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Report on the Party's Involvement in the Women's Liberation Struggle

by Cindy Jaquith

[The following is the report presented at the workshop on the Women's Liberation Movement Today at the Socialist Workers Party convention, August 1976. Cindy Jaquith is the SWP women's liberation work director.]

* * *

A year ago, at the 1975 Socialist Workers Party convention, we decided that we should increase our participation in the women's liberation struggles that were beginning to intensify. As we began to get more involved in the movement to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, in the National Organization for Women (NOW), in campus feminist activities, and in union women's groups, we noticed something right away—between 1973 and 1975 the women's liberation movement had changed. We were engaged in new debates around new issues; we were working with new women's organizations; and we were meeting brand new feminists.

Most significant of all, we began to see that new social forces—new class forces—were on the horizon of this movement, just beginning to get involved.

We increased our activity in the feminist movement at the same time the party was carrying out its turn to the working class—and we noted that carrying out women's liberation work is an integral part of putting that turn into practice.

If there was any doubt about that in anyone's minds, marching in the May 16 ERA demonstration in Springfield, Illinois, put those doubts to rest.

What did May 16 look like? There were hundreds, if not thousands, of women who belong to NOW. There were thousands of students; scores of ERA activists from groups such as Utah for the ERA and Housewives for the ERA; Black women; lesbians; socialists; Democrats; Republicans; and even a group calling itself Chicago Irish Feminists for the ERA.

But I think for every one of us who marched, the most inspiring contingents were the union contingents. As I watched the march go by, I couldn't help asking myself what Phyllis Schlafly must be thinking several hundred feet up in the air in her STOP ERA airplane. (This was the plane that trailed the "libbers go home" streamer.)

Now, Schlafly has made it a point to insist that women's liberation and the ERA are of no interest to working women and Black women. Imagine how she felt when she looked down and saw those Black "women's libbers" proudly marching in the United Auto Workers contingent; or those "women's libbers" in the teachers and public employees contingents; in the Coalition of Labor Union Women contingents; in the contingents of Teamsters, Meat Cutters, Rail Clerks, and printers.

We can feel proud of the role the Socialist Workers Party played in helping bring these union women and men to the demonstration, along with all the other marchers.

There's a second thing we noticed about May 16. We can say without hesitation that many, if not most, of those who demonstrated that day had never been on a women's

liberation demonstration before. They had never been part of the abortion rights struggle, nor did they participate in the historic August 26, 1970, demonstration that put the women's liberation movement on the political map.

But these new activists are a product of those early years of the feminist movement. And, they are proof that the early movement raised and popularized issues that go straight to the heart of the lives of all women in this society, issues that would eventually move working-class women into the struggle for their rights as women.

The first feminists of our generation came out of the student movement, the civil rights movement, and the struggle against the war in Vietnam. They were part of what we call the youth radicalization—a radicalization that stirred questions in the minds of all Americans about the nature of the government, its lies and deceptions; the nature of the capitalist economic system, which breaks down constantly and cannot care for the most fundamental needs of people; the nature of the social and moral traditions about the family, sexuality, and women's role.

Like these other struggles, the women's liberation struggle arose outside the organized labor movement. Students were in the forefront of its ranks, along with professional women, who made up the leadership of groups like NOW. The ruling class tried to use the social origins of the initial wave of young feminists to argue that the women's liberation movement was a "white, middle-class" struggle alien to the needs and interests of working women and Black women. The capitalists did everything possible to try to drive a wedge between feminists and those women who had the most to gain from the women's liberation struggle.

Many tendencies on the left—particularly the Stalinists of the Communist Party, the various Maoists, and sectarian groups like the International Socialists—used this as their own excuse for not supporting feminism. They rejected the revolutionary dynamic of the struggle of women around their special oppression as women, and counterposed to this the struggle of workers and Blacks.

On the other side, there were tendencies among the feminists who rejected the anticapitalist dynamic of women's liberation and the Marxist explanation of the class roots of women's oppression. To a struggle against the capitalist institutions that perpetuate women's oppression, they counterposed a struggle against individual men, as women's prime enemy.

The intervening years have given time to test out all theories of women's liberation.

New Upsurge of Feminism

After the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion—a great victory for women—and after the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam, all movements of social protest in this country experienced a pause in organized activity. We saw this on the campuses, where there was relative quiescence among the students. We also saw this in the women's movement.

The struggle to legalize abortion had been the most important political fight of the women's movement. After it was won, there remained no single, central demand for the movement, although local struggles over child care, denial of abortions, and other issues continued.

Many women's groups on campus—where the movement had its base—began to fall apart or turn inward, seeking personal solutions to the problem of sexual oppression. City-wide feminist organizations faced a crisis of perspective, with many declining or turning into sects that organized around issues that could not move masses of women into action.

It appeared that very little was happening with the feminist movement for those next two or three years.

However, it wasn't long before we began to see the very real effect that the women's movement, and women's changing role in capitalist society, had had on masses of women in this country.

Working women began forming their own caucuses in the unions and on the job, demanding new rights, and taking initiative in labor struggles. Women led the massive meat boycott of 1973, a spontaneous outburst of protest against high prices. Women deep in the hollows of Harlan, Kentucky, beat back the scabs in the Brookside miners' strike, later commenting that they had seen "all those women's libbers picketing" on TV, and "we didn't see why we couldn't, too."

In 1974, the Coalition of Labor Union Women was formed at a conference of more than 3,000 trade-union women.

Other working women's organizations started sprouting up. Among the most significant were the office worker organizations, groups like 9 to 5 in Boston, Women Employed in Chicago, Women Office Workers in New York, and Women Organized for Employment in San Francisco. The formation of such groups spoke for the fact that millions of unorganized clerks and secretaries had been abandoned by the labor movement and were starting to turn instead to the feminist movement to get organized.

In 1975, Black people in this country went into motion around the case of a twenty-year-old Black woman prisoner in North Carolina, Joanne Little, who was on trial for her life because she defended herself from the sexual attack of a white prison guard. Black women were in the forefront in the Little case, identifying with this courageous fighter not only as a Black, but as a woman.

That same summer, we saw 2,000 women gather in Yellow Springs, Ohio, for a socialist-feminist conference that in yet another way signaled that the women's movement was entering a new stage in its development.

What is this new stage we are entering?

First of all, there is the upsurge in feminist activity that we see around the ERA but also around other feminist issues, and an increase in the political discussions on the roots of and solutions to women's oppression.

Second, this upsurge has for the first time brought into action working women—not in large numbers yet—but in numbers sufficient for us to know that there are important new opportunities in the unions and at workplaces in general to do women's liberation work.

This upsurge is for the first time involving those class forces—the working class and the oppressed nationalities—that must be in the leadership of the women's liberation struggle for it to achieve victory. These are the forces that have the power to make a socialist

revolution in this country, the only way to do away with the economic system that keeps women oppressed.

Equal Rights Amendment Struggle

To the degree that any one issue has galvanized this stepped-up activity in the feminist movement, that issue is the ERA. It is this issue that has most stimulated the development of women's liberation groups in the past few months. This is the issue around which we can mobilize the largest number of women in action at this time.

Attitudes toward the ERA have undergone a big change from the late 1960s, when it was first raised seriously after decades of languishing in Congress. In the 1960s, the labor movement opposed the ERA and campaigned vigorously to prevent its passage. Most groups on the left, especially the Communist Party, opposed the ERA, usually pointing to the union officialdom's argument that it would destroy protective legislation.

At that time, many feminist organizations also opposed the ERA. "Anti-imperialist" women's groups, such as the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, saw in the ERA a "petty-bourgeois" women's issue. Their opposition to this basic democratic right of women fit in well with their general perspective of counterposing feminist demands to "working-class" women's demands.

The major organization pushing for ERA ratification at that time was NOW. The SWP and YSA also supported it and sought to educate in the movement about the importance of this amendment for women.

The union officialdom's opposition to the ERA began to crack, however, as feminist sentiments sank deeper and deeper into the ranks of working women. In 1973, the AFL-CIO changed its policy to one of support for the ERA.

Consciousness of the importance of the ERA has made significant progress over the last year. It took the defeat of state referendums on the ERA in New York and New Jersey last November to shock many ERA supporters into the realization that the amendment could very well go down the drain—without even a fight from the women's movement—unless the majority that backs this issue got out in the streets in a countermobilization against the anti-ERA forces.

The New York-New Jersey defeats opened up a discussion over the strategy that had been followed by the most influential pro-ERA forces up to that time—NOW, the Women's Political Caucus, and the unions. The reformist leaderships of these organizations had opposed a mass-action campaign to win the ERA. Instead, they counterposed lobbying and electing "pro-ERA" Democrats and Republicans to the strategy of getting masses of people out into the streets.

Even when the referendum was on the ballot in New York last November, many NOW leaders cautioned that pro-ERA forces should keep a "low profile" and not do anything that would stir up the anti-ERA forces.

The subsequent defeat of the ERA made it clear that unless there is a massive countermobilization to the opponents of the ERA, women will lose this fight. Ratification of the ERA by 1979 is by no means assured.

This is in great part the case because of the context in which the ERA fight takes place today. We are in the midst of an offensive by the ruling class, an offensive that is driving down the standard of living of women and

working people, and snatching back the victories we won during the struggles of the last decade. For women, the economic crisis means getting fired from jobs we battled our way into through affirmative action plans; it means closing down the child-care centers; it means slamming the doors of the abortion clinics in our faces.

These attacks make one fact absolutely inescapable. The capitalist system is incapable of granting women full equality. It cannot absorb into the labor force all the women who want jobs. It cannot offer job equality and equal pay for equal work. It cannot provide the day care and other social services women need in order to have full control over their lives.

Today, even simple statements of sexual equality—like the ERA—are meeting the determined resistance of a small but serious opposition, which has been emboldened by the capitalists' assaults on Blacks, women, and working people.

The ERA has become a symbol for the right wing—a red flag if you will—of everything they detest about the women's liberation struggle. Their challenge to the ERA is a challenge to the feminist movement's right to exist.

The economic crisis and the attacks on the gains of the 1960s have given the ERA a new political and social weight, making the stakes in the ratification battle higher. Today, opposition to the ERA, to busing, and to abortion is the rallying cry of the right-wing forces in this country. Thus it was entirely appropriate—from their point of view—for the anti-abortion forces to select Boston as the location for their June national convention, the racists' stronghold, and then to invite STOP ERA leader Phyllis Schlafly as a featured guest.

Recognition of the forces opposing the ERA for what they are—enemies of women, and of Blacks and the labor movement as well—has prompted even such hidebound conservatives as AFL-CIO President George Meany to express concern over the failure of the ERA to be ratified. Meany correctly sees that defeats for the ERA, just like setbacks for desegregation, only encourage the reactionary forces to step up their attacks on the unions themselves. This is what lies behind Meany's statements that the ERA should be a priority for the labor movement.

The importance of the ERA as an issue is also seen more clearly in the Black movement. In such cities as Louisville and Boston, the antibusing outfits have openly allied themselves with the anti-ERA forces.

These new openings for ERA work in the union and Black movements coincide with a new willingness on the part of the NOW national leadership to engage in mass actions around this issue. What these changes open up is the possibility of building a massive, broad movement to push the ERA through those final four states where ratification is still needed.

If we just look back for a minute at the abortion rights fight, we can see a big difference. In the early 1970s, those who agreed with a mass-action campaign to legalize abortion were limited to campus feminists, some radical feminists, a few isolated members of NOW, and ourselves. The national leadership of NOW opposed the campaign of the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition (WONAAC) and tried to sabotage its efforts. The unions—with a couple of exceptions—played no role whatsoever.

Today, the fight for the ERA has already spread beyond the feminist movement itself and showed the potential it has to involve thousands of working people.

I say "potential" because thus far the labor movement has done almost nothing to mobilize the *power* of the unions. Labor officials, like the leaders of NOW, have poured most of their resources into lobbying and the elections.

Pressure to subordinate ERA activity to the elections is intensifying right now. In the different cities where we participate in ERA coalitions, or in NOW, we are seeing the effect of the elections already in the smaller size of meetings and the unwillingness of ERA leaders to call actions in the fall.

We think there will be no big actions for the ERA in the fall because it will be difficult to get the kind of broad, authoritative call for action that is needed.

Our goal is to prepare for the spring, when the state legislatures open again, and when there is the potential to organize more demonstrations like the one in Springfield on a larger scale than before, involving broader forces.

We don't know yet what form ERA actions will take in the spring—whether there will be regional demonstrations in unratified states, or whether an action in one city will turn into a national focus for the ERA movement. We want to support any local, regional, or national mobilizations that are called and build them as widely as possible.

We also think that what is objectively needed to unite ERA supporters across the country and put the maximum pressure on the Democrats and Republicans is a national march on Washington, D.C. Such a march would have a powerful impact on the ERA struggle and on the women's movement as a whole.

Everything we can do around the ERA this fall will help lay the basis for this kind of action campaign. In many cities we can help organize educational activities, debates, rallies, labor speakouts, or picket lines. In Massachusetts and Colorado, we will be campaigning around important ballot referendums on the ERA. In Massachusetts, there is a referendum for a state ERA; and in Colorado, there is a referendum on rescinding the ERA, placed on the ballot by the right wing.

This summer, our work to build August 26 activities has provided a valuable focus for ERA coalitions and NOW chapters.

Child Care, Abortion, and Other Issues

While the ERA fight remains the central one in the women's movement right now, struggles around other women's rights are also intensifying. We want to pay close attention to these as well.

The fight for child care has become especially important as cutbacks quicken, affecting thousands of day-care centers around the country. Child care is an issue that unites all the victims of government cutbacks—working women, unions, oppressed nationalities, students, and the feminist movement. The Proposition I fight in San Francisco demonstrated the broad array of forces that can become part of this struggle.

Child care is a pivotal issue in the economic crisis in one sense. It is one of the best ways the ruling class has to regulate the flow of women into the labor market. Without child care, women with children are forced to quit their jobs and in many cases go on welfare. Even though welfare costs are estimated at three times that of child care, the capitalists prefer welfare because it keeps women

in that reserve army of labor. Providing child care, on the other hand, raises the idea that society should assume the responsibility of raising children, not the individual family.

Another issue that isn't going to go away is abortion, despite the recent Supreme Court ruling upholding the 1973 decision. The Supreme Court decision was a defeat for the anti-abortion forces and a reflection of the continuing majority sentiment for women's right to choose. But the anti-abortion forces have not demobilized, and abortion remains a burning issue in the presidential elections.

It will remain an issue until after the socialist revolution. The right to control one's own body is such a fundamental challenge to the roots of women's oppression that this victory we have won will be constantly under attack. We need to remain vigilant and help build protests wherever the right wing or the government attempt to take back abortion rights. In the next immediate period, one of the ways they may try to do this is through cutbacks in Medicaid payments for abortion. Jimmy Carter has already said that he would try to do this if he became president, and Ford is in agreement.

In both Milwaukee and Minneapolis, we initiated struggles around abortion rights this spring. In Milwaukee we helped defeat an anti-abortion bill in the state legislature. In Minneapolis, the YSA organized a student protest against the closing of the University of Minnesota abortion clinic.

Integrally tied to the abortion struggle is the fight against forced sterilization. In the last two years, protests in the Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Black communities have escalated against the butchery of minority women in city and county hospitals. Chicanas in Los Angeles have filed a lawsuit against these racist practices. In New York, a Puerto Rican-based group is challenging an attempt by some city doctors to do away with sterilization guidelines set down to protect women from sterilization against their will. Forced sterilization is the women's issue around which there is the most activity in the Puerto Rican and Chicano movements right now, and we want to continue our support to these struggles.

These are only a few of the feminist issues. We can't predict which issues may become most prominent at any one time. For example, as more and more working women radicalize, we will see bigger fights around equal pay and equal job opportunities. One important fight of working women today is defense of affirmative action—against discriminatory layoffs. We should continue our support to local struggles on affirmative action and our participation in the ongoing national debate on this issue in the women's, Black, and labor movements.

We should also be alert to the development of feminist consciousness among new layers of women and all the questions that arise with this. We've noticed, for example, the reappearance of rap groups. The New York chapter of NOW recently ran a notice in its newsletter asking for 100 women to lead consciousness-raising groups, so great is the demand from women.

A simultaneous process is the deepening radicalization of those who are already active in the women's liberation movement. These more experienced feminists are realizing just how complex the struggle against women's oppression is, how it is linked to other struggles against oppression, and how big a struggle it will take to liberate women. Some of these women—including former enemies of

Marxism—are beginning to rethink their attitude toward scientific socialism.

National Organization for Women

One very important arena where everything from Marxism to the ERA is being discussed today is the National Organization for Women. In the last few months of stepped-up feminist activity, it is NOW that has taken the initiative in calling supporters of equal rights into action.

We're seeing a change in NOW in response to the new economic period and the deepening radicalization. NOW has traditionally been the major reformist organization in the movement. Its leadership has looked to the Democratic Party as the vehicle through which women would be liberated. Frequently this has led NOW to oppose mass action, as it did during the abortion struggle.

NOW followed this same reformist strategy for years in the ERA fight, rejecting the idea of a massive public campaign for ratification.

But two basic things have changed. First of all, the deepening social crisis in this country has forced every organization claiming to represent some section of the oppressed to reexamine its perspectives and look for new allies. The escalating attacks on women's rights, and in particular the New York-New Jersey defeat of the ERA, clearly shocked NOW leaders into launching an action campaign for the ERA.

Second, the composition of NOW is undergoing some changes. NOW is the largest and only national feminist organization in the country. It has tens of thousands of members and its name is well known. Many young women have been drawn to it in recent years in the absence of other women's organizations to join.

These young women are militant, many of them are radical, they are looking for action, and they expect NOW to provide it. An increasing percentage of NOW members are also working women—teachers, nurses, social workers, secretaries, union members.

Since May 16, and the public identification of NOW with that demonstration, we can expect that many more young women will join NOW. This means socialists should also be active in NOW. We need to increase our participation in NOW's activities in many parts of the country.

We should be involved in the full range of NOW's programs, from the ERA campaign, to abortion, child care, consciousness-raising, full employment, Black and Chicana task forces, and so forth. We should be on the lookout for NOW's activities in the labor movement, such as its work in the Karen Silkwood case. In Baltimore, for example, we discovered that NOW is involved in a lawsuit filed by women steelworkers.

NOW is organized differently from many groups we are accustomed to working in. It is very decentralized, with chapters varying widely in terms of their activity and political composition. Around May 16, some NOW chapters threw themselves into the action, while others refused to build it or hesitated to become involved in coalitions.

We have also learned that NOW has many problems. Its leadership remains committed to winning reforms for women through work in the Democratic Party. This is still their basic strategy, although they are under rank-and-file pressure to carry out more militant actions.

NOW is also being torn apart by a faction fight in the

leadership that threatens to paralyze the organization. The disputes in this fight are not fundamentally over differences in political strategy. The factionalism serves only to cut across united action by all women in NOW and it hurts the whole women's movement. We do not take sides in this fight. We are for all groupings inside NOW joining together in actions around the issues of common agreement, especially the ERA.

Union Work

Deepening our involvement in the feminist movement will enable us to deepen our work in the labor movement as well. As the political resolution explains, we see as components of the coming workers radicalization the development of a class-struggle left wing in the labor movement, but at the same time the explosion of social struggles of the oppressed *outside* the labor movement. The two go hand in hand and influence one another. Right now it is the women's movement that is pushing the unions into action around women's rights, not the other way around. It was the fact that NOW called May 16 that we were able to initiate some women's liberation work in the unions we belong to and in other workplace situations. We were then able to see in action how the struggle of women as women can set class forces into motion.

For many of our union members, this was our first chance to sink our teeth into union work. Through organizing for May 16, we got to know co-workers, the leadership of the unions, and the best militants at the workplace. In one postal workers local in Chicago, for example, we won the endorsement of May 16 and came in contact with a Black women's postal worker organization called United Postal Women. This organization began, we learned, around a fight for child care for Black women postal employees.

We set up ERA committees in a number of locals of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. In one local in St. Louis, AFSCME provided office space to organize for May 16, sent out mailings on it to the membership, and sent a contingent to the action.

We were able to have a similar impact in locals of the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, United Auto Workers, and other unions.

ERA and other women's liberation work can also be done where there is no union. One comrade in New York discovered that there is a women's caucus at the nonunionized office where she works. She joined the caucus, became active in its consciousness-raising committee, and recently was asked by co-workers to help draw up an affirmative action program for the workers at her job.

This example shows that all of us should be thinking about what kind of women's liberation work is possible on the job, no matter what the job, union or nonunion.

Where the work force is organized, of course, the work we can do is especially important. May 16 gave us a taste of what the organized labor movement can do if it wants to mobilize its members for the ERA. Imagine, for example, if the UAW had decided to mobilize all its members in the Midwest for the Springfield action. Or if AFSCME, the AFT, the Teamsters, and other unions had decided to do the same. That would be a force those legislators would have to reckon with—fast.

We're not at that stage yet, but everything we did around

May 16 in the unions helped set an example. Our work in getting endorsements, soliciting money for buses, sending out mailings to the membership, and bringing co-workers to Springfield—all contributed to raising the consciousness of union members about the importance of the ERA.

One of my favorite examples was bringing the ERA issue to a steelworkers local near Oakland, California. This was an all-male, virtually all-white local. Carl Finamore, a leader of the Oakland SWP, was a member of this union. When he introduced a motion on the local floor to support the ERA, the Springfield march, and CLUW, all hell broke loose. A few right-wing union members got up in arms about this "communist plot" called women's liberation. But most of the workers listened with great interest to the two sides. After all, this was probably the first political discussion there had been in the union for years. In the end, when a vote was taken, the men voted to endorse the ERA and to begin a discussion on women's rights on the union bulletin board.

This story illustrates what we mean by getting working people to think socially and act politically. In this way we have helped raise the consciousness of trade unionists about the fact that one of the most important jobs of the unions is to defend the rights of the most exploited members—women, Blacks, and other oppressed nationalities. And we have also helped bring a significant number of union militants closer to the party. Some have joined.

Coalition of Labor Union Women

One of the most important developments for women in the unions is the formation of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW). CLUW was founded in 1974 with the express purpose of organizing the labor movement to support the struggles of women workers. It reflects the growth of feminist sentiment among women in the unions. It is this sentiment and the women's liberation movement that continues to be the driving force behind CLUW.

We have been active in CLUW since its inception and will continue to be active wherever there are opportunities to build CLUW. Last fall, along with other militants in CLUW, we organized a campaign to get the CLUW convention to go on record against discriminatory layoffs and to overturn the weak stand on affirmative action adopted by CLUW's leadership body. Although we lost that vote at the convention, the affirmative action campaign played an important role in educating women in CLUW about the job of a women's rights organization in the unions and in explaining our class-struggle program for CLUW.

Since the convention, there have been some important opportunities to get CLUW chapters behind the drive for the ERA. May 16 gave us a chance to orient CLUW chapters outward, toward the unions and the women's movement, toward getting union women involved in ERA activity. The endorsement of May 16 by the CLUW National Executive Board, a decision opposed by CLUW's top leaders, made it possible for us to involve some CLUW chapters in building labor support for the march.

As an organization, CLUW is just beginning. It is more the expression of the idea of women's liberation work in the unions than that idea in full-blown form. CLUW remains small, and many of its chapters are inactive and turned inward, not toward the unions. The officials in CLUW have by and large resisted the kind of action

program that would attract rank-and-file women.

But CLUW's Statement of Purpose, if carried out, could attract militant young women in the unions who want to fight for their rights as women. The Statement of Purpose says very simply that CLUW's job is to get the unions to support women's fight for child care, the ERA, equal pay, affirmative action, and so forth. We think the best thing union activists can do to build CLUW is work to implement this Statement of Purpose, through the unions. Every CLUW activist must be active not only in CLUW but first and foremost in their local union. CLUW as an organization is meaningless if it is not based on women's liberation activity in the unions themselves.

It is important to keep in mind that the forms through which we do union women's liberation work will vary. In building for May 16, for example, we were able to get CLUW chapters in some instances to take initiative around the ERA. In other cases, the best work was done through ERA or women's rights committees in local unions. In still others, the quickest path to the labor movement was through NOW or an ERA coalition. We don't want to get hung up on the forms through which we do this work; these will depend on the concrete situation.

Black Women, Chicanas, and Puerto Rican Women

The ferment among women is also reflected in the Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican movements. There will be more activity by Black women, Chicanas, and Puerto Rican women in the period ahead—around day care, forced sterilization, the ERA, abortion, and struggles on the job. This increased activity has already become apparent in our ERA work, where through building May 16 we came into contact with people from the National Council of Negro Women, NAACP, National Alliance of Black Feminists, and other groups. We have begun to get to know Chicana groups through ERA work as well, especially in Los Angeles and in San Antonio.

Last weekend our comrades attended a conference of Black feminists held in Pittsburgh. Fifty-five women attended and discussed the nature of the special oppression faced by Black women and how Black women should relate to NOW. The participants were eager to hear what Black feminists in the SWP and YSA think about these important questions.

One striking thing about this conference is that it was initiated by Black women in NOW. This reminds us that when Black women begin organizing as women, they may well do so through forms and channels that are unexpected. We saw on May 16, for example, that the majority of Black women participating came through trade unions.

This is a lesson we should apply to all our women's liberation work. The worst mistake we could make is to overlook any organization that may be attracting feminists. In every city, there are bound to be feminist groups, or other women's organizations, that we should be getting to know. In Chicago, for instance, comrades sat down after May 16, compared notes, and came up with a list of several important, active feminist groups that we should be participating in, including a women office workers group and two Black women's groups.

Socialist-Feminist Groups

A growing number of women's groups identify them-

selves as socialist-feminist. These groups have a variety of political perspectives.

There are independent, action-oriented socialist-feminist organizations, like the Vermont Socialist Feminists, who rode the Freedom Train to Springfield with us and helped organize workshops on socialism for the trip back.

Then there are groups such as the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, which have always had a general "anti-imperialist" outlook. In the past, these groups often took an anti-mass-action stand. Their leaders were usually anti-Trotskyist. But under the pressure of the economic crisis, coupled with the beginnings of real motion on the part of the working class, many women in these groups are reexamining perspectives.

In the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, for instance, there is a wing that favors mass action and worked with us on May 16. The union is now sponsoring weekly discussion sessions on strategy for the women's movement. It is also undergoing an internal crisis and is torn by debate over political perspectives.

In all the groups we are active in—from NOW to radical feminist groups to trade unions—we are finding that women are eager to discuss what revolutionary socialists think the movement should do. The Socialist Workers Party and the Young Socialist Alliance are recognized as consistent defenders of the feminist movement and leading activists.

I think we're sometimes surprised by how well the SWP is known to feminists. We have to remember that nearly every day, millions of women are reading about government attacks on us in the major newspapers.

We are also known as the genuine Marxists in the movement. This is particularly true in terms of the impact of the books and tours of Evelyn Reed.

Most other tendencies on the left have stood aloof from this recent period of upsurge in the feminist movement. There are exceptions—the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC), which played a central role in organizing May 16, and the New American Movement (NAM), which is active in some socialist-feminist groups. Both DSOC and NAM are active in NOW chapters in some parts of the country.

The tendency that sticks out like a sore thumb for its resistance to the struggle for women's liberation is the Communist Party. The CP's determined opposition to the ERA is as scandalous a betrayal of revolutionary socialism as their onetime denunciation of Malcolm X as a "Black fascist" or their recent statements opposing the SWP's right to be on the ballot.

We know that the Stalinists' position on the ERA is very unpopular in sections of their party. They have had to establish a women's front organization, Women for Racial and Economic Equality (WREE), in part to counter the pressures on their members from the women's movement and the ERA struggle in particular. Just last week, Dianne Feeley had the opportunity to debate the head of WREE, Georgia Henning, on the ERA. This kind of debate is something we want to do more of everywhere in the country where we can get the Stalinists to debate us.

The Stalinists are historically the chief distorters of the Marxist traditions on women's liberation. This fall, we have two main propaganda vehicles through which to educate about the genuine Marxist position on this question—our election campaigns and the party's suit against the government.

SWP Election Campaign

The opportunities for our national and local candidates this fall in the women's movement are many. We should be at all the candidates' nights sponsored by local chapters of NOW and other feminist groups. We should aggressively seek out feminists to endorse the campaign.

Many branches will also want to pick up on the lead of the Los Angeles and Chicago branches in organizing socialist educational weekends on socialism and women's liberation. There is an almost unquenchable thirst for education on Marxism and women's oppression. These events can be one of the best ways to bring women closer to the party. The same is true of regular classes on women's liberation, sponsored either by our campaigns or by YSA chapters on campus.

The party's lawsuit goes hand in hand with our campaign work. This suit has brought us into contact with all kinds of organizations and individuals in the feminist movement we have had little previous contact with. We should aggressively seek out all the opportunities we have to get support for our suit in feminist publications, NOW chapters, and among feminist leaders, trade-union women, Black feminists, and so forth.

The women's movement is anxiously watching developments in our case because it is bound to unearth essential documents that will tell much about how the government has tried to sabotage the feminist movement. Our suit is

seen by many women as performing a valuable service to the movement in this regard.

The Political Rights Defense Fund has not yet received from the government many of the files we expect to get on the women's movement. But we have gotten one slimy piece of slander put out by the FBI in 1972, purporting to be the "inside story" on how the SWP "infiltrates" the women's movement and uses it for its own purposes. This piece of garbage is titled *Exploitation of Women's Movement by Socialist Workers Party*. I'll spare you the details of this collection of red-baiting smears. The main complaint of the FBI—as always—is that socialists are building the women's movement, helping it grow, and as a result, many feminists are being won to revolutionary socialism.

You know, it takes a lot of gall for the people who admit spying on the women's movement and admit using women as prostitutes in their "foreign intelligence" work to turn around and accuse *us* of exploiting women. But if the government garbage-sifters, poison-pen artists, and burglars were concerned that socialists were building the women's movement in 1972, they haven't seen anything yet. They can put out a hundred red-baiting pamphlets on the SWP and it won't stop us. We are going to be part of the women's liberation struggle until working people have succeeded in taking the power out of the hands of the sexist, racist minority that rules this country and we have rebuilt society on socialist foundations, where women can at last develop as full human beings.

Party Participation in the Struggle for Black Women's Liberation

[The following is the edited transcript of the presentations and excerpts from the discussion at the workshop on Party Participation in the Struggle for Black Women's Liberation at the Socialist Workers Party convention, August 1976. The workshop was chaired by Cathy Sedwick of the Chelsea branch, New York.]

* * *

Cathy Sedwick, Chelsea, New York

The purpose of this workshop is to report on the increase in Black women's liberation activity in the past year. It is also an opportunity for comrades to report on activity in their local areas. The information, questions, and ideas that comrades share with us today will help us in coordinating our work and participating in these activities and help us in putting out literature on the Black women's liberation struggle.

The reason we are seeing an increase in Black feminist activity today is primarily based on the objective conditions we find ourselves in as Black women. We make up 53 percent of the Black community. We are more likely to be in the work force than any other women—one-half of all Black women work. Usually this means working at the worst paying, dead-end jobs. Our median income is one-third that earned by white men, at least \$1,000 less than that of white women, and a little over half of that earned by Black men.

More than 27 percent of female-headed households are Black, and 40 percent of these are below the government's poverty line.

These conditions make Black women the most oppressed members of the Black community, and some of the most militant fighters for social change.

Although Black women have not yet participated in the organized feminist movement in large numbers, the feminist movement has had a definite effect on the way we view ourselves. The gains we have won through this movement have changed Black women's consciousness. For instance, the right to abortion has allowed us to exercise more control over our bodies and our lives.

Today, increased attacks on our standard of living and the general increase in women's liberation activity have brought about an increase in activity among Black women, around such issues as the Equal Rights Amendment, child care, abortion, and forced sterilization.

We are seeing organizations like the NAACP and the National Council of Negro Women discussing and supporting the ERA. Black publications are taking up the issues of women's liberation. The *Black Scholar* solicited an article from us on Black women and the ERA, which we submitted, written by myself and Reba Williams, who is active in the Massachusetts Action Coalition for the ERA.

And on the May 16 ERA demonstration in Springfield, Illinois, while there was not a large number of Black women, many of the union contingents had significant numbers of Black women participating.

The day after the May 16 action, a news conference was held in Chicago to announce the formation of a new Black

feminist organization, the National Alliance of Black Feminists. This organization issued a "Black Women's Bill of Rights," which takes up many of the questions facing Black women, such as child care, adequate medical care, the right and knowledge to control our own bodies, and the need to achieve legal and political equality for Black women. Abortion and the ERA are not mentioned specifically.

A number of Black women's conferences have also taken place. A conference on forced sterilization took place in New York recently. A minority women's speakout is to be held in Minneapolis later this month.

One significant sign of the ferment among Black women was a conference sponsored by the National Organization for Women in Pittsburgh July 31-August 1. The purposes of this conference were to recruit more Black women to NOW, to discuss why most Black women have not viewed NOW as an organization they can work in, and to discuss the formation of a national Black caucus within NOW.

Official registration was placed at fifty-five. Forty-five of the women were Black. This is a significant number, considering the fact that the publicity was very poor. It's a real indication of the amount of interest Black women have in the feminist movement.

Participants in the conference were mostly from the Pittsburgh area. Most were not members of NOW. Other groups represented were the NAACP, the National Alliance of Black Feminists, the National Council of Negro Women, the Young Socialist Alliance, and the Socialist Workers Party.

Our comrades went to the conference to learn what issues Black women are discussing, what activities Black women are carrying out in NOW, and to get out our own ideas about the Black women's liberation struggle.

The discussion focused on the problems facing Black women—the need to organize women around basic survival issues, such as jobs and child care. The question of how Black women should organize our struggle also came up: whether Black women should work through all-Black women's groups primarily, whether we should work in organizations like NOW. We learned that some white women leaders in NOW were opposed to the idea of an all-Black women's conference and opposed to the idea of Black women organizing independently within NOW.

We can expect these questions to come up again and again as there is more activity by Black women. We think there is a need for Black women to participate in both kinds of organizations. Because of our special oppression, Black women need our own independent organizations. Only we can determine how the struggle for Black women's liberation will be won. But Black women also need to participate in feminist organizations like NOW, in order to help lead the women's movement and make it more responsive to the needs of the most oppressed women. The key thing is what is the most effective way to get masses of Black women involved in struggle against their oppression. The organizational forms will vary according to the issues involved and the forces taking part in the struggle.

Especially in areas where NOW has active Black

members, Black women comrades should be in NOW. We should learn more about the composition of NOW chapters in our areas. NOW is the largest women's group in this country and it attracts many new feminists.

At the Pittsburgh conference a special presentation was given Saturday night by Pat Callair, a Black woman from the NOW Task Force on the ERA. She explained the need for Black women and other minority women to support the ERA. She reported that women in South Carolina are planning a march on the state capital to demand ratification of the ERA in January. This demonstration is aimed primarily at trying to involve Black women in large numbers at an ERA demonstration, and she encouraged the women attending the presentation to go back to their local areas and begin discussions on how they could participate and help build the march. This is the extent of the information that we have on the demonstration.

We learned a great deal about the issues being discussed by Black women in NOW and a lot about the conditions faced by Black women within NOW. The atmosphere at the conference was one of openness. We introduced ourselves as socialists, members of the SWP and the YSA. People were very interested in what we had to say about the issues facing Black women. We were able to help answer questions that came up on such subjects as the ERA, what strategy for the Black women's movement, and the type of organizations for Black women.

We sold *Militants*, the ERA pamphlet, and our new pamphlet on *Black Women's Struggle for Equality* with the feature article by our vice-presidential candidate Willie Mae Reid.

We also talked to a number of Black women about our campaign, especially the campaign of Willie Mae Reid for vice-president. We had discussions about the Socialist Workers Party.

These developments show that there is an interest and an increase in Black feminist activity, which we certainly can and should be participating in. We should keep our eyes and ears open because many times these things are not that well publicized.

We should be having forums on Black women and their relationship to the women's movement and the many issues that are facing Black women today.

Reports on activities that take place on a local level should be sent in to the National Office so that we can step up our coverage of these activities in the *Militant* and the *Young Socialist*.

These are just some of the things that we can do to visibly show our support for the rights of Black women and win more Black women to socialism. We have made strides in our recruitment already.

For example, of twenty Black comrades in Detroit, twelve of these are women. The large number of Black women attending this convention shows that Black women can and will be recruited to revolutionary socialism.

The objective basis certainly exists for a powerful Black women's movement in this country. What form this will take and around what issues it will be organized, I don't think we can speculate at this point. I think it would be a safe prediction to say that a Black women's movement will have a definite effect on the women's struggle, the Black struggle, and the entire struggle for the complete reorganization of this society.

Reba Williams, Roxbury, Boston

One of the things we're doing in Massachusetts is trying to get a state Equal Rights Amendment. It will be on the ballot in November. The federal Equal Rights Amendment has already been ratified in Massachusetts.

One of the ways this campaign started was that the University of Massachusetts had women who were struggling there for a women's center. They came to us and asked us if we could help out with that campaign, which we did.

As a result of this, these women saw a need for a campaign around the ERA. They set up a separate task force inside of the U. Mass. women's center to go about educating women at U. Mass. about the ERA. The women's center did some calling to see how many other campus women were interested in doing this kind of work. A city-wide meeting was called, initiated by the women's center.

One of the things about Massachusetts is the antiracist struggle that has been going on there, which gives this campaign around the ERA a very, very important focus. I'm sure comrades know about the pro-ERA rally that was busted up last year around April, where the racists came in chanting, "Feminism equals communism" and so on.

This helped women in the feminist movement to see that the people who were against our rights as women—against abortion and everything else—were the same people who were against our rights as Blacks. It politicized these women around this particular struggle.

I lived in Atlanta before I moved to Boston. In Atlanta, Georgians for the Equal Rights Amendment established a Black women's task force. We felt that one was needed because a growing number of Black women were coming into GERA to do work and to see what they could do in the ERA struggle.

The task force had an autonomy of its own within the coalition. It could decide what speakers could best express our oppression as Black women, and decide what kind of literature we wanted to print directed toward Black women.

In the abortion struggle in Boston around Kenneth Edelin, the Black doctor who was convicted of performing an abortion, we had about three to five Black women involved in this campaign. We didn't feel it was necessary at that particular time to set up a Black women's task force, but we felt there was still a need to have literature and leaflets directed toward Black women. We were also able to go to different community agencies like the NAACP and such people as Tom Atkins to have them endorse events that we had around the Edelin campaign.

When the April 24 probusing march was called, the people in the Action Coalition for the ERA, the student-based coalition in Boston, identified with our struggle as Blacks. We also went to the National Organization for Women and explained to them that we needed their support for April 24, as well as other women's organizations like the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. WILPF came in and helped build the struggle and also participated in the different meetings. NOW was also friendly to the action.

One of the other things that is important about involving Black women is media coverage. As you know, Phyllis Schlafly has been going around the country saying that we as Black women have nothing to do with the

feminist struggle, that we don't identify with this particular struggle. We have to make public the fact that this is not true. One way is through articles in different newspapers and other media coverage. One of the things that I'm going to be doing when I get back is preparing for a debate with one of the anti-ERA people on "Women '76," a widely viewed television show.

Mary Pritchard, North St. Louis

I wanted to report on the type of reactions I was getting from Black women in talking about the ERA in St. Louis.

How many times have you heard these words or something similar to them: The Black woman has always been freer than the Black man—it's about time that she stood on the sidelines and let the Black man take the lead? Or the old Southern cliché that the white man and Black woman have always been free?

The truth of the matter is that these statements are lies. The Black woman is the most oppressed sector of society. She has and still is being exploited sexually and economically.

Some people have the audacity to say that because Black women can find a job when there are few or none for Black men, this makes us freer than Black men.

This too is a lie.

Some Black women feel that if they get involved in the women's liberation movement, they will be dividing the Black liberation struggle. This is not true. By just participating in the Black liberation struggle, we are fighting only half the battle. Ours is a fight against racism and sexism and we must deal with them both.

We encounter Black women, for instance, who see the fight for the ERA as a white, middle-class issue. We need to educate Black women and inform them that the battle for the ERA and all issues of the women's movement are struggles that we need to participate in. By organizing and educating Black women around the issues, Black women as a whole have already started to have a major effect on the feminist movement. It will be Black women who will put forth the issues that affect us as Black women.

We can talk to Black women who we meet in the antiracist struggle about the ERA and other feminist work that we're doing, by pointing out to them that the forces attacking the antiracist struggle are also attacking the ratification of the ERA, as Reba pointed out. Boston is a prime example of this, where you have the racist forces going against the antiracist movement and attacking the feminist movement there simultaneously.

We are the ones who would have to make sure that it doesn't look like the feminist movement is counter to the Black liberation movement.

One way this can be done is by getting them to support each other, as was done when different women's groups across the country endorsed the April 24 demonstration, and the NAACP endorsed the Equal Rights Amendment. Although these groups have done this on paper, we still have to push to make this support real. We need more than paper endorsement. We need to see full-force endorsement by these different organizations, getting out there and helping to build.

Lorraine Page, Minneapolis

I'd just like to tell everybody how the idea for the

Minneapolis minority women's speakout came about. It happened when we were in Springfield, Illinois, on May 16. We looked around and saw Black women, but we didn't see nearly as many Black women as we would have liked to see.

Myself and Ramona Austin, who is a member of the Minority Task Force of NOW, thought that when we got back home we had to do something about this. So we started looking around and the idea came to us of a Minority Women's Speakout. And we started looking around for some funding sources. Somebody turned us on to what is called the Minnesota Humanities Commission. We approached them and they said send us a proposal. We wrote up a very lengthy proposal and we submitted it and they accepted it. We asked for \$1,200, and they gave it to us.

We got Yvonne Wanrow, who is a Native American frame-up victim from Washington State, to come and speak at our rally. We got Cilia Teresa, who is the national head of the Minority Task Force of NOW, as a speaker also, and several Black speakers.

Tania Abdulahad, Pittsburgh

I just wanted to comment on the conference in Pittsburgh last weekend because I was one of the people who was there.

One of the things I wanted to stress is the need for independent organization of Black women. At the conference there were a lot of Black women who were in NOW who had a lot of things on their mind, but didn't get a chance to talk about them. The reason they didn't talk about them was because a lot of them felt they were in some way hurting the feelings of the white women there. And so a lot of people ended up repressing a lot of things they would have normally said if we were just Black women there by ourselves.

What they usually spoke about was that they were the only Black women in their chapters. But they didn't talk about what was happening to them as the only Black women in their chapters. So they never even got to talk about some of the things other Black women would probably feel about joining an organization like NOW.

I think this is one of the important things we need to really look at and see the importance for Black women to organize and to get together as Black women and Black feminists and socialists too and talk about some of the things that are on our minds, that are not part of the experience of white feminists.

Kalima Abdulahad, Philadelphia

I also was one of the comrades who attended the Pittsburgh conference. As Cathy has said, the Black women who were there seemed to be very conscious that we do suffer a dual oppression. They were able to see that within the women's movement we will have to push for certain priorities that we have as Black women.

One problem we did have was that given the presence of white women, the discussion in one of the workshops that I attended centered on why we feel as though we do have differences and priorities. So really we didn't get into a very deep discussion of exactly what things we need to fight around.

One of the things that was explained was that Black women have to deal with the Black community, which means that there will be certain issues that will be important to us. One example that was brought up is education of our children. We all want our children to receive quality education. But one priority that we as Black women have is to see that our children receive a good education of their own history and their culture.

I also think that when we talk about issues that confront Black women, sometimes it's very vague as to what those issues would be. There are certain things that are clear, such as the fight against forced sterilization. But simply because we are Black, we also have to fight racism as well. Looking at the prison system, we realize that a lot of injustice comes down on our men, that the majority of men in prison are Black. One issue that we as Black women should be involved in is defense cases, such as Gary Tyler, and also a strong fight against the death penalty. Because the way the prison system is set up, masses of Black women don't have any alternative except to head up the household. That is one myth that people use to make Black women feel that they're superior to men. It's not really the case. It's because of the type of society we live under.

Rashida Abdul-Ahad, West Philadelphia

I was also at the conference and I saw a few things that I think are important for us as comrades to deal with.

First of all, I think as a whole this conference was very positive. I thought it was good for NOW members as well as for women who were not members of NOW to see certain problems that Black women have to deal with that white women as feminists don't have to deal with.

The point has to be made clear that Black women as feminists do have two priorities we have to deal with—that we are women and that we are Black. And those are two major issues that are used to make us the most oppressed people in this society.

Another significant point I thought was that the conference made NOW members much more aware of certain steps they need to take as far as Black women are concerned. There are some chapters in NOW that have minority task forces or that might have a group of Black women dealing with Black women's problems. But this has not become a national priority of NOW. So I think we should urge local chapters of NOW to form Black task forces to confront the issues that concern Black women.

Renita Alexander, North St. Louis

I just want to make a small point on another aspect of reaching Black women. With the conferences and with NOW and within the women's movement, we're mostly working with conscious feminists, Black women who are conscious feminists. But there's a good many Black women who are not feminists. We should reach out to these women as well. They all know they're kitchen help for some reason, but a lot of them just can't put their finger on just why it is.

Those of us here weren't born feminists. We were in the same place once; we didn't exactly know what was oppressing us. And we can reach out to this layer of women too. We should be conscious in our antiracist work. That's where we're going to find most of these women. We

should be working with more Black women around these hospital struggles. Twenty-five percent of the Black female population works in hospitals. If they close Homer G. Phillips hospital in St. Louis, it's a big battle that's going to be raging. There's a possibility of about 510 lost jobs and a majority of these jobs are going to be Black women. We should be conscious of things like this when we intervene into struggles of this sort—we'll have a huge impact on Black women that we do try to reach.

And child care is another place where there may not be a whole layer of conscious feminists. But these women are going to fight for some kind of care for their kids. We can work with the unconscious feminists around this type of issue too. In AFSCME there's the public service workers. A lot of those are Black women too, and we should be conscious when we do this kind of work that we pay attention to the Black women.

Trudy Hawkins, West Side Detroit

One thing that's come out here in the discussion is that people weren't very impressed with the number of Black women who participated in May 16. Well, I frankly have just the opposite idea. I was very impressed by the number of Black women who participated in May 16. In fact, in talking to a number of these women, I found that many of them were in the YSA or the SWP or were brought to the demonstration by us. And I think that's very impressive.

I've had the opportunity to speak on Black women's liberation around the Detroit area to a number of women. It's been mostly community-college-type situations. Maybe it's much more clear in the community colleges than it is in some of the universities, but the problems these women face are very concrete. These women know for a fact they have to go out and work for a living. They know that in order for their families to survive, they have to work.

In the past we've been confronted with an organized campaign against the women's liberation movement, organized by a lot of these very, very sectarian nationalist groups who said women were supposed to stay home and have babies. Now they tell women they're supposed to go out and organize when they've got these kids to take care of. But Black women are not looking at the women's liberation movement in the same light as they were in the past. We're going to continue to see a shift in attitude among Black women as the women's movement as a whole becomes more concrete.

We were thinking about some of the myths that were created against the women's movement about bra-burning and so on. But we started thinking about it and we just sat around in a group and said, "How many of us saw anybody burning bras on TV?" We saw people burning draft cards. I never saw anybody burning a bra. This was a total myth. But we had the media playing up feminism as this white thing, and we had the misleaders in the Black community telling us that we're not supposed to organize around women's issues.

Where I have spoken in the last year, not once have I heard a Black woman say that abortion is genocide. Women's attitude about this now is that it's everybody's choice. They personally might not like it. They personally may not want to have abortions. But their attitude is that they support the right of abortion for Black women.

The attitude around the Equal Rights Amendment is the same way. Black women are supporting the Equal Rights

Amendment. The thing is that there hasn't been a conscious effort put forth by anyone to get Black women involved in the ERA. I think that's one of the weaknesses in our ERA work that I found in Detroit. What it's going to take is a conscious effort on our part to get out literature specifically designed to get Black women involved in the ERA fight.

Black women have to go out speaking at these high schools and community colleges to get other Black women involved in the ERA, get other Black women coming to these conferences and coming to demonstrations and picket lines.

One thing that always comes up in different movements that we're involved in is the history of our struggles. One thing that we don't have right now is a history of Black women in the struggle for equality whether it be in the Black liberation movement or whether it be in the women's movement as a whole.

Another thing that we have to realize in terms of the Coalition of Labor Union Women is the fact that most Black women aren't unionized. At Harper hospital in Detroit the union is going to be spearheading a drive to unionize nurses, both licensed practical nurses and registered nurses. And that's going to be very significant because that's Black women.

I think one thing that we're going to have to deal with in terms of participating in NOW is the fact that not only do Black women look at NOW as a white, middle-class organization. Many other women in NOW look at NOW like that, too. They assume Black women are not interested in feminist ideas. What we want to do is start turning that attitude around in NOW.

Finally, I think we have to keep an eye open for any literature that we see on Black women and write reviews for the *Young Socialist* or for the *Militant*. More literature with an emphasis on Black women is appearing, like the book *Black-Eyed Susan*, edited by a professor at the University of Detroit.

Mary Nell Bockman, Southside, Minneapolis

I just want to make a couple of suggestions. There are a number of traditional women's organizations that you don't necessarily think of as feminist, but they have a large Black women's membership. The YWCA, for example, took a really strong position against racism at their last conference. They unanimously decided that they were going to make the fight against racism their No. 1 priority nationally. And all of the YWCA chapters are supposed to take the initiative in seeking out antiracist struggles.

They have also unanimously endorsed the ERA. And I think a lot of Black women in the organization are beginning to speak out. We found in Minneapolis that both the university chapter of the YWCA, which has a couple of Black women on staff, and the city-wide chapter have been very friendly. They're going to be doing a workshop at the August 28 action on minority women and the Equal Rights Amendment, and in general I think they have played a really positive role in things because a lot of times these YWCA chapters, which are located in the Black community around Black high schools and so forth, will have a really large percentage of Black women. We can get speakers at some of these groups sometimes.

The other groups that are like this are the Girl Scouts, which you don't think of as a feminist organization, but

which at their last national conference endorsed the ERA unanimously also. A lot of times Black high school women make up a big part of these Girl Scout clubs, which will come out of churches or high schools in the Black community.

The other thing is Black sororities on college campuses, which are often real open to setting up programs for speakers. When we bring someone like Willie Mae Reid into the area or another Black woman comrade speaking on Black women's liberation, try to put together receptions, informal discussions with these Black sororities.

The other thing is that Black women speakers today are some of the most requested on college campuses. I think it would be really good for Viewpoint to think out maybe a national tour by one of our Black women leaders.

NSCAR also should have somebody, make like Flo Kennedy, who might be willing to do limited speaking engagements, or Ramona Austin from Minneapolis, who is pretty well known and is a really top-notch speaker on Black women and the fight against racism.

The other thing is just using the Black women's liberation pamphlet, which I think was Pathfinder's top seller for a long time. If updated and expanded to go over a lot of the newer struggles around Black women's liberation that have come up over the last few years, I think it would be really useful especially in getting into these traditional women's groups that don't really have a feminist viewpoint yet.

Maceo Dixon, Roxbury, Boston

Hattie McCutcheon, who is on the national staff of NSCAR, will be touring the West Coast of the United States, speaking on the question of school desegregation. One of the things that Hattie talks about is the whole question of Black women's liberation.

Reba Williams, who is in the Action Coalition for the ERA in Massachusetts, is also on the speakers bureau of NSCAR. If people want her to speak across the country, call the national office of NSCAR to have her come and speak.

One of the comments made by Cathy that I totally agree with is that more Black women in the YSA and the party should join NOW. I think that's very important.

One thing that I do not have an opinion on and I think is going to come out in the wash is the question of whether there should be separate Black women's organizations, a task force here, or whatever. I have no opinion on that. That's going to be decided upon in the struggle itself.

There's one thing that I hope we do not overlook. That is the question of the Black student unions on the college campuses across the country.

In speaking across the country, I've noticed an increase in activity amongst the BSUs throughout the United States, involving themselves a little bit more in the social issues of the day, like school desegregation, the question of police brutality, and so forth, more so than they had in the late 1960s.

But on top of that is a phenomenon I've noticed as well. I don't know how many, but there are many BSUs being headed by Black women nowadays. And I think that there is a basis for subcommittees of BSUs, for instance, around the question of the Equal Rights Amendment or other issues. I think that is something we should not overlook.

One thing I feel very strongly about is that whatever

type of formations develop, every time there's literature going out, there has to be material on the question of how the Equal Rights Amendment affects Black women. I think we have to go through the ABCs in terms of how it does affect Black women so that we can pass this out in the high schools, college campuses, shopping centers, and so on around this particular question. I think we can get a hearing in the Black community and win the Black community over to the question of the ERA.

Reba Williams, Roxbury, Boston

One of the things that comrades haven't talked about is the role of our campaign in this particular struggle. We're running Willie Mae Reid for vice-president, and what we have to do is utilize her to the fullest extent in drumming up support for the different struggles that are going on, like abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment.

Her campaign is very important from two aspects. One, she's a Black woman who's running for vice-president. The other thing is that when we have Willie Mae in the different areas, there may be something she can do besides speaking at campaign rallies and other things that she usually does, like speaking to the press. Like invite all of the Black women we know who are contacts of our movement, or who we know from school or whatever, to come in and have a sort of informal session or a class or something. Have her talk about her campaign as well as the fight that we have to wage as Black feminists.

Pat Wright is another example. She's running for U.S. Congress in New York. When she was running, she came in contact with a lot of Black women who identified with this particular struggle. She was heading up classes on feminism and socialism or feminism in general and we were able to draw a number of Black women around our movement.

Maceo talked a little about separate Black women's organizations. And Cathy talked about this in her report. I just want to reiterate it.

I think that what we feel is that there is a need for both. There's a need for Black women to organize as Black women, to talk amongst ourselves about what oppression we face and what kind of goals we want to set for ourselves as far as winning the struggle, as well as participating in the National Organization for Women and other feminist organizations that we come in contact with.

One of the things that Trudy talked about as well was the attitude toward Black women that some white NOW women have. And I know it's true. I encountered it at a Northeast regional conference of NOW. They had a Black women's workshop led by a white woman, which was a total shock to me, seeing as how they had a Black woman on their national board who was their vice-president, who was there, who was participating, and they did not ask her to lead that particular workshop.

In this workshop there were about three of us who attended—myself, another Black woman, and a Black man. After she had finished her presentation came the time for discussion, and we really had a debate going back and forth.

She conceded on some of the things that were brought out in the workshop. But she felt NOW is a middle-class, white feminist organization, and that Black women probably wouldn't feel comfortable in it.

That's the kind of attitude that Black women have to

take on. Black feminists should tell these women that we want a voice in NOW and a vote and we want this organization to defend our rights as women and our rights as Blacks.

Willie Mae Reid, Brooklyn, New York

I was excited about this workshop, as Cathy and Nan and the women in New York told me they were excited about the Black women's conference in Pittsburgh. I was in the South Pacific at the time that conference was taking place.

But a very interesting thing happened on that tour. In addition to having all those campus meetings and evening meetings that are normal in any tour, there were special meetings organized with the Black groups in both Australia and New Zealand and with the women's groups. And I think the thing that one Black woman in New Zealand said really expresses best what's happening right here in the United States among Black women.

She was a part of the Maori, which are the Black New Zealanders, and she was interested in the women's movement, although the Maori group in New Zealand is not particularly interested in the women's question. They feel that that cuts across the Maori struggle as a whole because they're fighting around what they see as the national question.

But this Black woman said, "I'm interested in what Black women are doing in the United States because I think if Black women get mad enough, then you'll have a socialist revolution."

And that's true, you know. If you're on the very bottom of the barrel and you get motion on the bottom, you're going to shake up everything that's on the top. There's no doubt about it, no doubt about it.

And I think the discussion we're having here, discussing how we can best relate to the ferment that's going on out there among Black women is a very good starting point. Pushing for those separate women's organizations, where Black women can come together and talk about their problems in an atmosphere that's comfortable so that they don't have to be intimidated about hurting somebody's feelings in the audience because they're not Black, and can't experience the things that they're feeling. We should also make the point that not all Black women feel the same way about liberation. There is no united opinion among Black women about exactly how we're oppressed and how we should struggle.

We're not going to be able to reach that point until we have an opportunity to come together ourselves and talk about our problems as Black women. Being able to do that gives us the confidence to work in organizations like NOW, not saying we *want* to work with you, but saying we have a place here and we have come to demand that place as equals. That's the way we must relate to NOW.

And we need to have just that kind of confidence ourselves in order to be able to accomplish that fact. The success that we're able to achieve in moving behind our priorities as women and focusing on the kinds of struggles that can help us win victories will educate our men about their chauvinism. All that discussion about the place for women in the abortion movement. It never was settled, never was settled. But Black women got involved in the abortion movement because they were affected by the

abortion question and the victory included some change for them.

The victory of the struggle around the abortion question changed a lot of chauvinist opinions. And that's what's going to be the major educating process for men. When we've reached the point where it's okay for you to sit in on our meetings and be a part of our organizations, then that's when you can expect that it's going to happen. And women too must not be intimidated by the fact that we need to be able to come together ourselves as women. We need to provide the best atmosphere so that we don't spend fifteen, twenty minutes debating on whether we should ask the white women to leave a Black women's meeting or to ask the men to leave a women's meeting, that kind of thing. We have to get on with the problem at hand. And that's very, very important.

The literature question is a good one too. Sister Mary Nell from Minneapolis talked about the need for the pamphlet. That's true. Black women are interested in that information, books, literature, on the whole Black women's question. And the idea of having these reviews on the books that come out is another good thing to do.

That means we need forces to do it. You are going to have to write those reviews as Black women. Or you are going to have to make contact with women you know in the Black movement who can write those reviews and articles for the *Militant* and the *YS* in the high schools.

That's what's going to bring together the kind of research that'll make it possible for us to start putting together books on the whole question of the Black women's struggle.

Eva Chertov, East Atlanta

It's the task of the entire Socialist Workers Party and YSA to recruit as many Black people, and particularly Black women, as possible. I want to address myself to that point.

For three years in Atlanta, we have been carrying out work to get the Equal Rights Amendment ratified in Georgia. Probably the Georgia experience is one of the richest in that regard.

For the entire three years our branch took a conscious attitude toward involving Black women in the Equal Rights Amendment coalition, although we had no Black women in our branch and there were no Black women initially in the ERA movement. We took the attitude of going out and finding Black women. And that's step one.

First of all, we found out that there were federal government' reprints from a magazine named *Focus* containing a statement put out by Black women on the ERA. We ordered tons of that literature to have in the ERA office.

We also began to just reach out with every single contact we had to the student groups at Atlanta University.

We also began to become conscious of small things as well as big. If you're going to make a leaflet and you're trying to orient toward all women, then you don't put a picture of just white women on the leaflet.

One of the things that happened is that Miriam Richmond, who is the director of communications for WAOK, one of the largest Black radio stations in Atlanta, was on the phone for three days trying to get through to the ERA office. She was one of the first Black women to come forward.

She brought with her other Black women. She began to speak around Atlanta on the ERA. We began to put out leaflets on Black women and the ERA, explaining the special relevance it has for Black women. We sent out teams to the shopping centers, and if we didn't have enough Black women to leaflet, we sent white women with the leaflets.

We found that when we approach Black women on a political basis, and in particular make it clear that we want to see Black women in the leadership of the ERA movement, that is when we have found the greatest receptivity and desire of Black women to take that leadership and get involved.

Helen Duffy, South Chicago

One thing I have noticed is that whenever women are together as women, there's potential for it to be a feminist type of thing. Women get together and they naturally talk about their own problems.

CLUW in Chicago probably has a larger percentage of Black women than any feminist organization or any women's organization that's a mixed group in Chicago. It was through CLUW that I found out about an organization called United Postal Women that has about thirty or forty members, all Black and most of them in their thirties and forties. Almost all of them are active in their unions and they are a very aware group of women. We were able to involve this group in getting the postal workers union to endorse the ERA, and in building May 16.

Laura Moorhead, Southeast, Washington, D.C.

I just wanted to make two brief points about the educational contributions that I think our movement has to make to this discussion that's going on now among Black women and our relation not only to the Black struggle but to the question of the feminist movement.

We can begin here in thinking about the question of literature, as Maceo has pointed out, at these ERA demonstrations, having leaflets that specifically deal with why the ERA is important to Black women. But also I think we have a job to do in terms of arming those Black feminists and those Black women who are coming to a feminist consciousness with the tremendous contributions that Black women have made in the course of American history and the contributions that Black women have made to building the Black struggle.

This history has been an important part of all the other movements that we've seen evolve over the past several years. People become hungry to know what their roots are and what their contributions have been, particularly in talking about Black women, the most degraded sector of society in many ways. It becomes very important to provide that kind of ammunition in terms of seeing what kind of road we have to go down.

I think most people have a sketchy sort of idea of that kind of history. They've heard about Harriet Tubman, they've heard about Sojourner Truth, but people don't really have a sense of continuity about the contributions that Black women have made to building a struggle in this country, not only in the Black movement but in all the areas where the working class has achieved victories, whether it's the antilynching movement or the movement of the Women's Council in Montgomery that pushed the

men to organize the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955.

These kinds of things, I think, we can make a valuable contribution on. And while we may not be in a position right now to write a whole book on the subject, I think we can begin to make that kind of contribution in terms of articles in the *Militant* and the *Young Socialist*.

I think this new pamphlet, *Black Women's Struggle for Equality*, is indicative of this new ferment that is going on around this discussion of Black women's liberation. The articles it contains are very valuable tools. We should try to get it around to as many people as possible, and have more articles in the *Militant* and the *Young Socialist* on this question, which comrades can participate in writing.

Rohima Miah, Detroit

I just wanted to talk a little bit about Black high school women. High school women are oppressed in general because of the restrictive nature in high schools and especially on the question of abortion and contraceptives. The information that's available to high school women on these two things is just none at all. In many of the Black communities and Black high schools there's no way that Black women have any access to this type of information and so therefore there's a large percentage of Black high school women who are getting pregnant every year—thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen years old. Many of these women are either forced out of their homes because their parents can't afford to take care of more children or the mothers that run these households are forced into a worse situation.

A lot of these high school women are forced out of school because they have to go out and work to take care of their children.

It's important that we have an educational campaign of getting more information to these high school women because of this type of new situation they're going to be in. They're going to be looking at themselves for the first time as being oppressed as women as well as being oppressed as Blacks.

Paul Boutelle, Berkeley

This is just a point of information, not a contribution to the discussion. There's a slide show that's out on Black women in history. It's been put together within the last three months by Naima Washington, who is close to our politics.

She also has a column in a newspaper called the *Sun Reporter*. It's called "Profiles in Black, White, and Beige," about the history of Black women. You can contact her through the San Francisco *Sun Reporter* newspaper. It's a Black newspaper. Or contact her through Frobén Lozada in the Oakland branch of the Socialist Workers Party.

Hattie McCutcheon, Roxbury, Boston

I wasn't planning to make any comments, but Rohima's remarks about Black high school students made me think of something that kind of hit close to home.

Recently when I was at home my sister was telling me that my niece, who is fourteen now, had to get married. We know that at least a quarter of Black families are headed by women. In many cases Black women have to take on

two or three jobs if they do not want to be forced onto the welfare lines, which many Black women are forced to go on against our will.

So my sister was arguing that maybe it was better for my niece to get married because obviously if she got married, her husband would go into the service, she would get allotment checks, and that would take care of some of the financial responsibility. But it just continued that vicious cycle that Black women in this country have to continually face, with sexist abuse as well as just racist oppression. It's a whole vicious cycle that we have to begin to break out of.

The only way that we're going to do that is what Willie Mae said earlier. The role that we—Black women within the Trotskyist movement—play within the coming period is very important. I think that many of us are beginning to realize that our oppression as women can no longer be separated from our oppression as being Black. We are both, and we have to fight on both fronts.

All of us have to be very, very conscious about our oppression and make sure that we aren't put back into sexist stereotypes or sexist positions—even if unconsciously. We have to begin to exert ourselves because no one is going to fight our oppression more than ourselves. It's going to be very important for Black women to play the historical role that we've always played within the Black liberation movement and that is to begin to take the lead, to begin to exert ourselves, to be more conscious about making sure that anything that our party does reflects the interests and the needs of Black women.

Because of the lull in the women's movement itself, many sisters, both Black and white, have begun to accept again sexism and chauvinism without being able to deal with it. We don't feel as confident anymore about fighting head on against sexist discrimination whether it be in the movement or outside of the movement. Whereas at the height of the women's movement we had a whole layer of women across the country fighting and demanding that women be treated as full human, equal beings and it made it easier for us, gave us a confidence that we had a whole lot of support behind us. With the lull in the women's movement, a lot of us have begun to lose confidence.

I think this workshop is beginning the process of regenerating the confidence we need to put ourselves forth, to not hold back. It's obvious. Given the economic crisis, the turn that the party is making, when you look at the cuts in New York City, the people who are being cut the most are Black, but mainly Black women. So, more than ever, I think it's going to be important for Black women to play key leadership roles at every level within the party. That means when we go back to our different localities we have to be part and parcel of everything our party does, making sure that our voices are heard, becoming leaders in our campaign committees, leaders in our ERA work, leaders in every aspect of what the party is doing.

Just as Willie Mae pointed out earlier, once we begin to fulfill the leadership role that we must, I'm confident the struggle for Black liberation and women's liberation will be hastened.

Nan Bailey, Chelsea, New York

I just wanted to say two things. One is that I think this discussion that we had here is an important beginning for us. It's really initiating a discussion that we're going to

have to continue. One of the things that has impressed me just listening to what the people have had to say here, and also that struck me at the Black women's conference in Pittsburgh, was that we really have very little information about the activities that Black feminists have been involved in around the country. I think this is one of the things we have to try to organize a little bit more to find out more about.

Conferences like the one in Pittsburgh may or may not be unique. I don't know. But we should find out more about activities like this.

It's going to be important to report on these activities too in the *Militant* and the *YS* to let other people know what's going on, to share the information, to be able to pool the

information through the National Office.

Just finding out more about what's going on and getting involved in these activities will help us lay the basis for being able to prepare literature that answers the questions on the minds of supporters of Black women's rights, women who are involved in the activities that we'll be participating in.

I hope that everyone here takes the initiative and encourages other comrades to take the initiative to write articles and make suggestions like some that have been made here already about the kind of literature and articles and reviews that are needed to step up our coverage of activities among Black feminists.

Party Participation in the Coalition of Labor Union Women

[The following is the edited report given by Carol DeBerry, Oakland branch, at the workshop on Party Participation in the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), held at the Socialist Workers Party convention, August 1976.]

* * *

The Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) has been in existence a little over two years, and we have been active participants in it from its inception. Two years ago at Oberlin we noted that we, as a party, were just beginning to get a knuckle into the unions at a time when one of the most oppressed sectors of the working class was in motion—women workers.

We should stop now and analyze the developments of these past two and a half years. Where has CLUW gone? What has it accomplished? Have we changed our basic evaluation of CLUW and orientation to it?

The answer to the last question is no. To better understand this, we must understand, in a very fundamental sense, what CLUW is and how we must view our work within it.

We see our work in CLUW as long-term. The development of CLUW is a reflection in the unions of the radicalization of women, and as such, a part of our overall work in the women's liberation struggle. The development of feminism has had a very deep impact on the population as a whole and on every layer of women in this society. Working women are no exception; they are not excluded from this process. The deepening of feminist sentiment among women workers is a powerful development and cannot be underestimated if we are to proceed correctly.

At the same time, the work we are doing in CLUW is part of our trade-union work.

At the beginning of the women's liberation struggle, we pointed out that the movement was wide open to discussion, debate, and action. There was no deeply entrenched reformist leadership in a position to block the spread of a militant struggle. We were able to play an active role in the leadership of the abortion rights movement and other struggles because we correctly understood and expressed the mood of women. We knew how to explain what had to be done and how to do it.

It was out of the feminist movement that CLUW arose. To date CLUW is the most important harbinger of the power the labor movement can bring to bear on ending women's oppression. At the same time, we face certain objective problems. We are trying to put forward a class-struggle perspective within a labor movement dominated by an already existing, heavily bureaucratized leadership. The union officialdom is doing everything it can to hold down the militancy of real worker fighters. This conservatism filters down into CLUW in several ways. Some of the CLUW leadership go along with the concept of CLUW that the United Auto Workers and AFL-CIO officialdom has—that is, a paper organization. Other sections of the leadership of CLUW do not agree with this approach but are not ready to move against it.

We have an example of this around CLUW's participation in the recently held Equal Rights Amendment demonstration in Springfield, Illinois, on May 16 of this year.

May 16 ERA Demonstration

We wanted CLUW to endorse and participate actively in the May 16 demonstration, so we talked to a number of people in the chapters and on the National Executive Board (NEB) of CLUW before the March 6-7 NEB meeting in Washington, D.C. A majority of the NEB members favored this action. They led a fight at that meeting to adopt a resolution endorsing the May 16 action and calling for participation in it by CLUW members. The resolution was adopted by the majority in spite of CLUW President Olga Madar's vehement opposition to it.

A second, more general resolution on the ERA was also adopted unanimously.

Everyone felt pretty good after the Springfield support resolution was passed, but Madar began a counteroffensive soon after the NEB meeting, aimed at downplaying active chapter support and activities in building the Springfield ERA demonstration. This had a demoralizing effect on some people in the CLUW leadership who had led the fight.

We went ahead with building support within the unions, helping to form union ERA committees, and getting busloads of unionists to attend the demonstration. In the Far West, solidarity rallies on May 16 and 17 were organized. Chicago CLUW, through the influence of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC), the left-wing Social Democrats, participated actively in organizing and building the Springfield action. It placed a full-time CLUW person in the Chicago office of the coordinating committee for the demonstration. As we know, the demonstration itself was successful.

The next NEB meeting was in June, held in San Francisco. This meeting accomplished very little and there was not much we ourselves could do. The only controversy was around a request made by a Teamster NEB union delegate to give the CLUW membership lists from each respective union to these union delegates, for purposes of organizing and representation. She raised a very cogent question: "If you cannot know who your members are, what is the function of a union delegate on the NEB?"

The response from the chair was a blatant: "We can't give out the membership lists because we don't want people organizing caucuses." A spirited fight was put up and some of us participated in it, but the matter at issue never came to the floor as a vote and was therefore side-stepped.

There was no meeting of the ERA Task Force, unfortunately. Olga Madar did announce, however, that all future CLUW work with ERA coalitions would be done strictly through ERAmerica, a lobbying and elections-oriented organization.

We spoke out against this because it was an attempt to block further action coalitions between CLUW and other

pro-ERA groups—the National Organization for Women, students, and unions. However, we were the only ones to vote against Madar's report. But it remains to be seen if this ERAmerica dictum will be enforced within CLUW.

The most enthusiastic portion of the meeting was the regional reports, which outlined activities the chapters had been carrying on around ERA activity, especially May 16. We think CLUW chapters should continue their ERA work, allying with any and all forces that agree on the need for actions and education around this issue.

Our Strategy for Building CLUW

The work we did to organize union support for the May 16 action is a good example of our strategy for building CLUW. CLUW's endorsement of the demonstration—and the activities it carried out in some areas to build it—was in line with CLUW's Statement of Purpose, which makes ratification of the ERA a priority. The Statement of Purpose says that CLUW's job is to mobilize labor behind the struggles of women workers—the ERA, equal pay, affirmative action, and other issues. As CLUW activists, our main job is to help CLUW win new members by putting this perspective into action.

To win the rank-and-file militants to its ranks, CLUW has to show these women it is fighting in their interests, both on the job and in the unions. Today, CLUW remains a relatively small organization. Its potential for growth lies in aggressively implementing the program of action laid out in the Statement of Purpose, seeking the support of the labor movement as a whole.

This is the class-struggle approach to building CLUW. It differs sharply from the strategy followed by sectarian groups in CLUW, such as the International Socialists and the October League.

Members of these organizations have failed to grasp that the way to transform CLUW is to get it involved in action campaigns around the most pressing issues for women workers. They do not put forward a political perspective for building CLUW, but rather one for "exposing the bureaucrats." But the fundamental lines of division inside CLUW are not between the labor officials *en toto* and the ranks, but between those who want to transform CLUW into a fighting organization for women's rights and those who do not.

The sectarians' head-on opposition to "the bureaucrats" only succeeds in deflecting the discussion away from the question of political perspective. It turns off the interested, radicalizing rank-and-file women. One thing we must remember about union members is that they tend to be loyal to their unions when these unions come under attack from people perceived as "outsiders."

Those who do not want CLUW involved in action campaigns make use of the sectarians' mistaken policies and entrap them. They use these mistakes to distract attention from the real political issues at hand. The sectarians' approach also has made it more difficult to win over those sections of the CLUW leadership that can potentially be drawn into activities that will help build CLUW.

Affirmative Action

CLUW has made some serious errors in its short life-span. One of the most important of these errors is the

incorrect position it took in the debate over affirmative action and seniority. In a narrow vote at the spring 1975 National Coordinating Committee (NCC) meeting of CLUW, the body defeated a motion we presented to place CLUW in opposition to discriminatory layoffs—in other words, to reaffirm CLUW's stand in defense of affirmative action at the workplace. The CLUW officials buckled under pressure from the AFL-CIO and UAW bureaucracies, which uphold seniority over affirmative action rights.

How can an organization like CLUW, formed for the purpose of overcoming inequities union women suffer, take a position in favor of continued discrimination against the very women it is supposed to represent? Affirmative action is a question very dear to the hearts of radicalizing working women. CLUW is in an untenable situation with its current position. The fight on this issue is far from over.

I can give you a specific example from my union, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Public employee jobs are generally based on civil service rules as well as a contract between the union and the employer. In my situation, there is a third element, personnel and policy procedures.

The civil service rules are being revised in my district because of affirmative action programs. One of the old rules had required "promotional" exams for a job opening when there were enough present employees qualified for the job. This is as opposed to "open" exams, which are advertised to the public and open to everyone, including those who are not presently employees.

The district wanted to do away with promotional exams; the union was opposed to this. I thought this through in line with our position on affirmative action and layoffs, discussed it with the branch leadership, and our conclusion was to have an affirmative action policy on exams.

The formula I presented to my union was that the job should be advertised within the district—for, say, a week—and then the applications studied. If sufficient employees in "protected groups" applied (Blacks, other minorities, women), it should be a promotional exam. If not, it should be an open exam.

I was on the civil service committee, which agreed with my position. But we expected opposition in the union. To my surprise, a white male put my proposal into a motion; another seconded it; and it passed unanimously.

But the union president, and other higher paid, mostly white male workers, opposed it in a vicious, underhanded campaign. The motion was rescinded.

The AFSCME International Executive Committee has adopted the position of fighting for the best in both affirmative action and seniority—certainly not the clearest position, but in light of most trade unions' standards, not one of the worst. The AFSCME international is in a dilemma—no women were elected to a national office at the June 1976 national convention.

When the question of affirmative action comes up in a union, especially around specific issues that threaten the privileged positions of white males, clashes often develop between women and minorities on the one side and the white male membership on the other. The union leadership is usually right in there defending and leading the fight of the white males against the rest of the working class. They are militant as hell on this issue! This is a default of the union leadership. Working people can only unite and be strong defending the rights of the most oppressed sections

of the working class—and that is us, women and national minorities.

December 1975 CLUW Convention

We waged a principled fight to place the issue of affirmative action on the agenda at the December 1975 CLUW convention. We argued that time must be set aside to discuss this issue, the ERA, and layoffs. We hoped that the convention would overturn the NCC's incorrect position on affirmative action. The convention failed to do this, but the campaign we helped lead was successful in demonstrating what the most effective program for building CLUW is.

The convention's failure to reverse the affirmative action stand was a setback. But it was a temporary setback, because this debate will arise again as attacks by the capitalist class against the working class continue.

Our participation at the CLUW convention overall was successful.

After we managed to get the floor to make the motion to open up the agenda, 30 percent of the delegates—a significant number—voted in favor of the motion.

Victories were won on two major issues—the question of rank-and-file representation on the National Executive Board and the question of the ERA. The National Executive Board fight centered on chapter representation. The officials wanted only chapters with 100 or more members to get a representative. The convention voted to lower the ratio to 50. We and other CLUW militants played a key role in this fight.

The convention adopted enthusiastically an amendment to the Statement of Purpose in CLUW's constitution. The amendment put CLUW on record for “a mass-action and educational campaign” around the ERA until it is ratified.

I want to very briefly discuss a tactical mistake I think we made at the convention, a mistake we can learn from. We began by centering the fight for a discussion of issues around the idea of counterposing an alternate agenda to that proposed by CLUW officials, as opposed to simply trying to make an amendment to their agenda. This approach tended to make us appear to be in head-on opposition to the CLUW leadership. We did not want the supporters of the alternate agenda to look like a power caucus out to capture the leadership of CLUW. This was a fight over political ideas, not posts. We recognized this error in the wee hours of the morning and we corrected it. We switched to an amendment proposal and we gained support from a number of women who agreed with the idea of having a political discussion but felt uncomfortable with an alternate agenda. (And we lost the support of the sectarians, who charged we had “sold out.”)

To further clarify where we stood, we could have taken another step. During the election of national officers, incumbent president Olga Madar was opposed by only one candidate, the October League's Dana Duke. In union elections, where all candidates represent one or another current within the labor movement, we usually have no *principled* reason to vote for or against a particular candidate. This is different from elections for president, Congress, or other posts in the state apparatus where parties and candidates represent different *classes* and we never cross class lines to vote for the “lesser evil.”

In union elections revolutionary socialists usually try to pick the better candidate and vote for that person. It's a

tactical question to be decided on the basis of whether victory for one of the candidates would be likely to advance the fight for union democracy or other objectives we consider important. For example, when Abel ran against McDonald in 1965 for president of the Steelworkers union, we voted for Abel as a “lesser evil.”

In the CLUW election it was clearly better to vote for Madar, who—despite her great shortcomings—at least stood for building CLUW as an integral part of the organized labor movement. With Madar as president for the next year, there was a *chance* CLUW could engage in actions that would attract some real forces and move toward becoming a viable organization fighting for women workers' needs. OL's program boils down to turning CLUW into an anti-imperialist caucus outside the union movement. With Duke as president, CLUW would have *no chance whatsoever* of being anything but a sectarian OL front.

We had not discussed this out in our fraction prior to the election, so our forces divided and comrades voted different ways. Had we all demonstratively voted for Madar—after having made crystal clear during the convention our counterperspectives to hers—we would have expressed our perspective for CLUW as a *union* organization. And we would have undercut the charges that we were merely a power caucus seeking to supplant the current officeholders.

Before the CLUW convention, we recognized that the union bureaucracy was moving to housebreak CLUW, strangle it, and make it a paper organization. This is why the CLUW officers wanted to prevent any programmatic discussion at the convention. But they were unsuccessful—even within their own ranks. The attitude of many CLUW militants who went to the convention was one of *testing* CLUW. What came out of the convention would determine whether they stayed in or not.

The affirmative action fight became a pole of attraction for these militants. The victories won demonstrated that it is worth staying in CLUW and trying to change it.

Long-term Perspective

In the last analysis, CLUW must be seen as a product of the radicalization and a product of the feminist movement in particular. It is influenced by the dynamics—the ups and downs—of the women's liberation movement. To the extent that the union officials succeed in stifling CLUW, this is a temporary setback. For how long, we cannot predict. But the women's liberation struggle is on the march. So is the fight to democratize the unions. The labor fakers may slow women down, but they can't stop them. Working women are going to mobilize to fight for their rights as women, just as they are determined to fight for all their rights on the job and in society as a whole.

Understanding CLUW and the possibilities for it requires understanding processes in motion and what we mean by a “long-term perspective.”

The antiwar and abortion rights struggles seemed to move along at a more rapid pace than has been the case with CLUW. We fought out ideological battles in these other movements, won support for our perspective, and played an influential role in the leadership. We were able to organize antiwar sentiment and give it voice through big antiwar marches. As a result, the antiwar movement was successful in mobilizing millions of people, demand-

ing that the troops be brought home.

These campaigns were based on the student movement, in which socialists were active leaders.

With CLUW, we start with a relatively small number of comrades in the labor movement. Much bigger forces, bureaucratized over decades, dominate this movement. Building a class-struggle left wing does not happen overnight. At the same time, our role in other parts of the women's liberation movement—such as NOW and the campus women's groups—plays an important part.

Building Local Unions

The fight to win over co-workers to our perspective is a patient one. It starts in our local unions. We must be the best builders of our unions, addressing ourselves to struggles that meet the fundamental needs of working women. Every situation has to be reviewed and issues found around which to educate, propagandize, agitate, and then act. The issues are there—and there are many. That's why CLUW came into existence.

Child care is a good example. This is an issue directly related to the right of women to have jobs in industry as a necessary component of the work force, and thereby to be in the union movement. Affirmative action is another issue, and so is the fight to ratify the ERA. These are issues that deal with raising women, as well as national minorities, to full and equal status. They strike a blow at the ruling class's divide-and-rule strategy, at its attempts to create a reserve army of labor that many workers consider to be outside the labor movement.

We should also be good union builders in general, addressing ourselves to issues that affect the entire union membership. We do this in order to build a movement within the unions that can lead to turning them away from class-collaborationist policies and toward class-struggle policies based on the mobilization of the ranks. Our job is to teach union members to think socially and act politically. CLUW—by fighting for the unions to champion the needs of women workers—is a potentially viable instrument through which to begin that task.

We carry out this perspective in the spirit of strengthening and building the unions—and we mean it. Our fire is always directed at the boss, gaining the support of the workers, and seeking the backing of the union as a whole. Once the momentum has started, the union officials find themselves in the position of either supporting the demands of the ranks or being exposed.

CLUW is not a separate union, not a caucus, not a faction. It—and its members—are an integral part of the union movement.

We are angry women and we think it's high time we were given our rights! This is the mood that is developing more and more among union women. Every time the women's liberation movement wins any kind of victory, it makes an increasing number of working women more desirous of finding a way to make their unions respond to this struggle.

Our job is not so much to make these women fighting mad—they are taking care of that aspect of things themselves. Our task is to help the women militants fight intelligently and effectively. That is—fight to win!

Tempo is important. We have thought through our strategy carefully. CLUW can play a potentially key role in the development of a class-struggle left wing in the

labor movement. In order to win the support of women, such a left wing must show in practice that it champions their struggles.

CLUW has the potential to become the leading organization fighting for women in this country, attracting millions. By doing so, it would also be in the forefront of the working class.

This is the strategic aim we fight for. We time our tactical moves to fit the reality of the situation.

Whether this goal can be achieved through CLUW is another question, but this is the perspective we fight for. CLUW may not, in the final analysis, ever develop into the organization women look to. That depends on whether it is willing to fight in defense of working women's needs. Right now, however, CLUW exists, and we want to work to build it.

CLUW's future in the last analysis is tied to the bigger struggle involving the working class as a whole—the struggle to take democratic control of the unions and put them to work for the interests of the membership. In that sense, time and events can be expected to bring about an increasingly close relationship between our work in CLUW and our activity in the trade-union movement as a whole.

We will most likely find that many women who join CLUW come into it with a learner's attitude. This has a positive side. But it also has a negative side to it, and that is learning and accepting the ground rules already laid down by the bureaucracy in the unions. We're not interested in perpetuating the unions as they are—their class-collaborationist approach and the racist and sexist attitudes they try to foster. While learning the mechanics of running a union is important, we want to help new militants think through a strategy that can make the unions function as they should, and then act in a tactically intelligent way to bring this about.

Next Steps for CLUW

Let's turn now to our concrete approach to CLUW. Since the SWP convention last year, the developments in the women's liberation struggle have made the ERA the best issue around which to focus our CLUW work because it is currently the issue that can draw the largest number of working women into action.

We estimate that because this is an election year it will be difficult to get any kind of mass actions off the ground this fall. But we should continue educational activity around the ERA and other issues in those CLUW chapters where it is realistic. We should work with ERA coalitions wherever we can, placing special emphasis on mobilizing union support. Both male and female comrades should attempt to build ERA committees in our unions and make the ERA a central project of union women's committees where they exist.

These union women's committees may in some cities offer the best opportunities for activity in defense of women's rights at this time. This by no means implies that we should drop out of CLUW chapters, even if they are inactive. We should attend CLUW meetings and wherever we see signs of action, jump in and help it along. The key is to search for the most productive way in each area to get union women involved in struggle around their needs. It may be through CLUW, it may be through a local union committee, or it may be initiated most effectively from

outside the labor movement—through NOW or other feminist groups.

I want to conclude on this point: Our work in CLUW is party work. We need to bring the SWP branches as a whole into more discussions about this work, through reports in the executive committees and in branch meetings, through collaboration with branch organizers, trade-union direc-

tors, and other comrades engaged in women's liberation activities and Black work.

We are socialist union activists who are helping to lay the basis for building a left wing in the labor movement. We want to win the best women militants we work with to our program for transforming not only the unions, but this entire society. We want them to join the Socialist Workers Party.