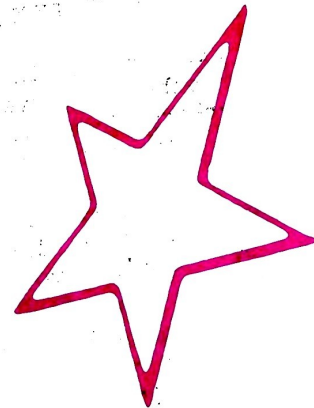


# CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS

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## WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES

### 1. A New Women's Movement

A new women's movement is emerging in America today. After half a dozen years of inactivity, women are beginning to organize in defense of the gains that were won through the movement of the 60's.

During the late 60's and early 70's, the ruling class was able to grant concessions to women. Those days are over. Now the economic crisis is forcing the capitalists to take away many of these gains. Everywhere that women look, we are under attack. Abortion, ERA, affirmative action. As the capitalist crisis intensifies, women's jobs will be threatened, and in some industries, wiped out.

The right-wing is joining forces with the ruling class to throw into question the role of women in our society. Are women to be equals at home and at work, or are they to be forced into dependent roles at home? The right has focused on two issues: ERA and abortion. They exploit genuine fears that women have over their changing roles to build a conservative movement.

A new women's movement is beginning as women fight the attacks. 100,000 women marched in Washington on July 9 for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Membership in the National Organization for Women has shot up to 100,000. 600 women demonstrated against the Akron abortion ordinances. Groups like the Coalition for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA) formed. Small demonstrations erupted around the country when the Hyde Amendment was passed. 20,000 marched against Bakke. Lesbian women have been active in the protests of the attacks on gay rights.

At the same time, women in the unions are beginning to move. Rank and file women in the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the United Steel Workers (USW) are organizing. Similar developments are taking place in almost every major union. Attempts are being made to coordinate and support clerical workers' struggles to organize.

The women's liberation movement of the 70's has the real potential to reach working class women. They are open to the ideas of women's liberation as never before. The possibility of bringing working class women into the women's movement is tremendously exciting. Only a working class women's movement will have the social power to make a real fight for women's liberation.

The crisis in capitalism with its attack on the gains of the 60's movement is giving working class women the incentive to go into struggle. The recession that is coming will wreak havoc on the gains that women have made in industry. Low seniority women in heavy industry will be laid off, as will many women in the traditional sector.

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Some more marginal factories will close for good. The tax revolt will put a squeeze on public employees. Everyone will feel it as inflation climbs higher. Unorganized workers will slip further and further behind. And throughout will come a barrage of propaganda--women shouldn't be taking jobs away from men (who are under attack too).

The new attitude of the trade union bureaucracy is helping to legitimize the idea of women fighting for their rights. The coalition between the labor movement and the women's movement has created tremendous openings. The liberal wing of the labor movement is reaching out to the (now largely middle class) women's movement as one of its most important allies in forging a new "liberal coalition." The union leaders are beginning to take ERA ratification seriously, seeing in it their one chance for a victory, if largely symbolic, over the right-wing. The bureaucrats' interest in women's issues has already gone beyond rhetoric. Sections of the bureaucracy are encouraging women's participation in new women's councils and committees within some of the major unions. The bureaucracy has mobilized for ERA demonstrations, first the Meatcutters in Virginia and then larger numbers of unions for July 9 and other demonstrations.

At the same time, the alliance between the labor leadership and the women's movement is forcing changes in the middle class women's movement. As their part of the bargain, NOW is supporting legislation like labor law reform, minimum wage, against right to work laws, Humphrey-Hawkins, etc. But more important, the movement is beginning to discuss the needs of working women. This was obvious at the recent NOW convention as the leadership of NOW spoke over and over about the need to unite with the labor movement, organizing the unorganized, the wage differential, and so on. The Conference passed a resolution committing NOW to hold a conference on women in the unions, to establish local labor task forces, and to get involved in the organizing drives of working women.

The closer the alliance between the labor movement and the women's movement, the better we like it. It will make the beginning stages of a new women's movement easier to build. Union members struggling as women, and as women workers, becomes legitimate--even encouraged. At the same time, we know that since this alliance is based on a strategy of winning concessions from the Democratic Party, there are limitations which will reach crisis proportions as the struggle develops.

## 2. Issues

Until the ERA is ratified, it will be the focal issue of the women's movement. It is the issue that the middle class leadership is willing to fight around, it is the cement in the alliance between the labor movement and the women's movement, and it is the issue that both are willing to mobilize women for. ERA has the ability to unite women who are fighting on many different fronts. Whether they are fighting for jobs, against sexual harassment or discrimination, for reproductive rights, or any of a dozen other issues, women can come together on the ERA. It symbolizes the other attacks that women face. Especially through mass demonstrations, the fight for the ERA can give a sense of a broad, national movement of increasing momentum.

At the same time, women have suffered devastating attacks on the right to abortion. Most recently, an amendment was attached to the Pregnancy Disability Bill that permits employers to exclude abortion from their insurance coverage. More than any other issue, the ruling class and the right-wing are united against abortion. One of the reasons why the attack has been successful is that women do not agree on the question of abortion; even some feminists do not support the right to abortion. The radical women's movement is organizing around this issue, but it does not seem, at

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this point, to be able to bring working class women into the movement. This does not mean that we don't want to educate about the importance of abortion, to try to raise the issue with the women we work with and bring them to demonstrations, but abortion does not seem to have the potential to unite the women's movement, including working class women, the way the ERA does.

For working women, the economic crisis will hit hard. The vast majority of working women are still in the traditional jobs; 84% are unorganized. These women will continue to fall further and further behind in terms of wages, jobs security, benefits, and working conditions. An economic crisis will wipe out many jobs. Although we don't expect organizing the unorganized or strike support work to be an issue of the women's movement immediately, we believe that this work can play an important role today. It can bring working women into the women's movement. It can bring women militants in the key unions into contact with their sisters in struggle, helping to develop them as leaders and to build solidarity and sisterhood. We expect the issue of unionization to be of increasing importance in the future. The labor movement faces a crisis that can only be resolved by bringing workers in the unorganized sector into unions. Today the labor movement is not equal to the task. As the full impact of the crisis hits, the unions may be forced to deal seriously with this question.

#### Building An Independent Women's Movement

This is an extremely significant time for the future of women's rights. On the one hand, the attack on women is intensified. At the same time, resistance is building. And for the first time, working women are part of the resistance. Their heightened feminist consciousness, their willingness to fight for their rights, and the alliance of the labor bureaucracy and the women's movement open up possibilities for the growth of a militant working women's movement in the future.

In the long run, neither the current middle class leadership, or those at the top of the unions who are now championing women's rights, will be willing to lead the kind of struggle that will be needed. Today, we have the opportunity to bring trade union women into the women's movement. We must begin to train the best women that we meet to be the leadership of a future independent working class women's movement. Eventually, if the women's movement is to deal with the critical issues of women's liberation--jobs for all, equal pay, government funded child care, and so on--it will have to break with the labor bureaucracy and the Democratic Party because these issues challenge capitalism.

We have two jobs today. One is to force the women's movement to reach out to working class women and bring them into the movement. The other is to begin to lay the basis for building a movement that is independent of the trade union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. The leadership of that movement will come out of today's struggles. We must help to politically train these future leaders of the working women's liberation movement.

#### Perspectives

Until now, our women's liberation work has been limited by objective circumstances. Today there are endless opportunities for us as the women's movement develops. But we are limited by our own resources. We must prioritize the work we will do in order to accomplish our objective of building a working class women's movement.

Our most important work will continue to be building around women's issues in the unions. This is most developed in USW District 31 and UAW Region 1, but it is

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also beginning in USW District 15, our CWA work in Cleveland, and elsewhere. We welcome the initiative of the bureaucracy in bringing women together in women's councils and caucuses. We will participate in these groups and help them to grow. At the same time, we know that the bureaucracy will try to limit the scope and activity of these groups. They will want the groups to organize activities which support their legislative strategy.

The trade union leadership will be far less likely to speak to the issues which concern women in the plants--job security, harassment, sexual discrimination, questions of survival. Many of the problems that rank and file women face can only be solved at the collective bargaining table. But the labor bureaucrats are not willing to take on the employers. As the movement develops, rank and file women will have to challenge the bureaucracy--if you're for women's rights, show us in the contract. We must fight at all times to make these groups real, activist groups, not merely support groups for the strategies of the bureaucrats.

Several branches have excellent work going on around Reproductive Rights. We want these women to continue building this work and to push the women active around this issue to reach working class and minority women. In Los Angeles and Pittsburgh we have done successful work for gay rights. In Los Angeles this is leading to possibilities of new work in linking gay feminist issues. There could be real opportunities for us to recruit in this area. In some areas, radical groups that orient to working women exist, like Union WAGE in the Bay Area. We should work with these groups.

We want to continue all the work we are now doing. But we also propose two additional priorities for women's work in the I.S. The first is to build the movement to ratify the ERA. We would not choose the ERA as the key issue for the women's movement, but we expect it to be the issue that generates the most activity over the next year. The middle class women's movement understands the need for quick victory on the ERA. The movement to ratify the ERA will give us the opportunity to bring working class women into the movement and get them involved in an activity which will be victorious, giving them the confidence to go on to other issues. We will attempt to reach out to women in unions even where we are not located through the NOW labor task forces and through the women's committees we work in.

The second proposed priority is to support the struggles of working women. This will include strike support work and support for organizing drives. The fact that today's women's movement has the real potential to attract working class women makes this work relevant to our perspectives for the first time. It will help us to give sections of the women's movement a working class character. It will give us the opportunity to link up women activists that we work with in our unions to their sisters in struggle, thus developing the leadership of the women's movement and giving a sense of solidarity between women. We must take advantage of our position within the major industrial unions to build a consciousness that working women must unite to help each other. We can begin to break down the isolation that women in small shops face, that so often leads to defeat.

We will also begin to develop a network of militant working women. We will begin to speak to women in the traditional sector, to understand their needs, to raise the issues of women's liberation with them.

We will have to be extremely careful in choosing our targets. Initially, it will be easier for us to do strike support work because of the internal nature of organizing drives today. However, we should be on the lookout for opportunities, whether becoming organizers (like in the department store drive in NYC), or working in clerical

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organizations like Women Employed, Women Office Workers, etc, raising the issue of the need to organize the unorganized in our unions, or working around issues like JP Stevens.

As often as possible, we should do this work through our unions and rank and file groups. We should suggest strike support work as possible activities in the District 31 Women's Caucus, in the UAW Region 1 Women's Council, in TDU, etc. We will be able to use the NOW Labor Task Forces for this purpose too.

We should push the bureaucracy to fight in organizing drives or contract disputes like Essex. We hope to force them to give real support, but if we are not successful we will be able to show rank and file women concretely the failure of their leaderships to support other women in the union.

Implementing these priorities will require a greater commitment of our resources than ever before. The times demand it. These priorities reflect the role we want to play in the women's movement--to build the movement and bring working class women into it.

### Working in NOW

For the women who came to July 9, there was a tremendous leap in consciousness. The power in numbers, the strength in unity was apparent to everyone there. That demonstration was called by the National Organization for Women (NOW). It is the largest, most viable women's organization in the country today. When women begin to get active in the struggle, they look to NOW.

For ten years, we ignored NOW. NOW was irrelevant to the struggles of working women. That is beginning to change. NOW is an organization in transition. Previously, NOW spoke only to the needs of white, middle class women. Now it is beginning to understand the social power of the trade unions and--somewhat more slowly--the need to bring women into the struggle for women's liberation.

So far, this has been manifested by an "alliance" between the trade union bureaucracy and the middle class women's movement. However, the leadership of NOW is initiating a discussion about the importance of organizing the unorganized, of building support for the ERA around "economic" issues, of winning equal pay through unionization and collective bargaining.

For the first time, there are openings to use NOW to reach out to working women and bring them into the women's movement. NOW is attempting to implement its labor strategy by activating labor task forces at the local level. These task forces will be able to go out and organize conferences of working women, to reach out to union women on the ERA, to do strike support work, to support organizing drives, to work on the JP Stevens boycott, the Karen Silkwood case, etc.

Unlike the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), NOW is independent of the bureaucracy. CLUW's hands are tied by its relationship to the bureaucracy. Although NOW is not going to alienate the bureaucracy over, say, the Essex strike, their independence is a critical point in favor of rank and file activists. In addition, only union members can work in CLUW. This is not true of NOW's labor task forces.

We want to go into NOW in a limited way. We want to initiate and work with these local labor task forces as a way of reaching working class women with the issues

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of women's liberation. The labor task forces should be seen as another tactic in implementing the perspectives proposed here.

### Towards Liberation

We are tremendously excited as we see the women's movement developing. For the first time, women have the opportunity to make the movement relevant to working class women. The fact that working class women are open to feminist ideas gives women the chance to build a movement that can fight for liberation of all women.