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TO ALL BRANCH ORGANIZERS AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION DIRECTORS

Dear Comrades,

This report is to give a general assessment of the developments in the women's liberation struggle and our activities since the Supreme Court decision on abortion.

I. Status of Abortion Rights Movement

Whereas it would be very difficult for the anti-abortion forces to overturn the Supreme Court decision, there is considerable right-wing activity and attempts are being made to chip away at the decision. Seven state legislatures, for example, have passed bills that are in clear violation of the Supreme Court decision. Two states, Rhode Island and Wyoming, have passed bills which completely forbid abortion in those states. A bill presented by Senator Church has been passed in the Senate which allows Catholic hospitals to refuse to perform abortions, even if they receive federal funds. The "right-to-life" forces in Oregon have called for a large demonstration on May 26 to protest the liberal law in Oregon.

Comrades should pay very close attention to the right-wing activities in their states and be prepared to respond to them.

The bills calling for total repeal of abortion laws which were introduced in several states have received very little support. Nevertheless, we should continue to support any repeal bills that are introduced and make educational points around them. In most cases the fight boils down to a fight between a bill that conforms with the Supreme Court decision and one that is more restrictive. We want to join with other forces in fighting against the more restrictive bills.

WONAAC chapters around the country have reported to the national office of WONAAC that few people come to WONAAC activities or donate funds. Most chapters have no full-time staff and many have either closed their office or moved into free office space on a campus.

The main project of national WONAAC is sponsoring a European tour for one of its national coordinators -- Susan Lamont. This was decided upon in order to take advantage of the victory in this country to help the abortion struggle in other places. National WONAAC has also responded through press releases and press conferences to any right-wing attacks on the Supreme Court decision.

II. General Interest in Women's Liberation

Since the Supreme Court decision there have been several significant demonstrations around the day-care cutbacks. Also, although not solely a woman's issue, new layers of women were involved in the meat boycott. Another reflection of the interest in feminist ideas was the International Women's Day activities around the country which were larger than others during recent

years. The largest was 1200 people in Seattle to hear Kate Millet and Evelyn Reed, but most other major cities had activities which drew between 75 and 250 people. These activities had no central issue. They consisted of speeches, panels, and demonstrations sponsored by coalitions around a variety of feminist issues.

Yet another reflection of the continued broad interest in women's liberation was the size of the conventions of both NOW and the Women's Political Caucus -- both of which drew over 2000 participants. And Ms magazine now sells almost one-half million copies every month.

This continued interest in feminist ideas, coupled with the impact of the abortion rights victory, provides our movement with an excellent opportunity to do basic educational and propaganda work on women's liberation. We have an opportunity to hold classes, forums, and speaking engagements for our candidates and other spokespeople, that can attract many interested women and men. There is much interest in some of the basic questions around feminism such as, "What Is Women's Liberation?"; "Feminism and Socialism"; "Are Men the Enemy?"; "What is the Relation Between the Feminist Struggle and Other Struggles?" and topics of that nature.

III. What Are the Issues?

Although no one single issue has emerged as a focal point, there are several important fights going on.

A. Anti-inflation Fight -- The meat boycott of April 1-7 was organized and led by women and involved thousands of women who had never been part of a protest movement before. This, of course, was not organized through the feminist organizations and most of the women involved were not conscious feminists. However, the anti-inflation fight is certainly bringing women out of the house to fight and organize. We should be making every effort to encourage the organized feminist groups and individual feminists to be involved in the anti-inflation fight.

B. Child-care Fund Cut-backs -- There have been several large protests centered around Nixon's cut-backs which will throw tens of thousands of children out of day-care centers. Just as in the anti-inflation fight, these struggles are involving new women, particularly Black and Puerto Rican women. Our comrades should continue to participate in these fights wherever possible, attempt to involve feminist organizations in these fights, and investigate what possibilities exist for continuing and broadening them.

C. ERA -- The Equal Rights Amendment has been passed in 30 states and either defeated or tabled for this legislative session in 14 states. This means that it will not be possible to gain passage in eight more states during this legislative session.

Even though the ERA must be passed on a state-by-state level, it is a national issue and many feminist organizations, particularly NOW, see it as a national issue. Any activities which are held, such as August 26 actions, even in those states which have already passed the ERA, should include the demand

for passage of the ERA and educational work should be done around that demand.

D. Equal Pay, Promotions, and Maternity Benefits -- Women now comprise almost 40 percent of the work force, and the number of working women has increased by 36 percent in the last decade. At the same time, the gap between male and female wages and job opportunities has continued to widen. This discrepancy has become more and more obvious and, influenced by feminist ideas, women have begun to fight in large numbers for equal pay, for promotional opportunities, and for maternity benefits. At this point, these fights have mainly been fought through legal suits. There have been thousands of suits filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and many have been won.

In addition to the legal suits, we have seen some other fights by working women. Women demonstrated at the General Motors plant in Detroit demanding that General Motors supply day-care in the factories and demanding that the United Auto Workers Union pick up the demand for day-care and fight for it. The strike against Farah Pants involved mostly Chicana women. The women's auxiliary of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union has played a large role in building strike support for the Shell strike and is also helping to build the anti-inflation actions in Houston. The Council of Union Women in Cleveland is concentrating on gaining union support for the ERA. The household employees, the stewardess' convention, and several others are examples of the impact that the feminist struggle is beginning to have on the unions. Wherever possible we should support and participate in these fights.

IV. Other Organizations

A. National Organization of Women -- NOW claims 30,000 members nationally and continues to grow and set up new chapters. It is the largest and most prominent of the feminist organizations. We want to continue to be participants in NOW. Local chapters of NOW often have committees on the ERA, education, abortion, and others which are doing good work and where our opinions and skills can be useful.

B. Women's Political Caucus -- The WPC is holding meetings in various cities to find women candidates and build support for women candidates. The SWP is running many feminist candidates in the municipal elections and we should ask for a hearing and for support from the WPC where possible.

C. Living-room Feminists and Counter-institutionalists -- These groups, which include the Radical Feminists, a variety of Women's Centers and Women's Unions, have been mainly concerned with three issues -- rape, prostitution, and self-help clinics. They have sponsored some sizeable conferences and teach-ins on these subjects. Whereas rape and prostitution are problems in this society, they are not the kind of issues around which significant actions can be built or which can involve large numbers of women. Neither are they the main expressions of the oppression of women. The rape issue is further complicated by the fact that many of the demands raised around rape take on a "law-and-order" character and are racist. The only effective alternative to this

"law-and-order" approach, in regard to rape, is to stress that the solution lies in building a socialist society.

We do not want to equate the living-room feminists with the overall women's liberation movement -- which they claim to be. They represent only a tiny and narrow portion of the movement. Our job is to orient toward the broader and much more significant issues and sectors of society.

V. Campuses

The campuses continue to be the best arena for recruitment to the YSA. The general women's liberation groups on the campuses do not have a central, main focus and are engaged in a variety of activities. These groups can be tied into the general, city-wide struggles such as the ERA and child-care fights. Some of the campus groups are fighting for child-care facilities on the campus, others against sex discrimination in admissions and hiring. Some campus groups have had success with sponsoring classes and forums. Serious consideration should be given to the question of helping to build the general women's liberation groups on campus.


VI. Summary

Interest in women's liberation activities continues to exist nationally and there is motion around a variety of different feminist issues. We can best relate to this by doing the following:

- a) carrying out educational activities such as classes, forums, and our press;
- b) participating in the anti-inflation fight, the child-care struggles, and supporting and participating in the fights of working women on the job, particularly in the unions;
- c) organizing support for the passage of the ERA;
- d) building general women's liberation groups on the campuses and tying them in with women's struggles off campus;
- e) continuing our participation in NOW.

In addition, we must constantly be on the alert for right-wing attempts to undercut the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, and we must continue to be prepared to respond to any and all such attempts.

Comradely,



Linda Jenness
SWP Women's Liberation
Director