women's studies departments, campus women's organizations, and other sources.

In some cases, unions may make funds available to send union members and other women. The labor movement has a stake in defending women's rights and repudiating such labor-hating outfits as the Ku Klux Klan. Some CLUW chapters may be able to organize fundraisers. Other CLUW members may be able to obtain subsidies from their unions.

### What Socialists Will Do at IWY

The IWY conference also presents a tremendous opportunity for revolutionary socialists to reach women from all around the country with our ideas. We will want to be at the IWY conference in sufficient numbers to have an impact through sales of the Militant, Young Socialist, and Pathfinder literature. Pathfinder Press is rushing production of Evelyn Reed's new book, entitled Sexism and Science, to be ready in time for the conference. Reed will be in Houston for the IWY conference and promotional activities for the book.

In addition to Pathfinder and Militant booths at the con-

ference exhibition center, a socialist headquarters will be open near the conference hall for women to come for political discussions.

Forums will be built featuring leading SWP spokeswomen on such subjects as the relationship between feminism and socialism, the relevance of feminism to women of the oppressed national minorities, and on internationalism and women's liberation.

Fractions in every area should immediately discuss how the women's liberation movement can be advanced through political discussion oriented to the Houston conference. Meetings should begin to take up the issues that delegates to the IWY national conference should debate. And lastly, every effort should be made to pursue every avenue--IWY state commissions, church groups, unions, NOW chapters, campus groups, community-oriented agencies, and other coalitions--for information on any plans and funds available to get the largest number of women's rights supporters to Houston November 18-21.

Comradely,



Willie Mae Reid  
Women's Liberation Work  
Director