

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
March 27, 1976

TO ALL ORGANIZERS, TRADE UNION, CLUW, and WOMEN'S LIBERATION
DIRECTORS

Dear Comrades,

This is a report on the role the Coalition of Labor Union Women can play in helping involve labor in the campaign to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, and an assessment of where CLUW stands since its December 1975 convention.

CLUW took an important step forward when its National Executive Board, meeting in Washington, D.C. March 6-7, voted to endorse and build the May 16 national demonstration for the ERA in Springfield, Illinois. In Chicago, CLUW is sharing space in the May 16 office set up by the National Organization for Women. The CLUW office address is CLUW-National Rally for the ERA, Suite 1614, 5 S. Wabash, Chicago, Illinois 60603. Telephone (312) 236-4075.

CLUW's involvement in the action opens up new opportunities to get local CLUW chapters and the unions behind May 16. Already, we have begun to see the potential for labor participation with the endorsement of May 16 by the human rights conference of the National Education Association and the significant number of local unions that joined in March 6-8 actions for the ERA. But this only begins to tap the sentiment that exists.

We want to step up our efforts to get labor support for May 16. CLUW members can play a role in their unions to mobilize that support by going on a campaign to win the support of other union members; the endorsement of their unions, prominent labor officials, and central labor councils; and by getting the labor movement to implement that support by setting up local union ERA committees, subsidizing buses to Springfield, putting out leaflets, publicizing the action in union newspapers, and speaking at ERA events.

In Atlanta, a successful labor forum to build May 16 took place March 20, with representatives from the UAW, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and Atlanta Association of Educators speaking on why the unions should join the fight for the ERA. In St. Louis, ERA committees have been established in CLUW, AFSCME, American Federation of Teachers, and the transport workers union.

Since the May 16 action is taking place in the Midwest, the center of powerful unions like the Steelworkers, UAW, and Meatcutters, the potential for labor involvement is great. There are some indications from the CLUW National Executive Board meeting that some officials in the UAW want to help bring about a big turnout from the unions in Springfield. In addition, Illinois is the home base of Steelworkers District 31 Director Ed Sadlowski, who CLUW members can approach to support the May 16 action and to help get other unions involved.

Where CLUW is successful in winning support from trade unionists for May 16, it can recruit new members and increase its influence in the labor movement. In New York, for example, CLUW organized two workshops at a March 13 ERA conference called by the National Organization for Women. The workshops were well-attended. Seven women there decided to rejoin CLUW and three trade union women joined CLUW for the first time.

All men and women comrades in the unions should be trying to get their unions behind May 16. This work is one of the most important focuses of our union activity right now and will help us come into contact with the best militants at the workplace.

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The March 6-7 National Executive Board meeting of CLUW was also significant from the standpoint of the development of CLUW.

Since the CLUW convention, sectarians like the October League and International Socialists have dropped out of some CLUW chapters, having decided that CLUW is "dead." They have remained in other chapters where their relative strength is greater, such as Detroit, Washington, D.C., Boston, Denver, Atlanta, and Southern Alameda (California).

But the sectarians have virtually no representation left on the National Executive Board. Now that they are gone, those officials in CLUW who favor a more action-oriented strategy for the organization feel freer to raise their views. Thus in the discussion over May 16, Liz McPike, state coordinator of Illinois AFSCME, and UAW representatives from Detroit advanced arguments for getting CLUW more involved in mass-action campaigns around the ERA. They were able to carry a vote in favor of May 16 over the objections of CLUW President Olga Madar. (McPike is also a member of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee.)

There was also discussion at the meeting on improving democracy and communications in CLUW, with some steps taken to give CLUW members more rights.

These developments confirm our view that CLUW has the potential to play an important role in advancing the involvement of the unions in the fight for women's rights. Today, CLUW is still very small. This will not change overnight, of course. CLUW is a product of the struggles of women over the past decade and the growing sentiment among working women for their unions to be part of those struggles. Its future is dependent upon bigger changes yet to take place in the labor movement as a whole, and on developments in the fight for women's liberation.

At this time, we think CLUW has excellent opportunities to take the ERA ratification campaign into the labor movement. We are centering our work in CLUW on this campaign. We should be carrying out CLUW work in close conjunction with ERA or women's liberation fractions and with the union fractions. In most branches or locals, CLUW members should be part of both fractions.

Some CLUW chapters have faced a problem of becoming isolated from the union movement, with CLUW activities revolving solely around the city-wide chapter and its small number of members. We want to center our work in CLUW on the unions and recruiting more union women to CLUW. Building CLUW means building union participation in CLUW.

This work is similar to our other activity in the unions at this time. Much of it requires patient work on a one-to-one basis. We are engaged in bringing our ideas and social struggles such as the fight for the ERA and for busing into the labor movement, trying to get the unions behind these fights.

In CLUW, this means trying to implement CLUW's Statement of Purpose, which outlines a campaign to get labor behind the struggle of women, for the ERA, affirmative action, equal pay, etc. This is the political program we want to put forth and win support for from other CLUW activists. We have no interest in power fights or sterile debates with CLUW officials over secondary, procedural matters that will only get in the way of discussing and acting upon the political issues before CLUW. Wherever possible, we want to win the support of CLUW officials for actions that can take the organization forward.

All our work in CLUW is fundamentally aimed at attracting rank-and-file militants to CLUW. These are the women CLUW must recruit in order to become an effective instrument for mobilizing the power of labor behind women's demands.

Comradely,

Cindy Jaquith

Cindy Jaquith
SWP National Office