

# I.S.

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# Women's Newsletter

## NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN

The National Organization for Women is holding its 1978 Conference on October 6, 7, 8, and 9 in Washington, D.C. The Women's Commission is asking the following branches to send a representative: Gary, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, New Jersey, New York.

Clearly, since the huge success of the July 9 ERA march, we have to re-evaluate our relationship to NOW. The last mailing from the National Office (dated 9/11/78) included a political motivation for why we feel the I.S. should be at NOW's Conference. We made the following points:

- The attack against women has begun to forge a new women's movement. As women become active, they look to NOW for direction because it is the largest, most visible women's organization. NOW's membership has grown phenomenally over the last year and a half.

- The attack has also forced the middle-class leadership of NOW to use mass action to fight for the ERA. The July 9 ERA march was a departure from the group's usual legislative strategy.

- NOW has hegemony over the women's movement. It will determine the strategy in the fight for the ERA.

The Women's Commission is beginning a process of investigation of NOW. Our relationship to NOW will be part of our convention discussion.

In this newsletter, the Commission is passing along some of the information we have about NOW. This will help those who attend the NOW Conference, and will help to provide a basis for making a decision about what our role should be vis-a-vis NOW.

Since the formation of NOW in 1966, the I.S. has always held a position that NOW was irrelevant to the work we were doing. NOW was a middle-class organization, more concerned with professionals and housewives than with working class women. By and large, we ignored NOW.

In 1967 NOW had 4-5,000 members. NOW continued to grow slowly but steadily not only in the late 60's and early 70's, but even through the mid-70's while we were saying the women's movement was dead. Growth was slow at first because there was a radical women's movement that was a dynamic alternative to NOW, and then because the movement subsided. In April, 1977, NOW had 55,000 members.

But in the last year and a half, NOW has about doubled its members. Why? The attack against women has spurred women into activity. As a result of the International Women's Year Convention in Houston last November, NOW gained 20,000 members. In April of 1978, they claimed 88,000 members. One member of the national staff told us that the "phones have been ringing off the hook" since the July 9 ERA march, so we can assume that there has been a lot of growth again. Probably, the membership approaches 100,000.

Of course, most of these so-called members are only there on paper. They subscribe to the NOW Times and that is it. Nonetheless, women are flocking into NOW. It is the only alternative.

At the same time NOW's strategy around the ERA has been a clear failure. Forced to face the fact that the ERA was going to go down in defeat, the membership of NOW began to demand more action. The New Jersey chapter passed a resolution calling for a national demonstration. NOW's Executive Board, after a two-day meeting, finally reluctantly agreed to hold such a demo.

But NOW's leadership is so out of it that they had no idea what the response would be. They expected 20,000. The day before, as they began to count heads coming into the city, they predicted 30,000. They were completely unprepared for the massive response.

To the leadership of NOW, the success of July 9 has not taught them any lessons—despite the fact that the House passed the extension ten days later. They still outline a purely legislative

strategy for winning on the ERA: 1. Lobbying for the extension 2. Boycotting convention centers in unratified states and 3. Campaigning for politicians who support the ERA (and then campaigning against them when they go back on their word, a tactic NOW calls the "vengeance strategy").

The root problem is that NOW sees the road to women's equality as through the Democratic Party. They do not want to build an independent women's movement. They think that liberal politicians will give women the ERA, guarantee abortions rights, etc.

Despite the fact that they are continually fucked over by the politicians, NOW is as firmly tied to this strategy as ever. In fact, more so. Last year, NOW moved its national headquarters to Washington, D.C. (from NYC) to be closer to Congress.

NOW is also moving towards a tighter, more "respectable" organization in order to have more clout within the two-party system. There is more control over the activities of local chapters. There is a lot of red-baiting against the SWP. The feeling is that to be disloyal to the leadership is to be disloyal to NOW.

As a part of this legislative strategy, NOW is moving into a closer relationship with the trade union bureaucracy. Their political strategy is the same.

Despite all the problems with NOW, it is still in the leadership of the women's movement today. Decisions made at the October Conference will determine what happens around the ERA struggle this year. We want to be a part of determining what this strategy will be.

Also, the rank and file of NOW was extremely turned on by the success of the July 9 march. It is unlikely that they will be content to sit in their meetings and fill out preprinted postcards for another year while the ERA goes down in defeat.

The NOW Conference is being planned as an issues conference. There will be workshops on the ERA, reproductive rights, labor, media, religion, legal defense, employment, plus a few others.

NOW members can speak and vote in the workshops. Resolutions coming from the workshops are in order to be discussed by the Conference and voted on. We expect that one of the key discussions will be around a strategy for the ERA. Another issue will be sterilization guidelines. NOW has a position against guidelines because they infringe upon a woman's right to be sterilized, ignoring the abuse that many minority women suffer. CARASA plans a fight on this issue.

Our role at the Conference will be mainly to learn more about NOW. We want to meet people. But we will also participate in the discussions around the ERA, abortion, sterilization, and see what labor issues they take up.

If you are going to the NOW Conference, you have probably already been approached by a member of the women's commission. Anyone else who would like to go should call Elissa.

You must be a member of NOW to speak and vote in the workshops. Join locally before the Conference. Price \$6.00 unemployed, \$25.00 employed. Apparently, you can register for the Conference at the event itself, which costs \$35.00—though you can negotiate that with them if you can't pay. The I.S. will arrange housing.

## CONVENTION DOCUMENT

The Women's Commission is preparing a document for the convention. It will be ready at the end of September. We will hold discussions with all of the women's caucuses before the convention. Such a discussion has already taken place in Gary.

## WOMEN'S COMMISSION

Elissa and Margaret will be co-organizers of the Women's Commission. We are dropping the title "commissioner."

## LABOR MOVEMENT MEETS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

On July 19, UAW President Doug Fraser resigned from the Labor-Management group, a 13-level non-governmental committee of corporate executives and ranking labor leaders originated by President Ford. In resigning, Fraser called for UAW members and millions of others in organized labor to reforge their links with those people and organizations who fought for social change during the last 40 years.

Fraser's statement has received broad circulation throughout the labor movement. The statement called for the recreation of these links and the building of a new liberal coalition. He called for joint action in the months ahead by labor's new and old allies: the unemployed, the poor, minorities, farmers, AND WOMEN.

During the past few months the process has begun. It is most developed in the women's movement and the campaign to ratify the ERA.

Earlier this year, the UAW, fearful of the future of the Labor Law Reform Bill, threw its support to NOW and the ERA movement in return for support for the labor bill.

In turn, Odessa Komer (UAW Vice President) mobilized 1000 UAW members to attend the July 9 ERA march. Cooperation between top NOW leaders and the UAW continues. The UAW endorsed NOW's boycott of convention centers in unratified states, and Ellie Smoel, NOW President, spent time with UAW leaders at the UAW's Black Lake Center this summer.

In the past the UAW supported the women's movement through CLUW. CLUW had little independent life from that of the international unions. CLUW has an insignificant membership compared to that of NOW.

The UAW understands clearly two aspects of NOW: NOW's ability to lead and mobilize thousands of women AND a political strategy that the UAW identifies with and shares.

Fraser and other UAW leaders wish to forge the social movements of the 70's together. The UAW Washington staff drafted a conference call which has two main principles: 1) an agreement not to agree on program since each group has its clear priority and 2) campaign to make Congress more open to liberal change. That is, restricting filibustering and making Congress operate more on a majority system than the present two-thirds.

At this point it is unclear what will emerge from this liberal coalition. There is little idea of what this grouping will do or what will hold it together other than that outlined above. Nonetheless this development and the closing of ranks of the UAW and NOW are significant and bear watching.

This will mean a general broadening of the present politics of NOW and the move to ratify the ERA. As part of a general social coalition the women's movement will go beyond its limited analysis to see the attack on women as part of an entire capitalist offensive. On the other hand it will tie NOW more and more to a legislative strategy.

## NAM CONVENTION

The I.S. was invited to attend the NAM Convention held in mid-July. Margaret went mainly to learn about NAM's women's work and meet NAM women and develop a relationship with them, with the possibility of doing joint work in the future.

Since NAM makes such a big point of being a "socialist-feminist" organization we went expecting to see work somewhat in advance of ours. The reality is that NAM has had a very different orientation in their women's work (the women's movement of the 70's) and is more involved in issues like reproductive rights, clerical organization. Our work in terms of working with women in steel, auto, Teamster wives, and the Red Tide is far more advanced in building a women's movement which includes working class women. We went expecting to be impressed with their work, but ended up impressing them greatly.

A major problem of NAM's socialist-feminist politics is that it is unclear to the members what socialist-feminism is. The discussions by many rank and file members of the organization ended up being quite reactionary—aggressiveness is masculine, theory is masculine, etc. The leaders (both male and female) are aware of this problem, but because of the loose nature of the organization are afraid to confront it for fear of being considered "male" domineering, undemocratic, etc. This particular problem is a reflection of the more middle class nature of the organization and its work.

The practice of the organization is better. Their women's work

is focused on reproductive rights (they believe that the abortion demand alone is not sufficient because many Black and other third world women are concerned about genocide and forced sterilization and so are organizing this work around a 13-point Bill of Reproductive Rights.) They are attempting to form a national coalition around their Bill of Rights. Our attitude presently is that we will continue to have women in New York be active in CARASA, that we would be willing to go to activities organized by the national coalition, but that we do not have resources to be involved in it any more than that.

The second area of work they are involved in is clerical organizing. They were involved in several organizing attempts last year, but the attempts were not successful. They plan to continue with this orientation. They are involved in a new national organization "Women Working" which is attempting to link up organizations such as "9 to 5", WE, WOE, etc. We plan to be in contact with this group so we know of organizing attempts in areas where we have branches to try to get industrial women we work with to support these drives by participating on the lines, giving financial aid, etc.

The third area of work NAM is involved in is Gay/Lebian work. They have a Lebian chapter in the Chicago area (Blazing Star) which is a militant activist group.

Their last area of work will be around violence against women. It was not clear what the specifics of that campaign would be.

It was clear that there is not too much overlap in our work around issues of working women. But we did agree to try to work together wherever possible and support each others women's work. In practice at this point, this will mean continuing to work together on local issues and maintaining organizational contact.

## BRANCH REPORTS

**DETROIT**—We participated in a city-wide celebration of Women's Equality Day held here on August 26. The event is sponsored annually by the Human Rights Department of the City of Detroit, but this is first year that the IS has been part of it.

Our objective in going into this event was to get the day to take up the issue of the ERA, preferably with a march. This was accomplished; the committee held a rally for the ERA. Although the rally was only moderately successful, it was a step forward for Detroit. NOW had previously decided to hold no more rallies on the ERA, so this was a real step forward.

Women's Equality Day itself was successful. Elissa was chairperson of the program committee, which set up a panel that addressed issues of concern to women: ERA, abortion, affirmative action, domestic violence, and alimony. Enid moderated the panel, and gave it a great deal of political content.

Local 51 sent its Women's Committee to the event (10 women), and they were very impressed. In addition, working on the event put us in touch with influential figures in Detroit and in the UAW and enhanced our relationship with them.

The Human Rights Department is now talking about establishing a real women's committee open to all women in the city. This committee may be a vehicle for us to do on-going work in the city, as well as link our trade union work to the women's movement.

**PITTSBURGH**—Women Steelworkers in USW District 15 are taking the first steps to set up a District-wide Women's Caucus or Committee. They are setting up a second planning meeting following the USW Convention. They plan to have a woman steelworker, president of a small production local and a convention delegate, speak, as well as another woman steelworker who is filing a grievance on pregnancy discrimination.

This meeting is to see what kind of interest exists for setting up a women's committee.

PCHR is working to set up a Gay Community Center which they hope will open by December 1. The Center will house a variety of political gay groups. PCHR feels this is essential for the development of the gay community. Many gay organizations have dissolved because of lack of organization; the Community Center would help overcome this problem.

The groups, of course, would work together on some issues, but most have pretty distinctive political approaches, so the work would not overlap. A group called Rage, for example, concentrates on legislation while PCHR tries to build

demonstrations and gives no support to political candidates.

In addition, members of PCHR are going to Bloomsburg, PA on September 24 to demonstrate against Anita Bryant at the County Fair. April will be speaking. The demonstration is about 5 hours from Pittsburgh, and 25 people are committed to going so far. A coalition of groups from Pittsburgh, Scranton, Philadelphia and Harrisburg will participate in the demonstration.

**BAY AREA**—The branch was recently involved in a workers' conference about the Briggs Initiative which was sponsored by a coalition. Three hundred people attended. The IS conducted a workshop on the right wing and the gay movement.

There are a large number of small strikes going on in the area, all of which will probably be smashed. Unfortunately, the branch does not have the personnel to get involved in them, though we have a contact in Union WAGE.

**NEW YORK/NEW JERSEY**—We have an exciting opportunity to be in an organizing drive in the New York department stores. The drive will begin before Christmas, and probably go on for a couple of years. Comrades from New Jersey and New York will be participating.

The Retail Wholesale Department Stores Union (RWDSU) is conducting the drive. RWDSU has had Macy's and Gimbel's organized for a long time. Now they are moving to get the rest of the stores organized. Right now the union is still formulating their strategy so we don't have many details.

CARASA held a meeting in Washington on the day of the ERA march. The purpose of the meeting was to feel out the forces active in abortion work and explore the possibilities of calling a national action around abortion. The meeting was unsuccessful. First, it came at the end of a long, exhausting hot day. Everyone was wiped out. Second, there were few people there—perhaps 15-20 in total, including the IS, NAM, a woman from a religious coalition for abortion rights, and a scattering of people from women's clinics and women's groups. CARASA was the most organizationally strong group there, but they did not project themselves as a dynamic group that could be a possible leadership for a national movement around abortion.

CARASA's evaluation of the meeting was that the forces just don't exist to carry out national actions. The only positive thing that came out of the meeting was that CARASA offered to open its excellent magazine to news from around the country.

In New York, CARASA recently held a demonstration against Congressman John Murtha, a leading supporter of the Hyde Amendment. The march attracted 150 people, but was considered to be only moderately successful.

CARASA is beginning discussions on strategy, and the fraction is working on proposals.

**LOS ANGELES**—The branch is active in the fight against the Briggs Initiative. As reported in the last newsletter, the IS is part of the Action Coalition Against Briggs. The group has three points of unity: 1 Gays are the backbone of the group, 2 The attack on gays is part of a broader offensive against minorities and women, and 3 The need to build an ongoing organization that can build links with other groups—Blacks, Latinos, etc. As a part of this strategy of developing links with other political struggles, the Action Coalition participated in a mobilization against police terror sponsored by CAPA.

The Briggs Initiative will be on the ballot in November. Public opinion polls show that 70% of all Californians are in favor of it.

Passage is expected, and a witch-hunt will probably follow, wiping gay teachers and those who support gay rights out of the schools.

The branch is also involved in a new Reproductive Rights Organizing Committee which was begun by LA Women's clinics. Medicaid funds for abortion were recently cutoff in California, a result of Proposition 13 cutbacks, but because of a court injunction the legislation has not gone into effect.

**GARY**—There are ten women elected as delegates to the United Steel Workers Convention from the Gary area. The Convention is being held the week of September 18. Another ten women from the area are going as observers. The women have organized themselves to lobby for resolutions that they put forward at the District conference, including affirmative action, Bakke, more women in apprenticeship programs, support for the ERA. The women will have hospitality room at the Convention and are holding a press conference to let people know that women are at the Convention, and what the issues are.

The District 31 Women's Caucus is at a cross-roads in its development. There is not a single issue or activity that is binding the group together as there was in the past over issues like the wash houses or discrimination against pregnant women. The caucus is searching for this kind of an issue, and at the same time discussing what kind of activities they will support that are not directly related to women. For example, support of democratic candidates, or the Right to Ratify campaign.

Despite this problem, the group continues with a solid core of 20 activists. Meetings consistently attract 30-40 women, and the Caucus has a very wide periphery because of its newspaper.

**CLEVELAND**—The Women's Caucus in Cleveland has not met formally in a while. This is largely due to the fact that several women have gotten jobs with odd shifts and it is difficult to find a time when most of the women can get together. But in spite of this difficulty there has been some activity around women's issues. Eleven members from Cleveland went to the ERA rally in Washington. This included 4 men.

Last weekend several women from the Branch went to a rally/march in Akron. The rally was called by a coalition of pro-abortion groups to protest the new Akron Abortion Ordinance passed recently by the Akron City Council. The ordinance forces physicians to tell women they are killing a life when they have an abortion, forces 15 year old women to have parental consent for an abortion, makes 18 year old women tell their parents of an abortion, and requires a 24 hour waiting period between the time of requesting an abortion and it being carried out. The ordinance is being challenged in the courts. The rally was to show sentiment to the court. One thousand people from all over the state came to participate. The main organizing groups were NARAL, NOW, Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights. It was primarily white and middle class. The speakers were fairly militant. The theme was we can't count on the courts, the legislature, etc. We can only count on ourselves.

On September 30 there will be a Right to Life march in Cleveland, followed the next weekend by a series of Right to Life workshops. We are trying to get a counter march organized. Other groups are not interested in this project. We have come into contact with a group of women who put out a paper called "What She Wants." Carolyn wrote an article about the march in Washington and will continue to work with them. There are a few other women in our developing periphery. The caucus is planning on holding a women's film series in the winter.