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June 14, 1972

TO ALL BRANCH ORGANIZERS AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION DIRECTORS

Dear Comrades,

WONAAC has scheduled a national conference Saturday and Sunday, July 15 and 16, in New York City at Hunter College. The conference is taking place at an important juncture for WONAAC and the abortion struggle. Sharp political differences have emerged within the national office of WONAAC and in some coalitions around the country, concerning how to build the most effective campaign to repeal all anti-abortion laws. It can be expected that these political disagreements will play an important part in the WONAAC conference, which will have to resolve them. Therefore, the building and organizing for the conference takes on major importance.

The differences were quite apparent at the National Coordinating Committee meeting of WONAAC, held in New York City, June 4, which was covered thoroughly in the June 16 issue of The Militant. Some of the questions formally or informally raised at that meeting were: (1) WONAAC has placed too much emphasis on organizing a national campaign and should pay more attention to local grass-roots organizing; (2) WONAAC didn't pay enough attention to lobbying and legislative work during the New York crisis; (3) small demonstrations like November 20 and May 6 hurt the abortion struggle; (4) WONAAC has stirred up a "hornets-nest of anti-abortion organizing," while its tactics for fighting for abortion law repeal have been completely ineffective; (5) WONAAC is "run and controlled" by the SWP and the YSA, which are responsible for all the problems that WONAAC has faced in organizing around the abortion issue; (6) WONAAC's "association" with the SWP and YSA have prevented it from being a broad unifying force in the women's movement.

All these arguments either implicitly or explicitly challenge the basic foundation upon which WONAAC was organized: (1) only through mass independent struggle on the part of women can abortion law repeal be won; (2) a nationally-coordinated campaign is needed; (3) a rejection of the red-baiting and exclusionary politics, used by the women who walked out of the founding conference of WONAAC.

Many of these criticisms, including the red-baiting, stem from great frustration with the lack of a unified mass response by the women's movement to the New York abortion crisis -- and in a longer term sense frustration with the fact that WONAAC isn't yet what they would like it to be -- big, broad and all-encompassing.

These criticisms also reflect a capitulation to the consistent political attacks on WONAAC and the SWP that have been proliferating in the women's press and by NOW since WONAAC was founded. However, this is the first time since the founding conference in July 1971 that these attacks are reflected on a major scale within WONAAC itself.

Why have they surfaced at this time? The massive, liberal, pro-Democratic Party campaign on the part of the Women's Political Caucus and NOW as a substitute for independent struggle has had a deep impact on the willingness of women's liberation activists to participate in independent, mass action-oriented activities. The political campaigning has continued to escalate over the past few months as the Democratic Party convention nears and as the McGovern campaign gains steam.

The elections have had a big impact on WONAAC's mass struggle campaign, but its impact was never clearer than when the crisis hit New York state: when President Nixon intervened on the part of the Catholic Church hierarchy and anti-abortion forces, NOW gave little but lip service to organizing the May 6 WONAAC-called demonstration in New York.

The May 6 abortion action in New York, and those around the country, took on more and more importance as the abortion question was clearly becoming a national political issue this spring. But the essential abstention by NOW limited the size of the active response to a rather small vanguard of 2,000 women in New York and a few thousand around the country.

Although Rockefeller vetoed the reactionary anti-abortion bill passed by the New York state legislature, the women's movement still suffered a setback. There was no massive response by the movement in New York -- a state where NOW alone has 5,000 members -- in the face of the right wing's attack. The Catholic Church and other anti-abortion forces, however, were able to turn out 10,000 people at a demonstration.

Despite the modest size of the May 6 demonstrations, they were at the same time very significant actions. Had there been no organization with a mass-action perspective like WONAAC's, there would have been no visible protests by women in answer to the right wing's campaign. Also, the May 6 actions nationally were the only visible demonstrations the women's liberation movement has held in quite a while. This keeps alive the mass struggle perspective which can open up again after the elections are over in the fall.

The questions raised in the dispute within WONAAC are important ones -- questions the entire women's liberation movement should be interested in. Having a clear political debate and a sober and realistic evaluation of the important role that WONAAC has played in the past year, will be a valuable contribution to the entire development of the women's liberation movement.

Because the conference is scheduled for New York, we can expect that women from virtually every political tendency and every perspective within the feminist movement will be there in attendance. Many traditional opponents of WONAAC and the SWP will show up, but at the same time, this conference will also be attractive to the many women who want to engage in effective action to repeal anti-abortion laws.

Therefore it is very important that we urge those WONAAC affiliates and women's liberation groups we are active in to go on a campaign basis to build the conference and get as many women as possible to attend. The WONAAC Newsletter will be carrying out a discussion on the political issues involved before the conference and will be a valuable tool in carrying out the necessary discussions on these questions in local areas. The Militant will also be carrying a series of articles on the discussion and all comrades should read them.

Further information will be sent to the branches on information concerning fraction meetings and organization.

On another matter, women's liberation activities may be taking place on or about August 26. Discussions are being held in some cities already. We should investigate what possibilities there are for united activities of the women's liberation movement for either demonstrations, public meetings, or other activities. The actions on or around August 26 will likely include many of the demands and issues raised by the women's liberation movement. WONAAC should be able to participate in whatever activities are scheduled and whatever formations appear to build August 26, because no matter what broad issues are raised, abortion will be an important question, particularly in those states where major crises are developing. Through the SWP and YSA and other women's liberation groups, August 26 can be built on a broader level. Local areas should find out what is already being scheduled by NOW and other groups and what discussions are taking place, so we can participate.

Comradely,



Carol Lipman  
National Women's Liberation  
Director