

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 11, December 9, 1975

Present: Barnes, Breitman, Camejo, Gersh, Hansen, Jenness, Lovell  
Seigle, Sheppard, Thomas, Waters

Visitors: Jones, Miah, Stone

Chair: Waters

AGENDA: 1. Plenum Report on Implementation of Party Turn  
2. Coalition of Labor Union Women Convention  
3. ERA Campaign  
4. Women's Liberation Director  
5. Robert Williams Defense

1. PLENUM REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF PARTY TURN

Jenness reported.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the general line of the report for presentation to the plenum.

Carried.

2. COALITION OF LABOR UNION WOMEN CONVENTION

(Hildebrand, Jaquith and L. Jenness invited for this point.)

L. Jenness reported on the CLUW convention and general line of Militant coverage.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

3. ERA CAMPAIGN

(Hildebrand, Jaquith and L. Jenness invited for this point.)

Jaquith reported on activities being initiated around the country in support of the ERA and our participation (see attached).

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

4. WOMEN'S LIBERATION DIRECTOR

Jenness reported on proposal to assign Jaquith as women's liberation director to replace L. Jenness who has been made available to be organizer in the Lower East Side branch. Cole will replace Jaquith as head of the Washington D.C. bureau. Hildebrand has been released by YSA national office to be on Militant staff to help strengthen coverage and analysis of women's liberation.

Motion: To assign Jaquith as women's liberation director.

Carried.

5. ROBERT WILLIAMS DEFENSE

(Bailey, Smith invited for this point.)

Miah reported.

Discussion

Meeting Adjourned.

## Report on Upcoming Actions for the Equal Rights Amendment

by Cindy Jaquith, December 9, 1975

In the past few weeks, discussion on the need for a national action campaign to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment has spread across the country. The immediate focus of this discussion is on March 8, International Women's Day.

What catalyzed this interest in an ERA campaign was the defeat of state ERAs in New York and New Jersey in the November 4 elections. The defeats shocked most ERA supporters, who had assumed that the measures would pass easily because majority sentiment for the ERA is so strong. This assumption led the pro-ERA coalitions to downplay the need for massive, visible activity around the amendment.

As it now stands, there are less than three years left to secure ERA ratification. The amendment must be ratified in thirty-eight states by 1979, or the measure simply dies. Thirty-four states have ratified so far, but the success of anti-ERA forces in New York and New Jersey emphasized that the ERA could in fact be defeated, unless its supporters get busy.

In recognition of the urgency of this issue, the recent convention of the Coalition of Labor Union Women voted to make a mass-action and educational campaign around the ERA a priority until final ratification is won. The ERA was by far the most popular issue among the 1,000 trade-union women at the convention.

In the National Organization for Women, there is also a serious discussion going on. Many NOW members were disappointed that their national convention in October failed to project any action at all around the ERA.

In Los Angeles, members of NOW, the Socialist Workers party, and other groups have formed an L.A. Coalition for the ERA, based on the coalition of groups there which organized the 4,000-strong "Alice Doesn't Day" demonstration. The new ERA coalition envisions local actions around March 8 and the formation of a national ERA coalition in the near future. It is sending out a mailing to ERA groups, NOW chapters, feminist organizations, and others urging them to also hold activities March 6-8.

The NOW board in Philadelphia has voted unanimously to approve a resolution calling for nationally coordinated, local actions for the ERA March 6-8. The resolution urged that NOW set up a committee to organize these activities and begin contacting interested women in the East and Midwest. The resolution also urged a national demonstration on July 4, possibly to be held in Philadelphia. Members of the SWP who also belong to NOW are active in this effort. (See attached.)

In Illinois, NOW is planning a week of activities in the spring when the ERA comes before the state legislature, including a march on Springfield on April 13.

These proposals were brought to the NOW national board meeting held in San Diego December 6-7. Unfortunately, that meeting was torn by the faction fight currently raging in NOW, and action on the ERA was deferred. The focus of discussion centered on the idea of choosing "target" states that have not yet passed the ERA, and pouring NOW's resources into those states, rather than the idea of a nationwide demonstration.

Meanwhile, Georgians for the ERA has slated a march on the Georgia state legislature for January. The ERA coalition in Virginia plans a similar march. Coalitions are also active in Michigan, Arizona, and Nevada.

Two things stand out in this intensification of ERA activity. One is that more and more ERA supporters are now looking at this as a national struggle, rather than a fight limited to a few states. Some of the strongest coalitions, in fact, are in states where the ERA was passed long ago.

Second, the failure of the lobbying strategy is convincing a growing number of women that a mass-action perspective is crucial in this fight.

We are already helping to build March 8 ERA actions in some cities. In areas where no activities have been called yet, we should help initiate teach-ins, demonstrations, debates, picket lines, or other actions that can help mobilize the broad support that exists for the ERA. Coalitions to build March 6-8 actions can draw together NOW chapters, other feminist groups, student organizations, church and civic groups, groups in the Black community, and unions.

The potential of involving union men and women in this campaign is enhanced by CLUW's passage of an ERA action perspective at its convention. This allows local chapters of CLUW to approach the unions and seek their active support. Getting the unions involved in ERA work will in turn help build CLUW.

The ERA actions can also galvanize the powerful sentiment that exists in the Black communities. A recent poll showed that 83 percent of Blacks now support the ERA.

While building March 6-8 local events, we want to continue to discuss with other forces the need for a national ERA demonstration.

DECEMBER 2, 1975 PROPOSAL TO PHILADELPHIA NOW BOARD  
PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

With the recent defeats of the state ERA referendums in New York and New Jersey, it has become clear to many feminists and supporters of women's rights that we can no longer take for granted the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. The enemies of feminism are busy organizing a nationwide offensive to defeat the ERA in states where it has already been ratified. The women's movement has to answer with a national campaign of our own or risk that the ERA will not be ratified by 1979, which would be a severe blow to the women's movement, setting us back decades. Such a national strategy was successful in the past in winning the right to vote, and more recently, in winning the right to abortion, and is the only strategy which can assure passage of the ERA.

The National Organization for Women is in a unique position to initiate a campaign for ERA ratification, since we are the largest feminist organization in the country. And since Philadelphia will be the principal city involved in the coming bicentennial celebration, Philadelphia would be a good place to be the focus of such a campaign.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Philadelphia NOW:

- 1) Endorse the concepts of nationally coordinated local teach-ins, picket lines and demonstrations on and around March 8, 1976 (International Women's Day), and a national ERA demonstration on July 4, 1976, possibly in Philadelphia.
- 2) Establish a special Committee of NOW to help organize these actions in Philadelphia and to reach out to other feminist groups and supporters of the ERA and involve them in building such actions.
- 3) Pledge the financial and other resources of Philadelphia NOW to the extent possible toward building such actions.
- 4) Propose to the Pennsylvania State Board of NOW and the National NOW Board that they endorse these actions and treat them as a high national priority for NOW chapters in the coming seven months.
- 5) Begin contacting local and state chapters of NOW in the east and Midwest, especially New York and New Jersey chapters, to get them involved in the initial stages of this campaign.