

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014

March 11, 1972

TO ALL ORGANIZERS, WOMEN'S LIBERATION DIRECTORS, AND NC MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

Attached is a report by Carol Lipman on women's liberation work. It was approved by the Political Committee at its meeting of February 25, 1972.

Comradely,

Barry Sheppard

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The WONAAC conference held in Boston February 11-13 launched the campaign for Abortion Week, May 1-6, which is projected by WONAAC as the major focus for their spring's activities. The conference was more successful, larger and spirited than expected. There was little or no redbaiting at the conference, due in part to the offensive the SWP and the YSA have taken to counter redbaiting.

Well over a thousand women came to the conference with the aim of finding out how to win the repeal of all abortion laws and looked to WONAAC for answers. The conference was a further affirmation that the question of abortion law repeal is one around which an action perspective for the feminist movement is developing, more so than any other issue raised in the feminist movement at the present time.

The ability of Boston WONAAC to draw close to ~~500~~ women from ~~the New England~~ area to the conference, primarily from the campus, indicates the potential that exists to win students to active support of WONAAC.

The conference showed that WONAAC has continued to develop on a national scale, has earned a place in the women's movement and is considered part of it, as the abortion coalition and has the ability to attract large numbers of activists to it.

We should consider carefully both the opportunities and limitations of the abortion campaign at the present time.

WONAAC has been unable to obtain the necessary support from the reformist circles (particularly NOW, which claims 20,000 members, and women active in the National Women's Political Caucus) to give it full authority within the women's movement. NOW's unwillingness to support the campaign and the conscious undercutting of WONAAC by a large section of its leadership (i.e. NOW called an East Coast conference on the same date as the national conference of WONAAC), including some of the most vicious redbaiting in the women's movement so far (Komisar's report to the NOW Board), does undermine the abortion campaign and hampers its ability to reach out.

But the potential to reach out is there. For example, McCall's magazine carried a five-inch box announcing WONAAC and its goals two months ago. As a result, hundreds of women across the country have written into the WONAAC national office asking for help in their areas to organize opposition to the abortion laws in their state. This is just a small indication of what might be possible if there were a fully authoritative abortion coalition of the character of WONAAC in this country. WONAAC was also instrumental in getting Bella Abzug's agreement to introduce the Abortion Rights Act in Congress. It is expected Abzug will do this soon.

The national and local leadership, as well as the rank and file of NOW, should continue to be actively confronted to support and build the abortion campaign.

One of the reasons that WONAAC has been unable to make substantial breakthroughs in the NOW milieu is the impact of the elections on NOW. There is a dual aspect of the elections and their relation to the feminist movement. Interest in women's liberation has increased over the past year. The growth of the National Women's Political Caucus and Shirley Chisholm's bid for the Democratic presidential candidacy has heightened interest on the part of women in politics in general. Large numbers of the women drawn into the circles of the Political Caucus are not hardened reformists as its

leadership is, and debates in the Political Caucus reflect this. Because of this interest in politics, our socialist election campaign will have a wider hearing.

On the other hand, the activity in support of the Democratic and Republican parties has hampered the ability of the mass-action wing of the feminist movement to win broad active support for the abortion campaign.

What does this mean concretely for the SWP? The abortion campaign remains the major arena of our activity in the feminist movement. WONAAC is the only national organization providing an opportunity for women to participate in action around one or another of the goals of the feminist movement. And it provides women, who may want to support candidates in the elections (which will include a growing number of women for Jenness and Pulley) an opportunity to also carry out actions around feminist issues. The conference demonstrated the potential to hold successful actions May 1-5.

Given these general considerations, the branches will be discussing what forces we will be able to allocate to help this important campaign, discussing this in relation to all the areas of work our movement is presently involved in.

Since WONAAC is projecting a modest campaign for the spring, it would logically follow that the size of its apparatuses building the actions will reflect its needs. At this time, two months before Abortion Week, some areas will not have an office open and staffed on a full-time basis; others which have the resources and needs to do so will. This will vary from area to area.

As long as adequate forces are allocated to carry out what is projected, and what is projected is in line with what is possible in each area, then the activities and actions will be successful.

Serious attention should be given to evaluating the current stage of the abortion campaign and allocating the corresponding forces to this work. If done correctly we will help WONAAC continue to make gains, help strengthen the mass-action wing of the feminist movement, and continue to make gains for the SWP and the YSA.

The Elections

As mentioned earlier in this report, the elections have provided a renewed interest in politics and political action on the part of large numbers of women. The Political Caucus and those attracted to it are not a homogeneous unit. There are large numbers of women who consider themselves radical and are challenging the leadership of the WPC for its compromising character. We want to take part in the political debate that is taking place in the women's movement and present our campaign as the viable alternative to the status quo. We want to attend open meetings of the WPC, to discuss our ideas, election campaign and candidates.

The Democratic Party convention, and the maneuvers of the WPC and NOW leadership in the name of "practical politics" to obtain a few positions of "power" for themselves, are going to turn many women activists away from support to the Democratic Party and towards our election campaign, especially if our campaign is visible. It would be useful for the women's fractions to discuss how our election campaign can participate in this discussion and reach the large

numbers of women interested in politics, and make this a part of its work in collaboration with the campaign committees.

Linda Jenness' appearances before women's meetings and groups have shown that there is potential to reach out to these women. The campaign gives us an opportunity not only to raise the abortion issue, but also many other questions that women are concerned with, as well as our entire program for changing society.

In the last report, it was reiterated that it is important to encourage a comrade or two where possible to join NOW, attend meetings, raise the abortion campaign and generally participate where there are openings in NOW. NOW chapters vary from area to area and there may be more openings in some places than in others. But this perspective should continue and reports on this work and other areas of women's liberation work should be sent into the national office. If there are questions about our women's liberation work, I can be reached by phone or mail at the SWP national office.

There is a meeting of the National Coordinating Committee of WONAAC in Chicago beginning at 12:00 noon, Saturday, March 18, in the Coral Room (first floor) of the Lawson YMCA, 30 W. Chicago Ave. There will be a fraction meeting for all comrades attending the meeting at the SWP headquarters at 180 N. Wacker Dr., Rm. 310 at 10:00 a.m. Saturday. Coalitions in most areas, except where distances prevent it, should be encouraged to send one person. Areas in the Midwest should try to send a few more.