

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 8, February 18, 1977

Present: Blackstock, Breitman, Garza, Hawkins, D. Jenness, Jones, Lovell, Lund, Miah, Rodríguez, Seigle, Sheppard, Waters, Wohlforth

Guests: Brundy, Heisler, Jaquith, Matson, Petrin

Chair: Wohlforth

AGENDA: 1. Plenum
2. South Africa
3. Black Work Steering Committee
4. Women's Liberation
5. Revolutionary Marxist Committee
6. Membership

1. PLENUM

Waters reported on proposal from secretariat to hold a National Committee plenum April 14-17 in New York City with a tentative agenda of: (1) World movement; (2) International perspectives of American imperialism; (3) State of the American labor movement; (4) Black liberation struggle; (5) Organization report(s); (6) Convention call.

The secretariat proposes that (1) local organizers and (2) branch organizers from cities where there is no local be invited to attend the plenum.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

2. SOUTH AFRICA

(Austin, Hart, Sedwick, and Zimmermann invited for this point)

Miah reported. (See attached.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

3. BLACK WORK STEERING COMMITTEE

(Austin and Hart invited for this point)

Miah reported. Four of the six members of the Black

(over)

Work Steering Committee established last year have now left New York for new assignments and a new steering committee should be designated.

Motion: That the Black Work Steering Committee be composed of the following: Malik Miah, John Hawkins, Willie Mae Reid, Omari Musa, Tony Austin, Pat Wright; plus three comrades designated by the YSA National Executive Committee--Cathy Sedwick, Osborne Hart, and Eli Green.

Discussion

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

4. WOMEN'S LIBERATION

(Zimmermann invited for this point)

Jaquith reported. (See attached letter.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

5. REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST COMMITTEE

Seigle reported that leaders of the Detroit-based RMC will be proposing to upcoming RMC conference that the group seek fusion with the SWP. We have been invited to attend and give greetings to the conference, which will be held March 5-6 in Detroit.

Discussion

Motion: To continue discussion at next meeting.

Carried.

6. MEMBERSHIP

D. Jenness reported on recommendation of the Roxbury branch that R.S. be readmitted to the party.

Discussion

Motion: To concur with the recommendation.

Carried.

Meeting adjourned.

REPORT ON SOUTHERN AFRICAN CAMPAIGN
AND NSCAR STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

By Malik Miah, February 18, 1977

This report will go over the progress of the March 25-26 protests initiated by the National Student Coalition Against Racism (NSCAR); the status of the Tsietsi Mashinini and Khotso Seatlholo tours; the February 26 national steering committee of NSCAR; and the West Coast steering committee meeting of NSCAR scheduled for March 5 in San Francisco.

March 25-26 protests

In areas of the country where SCAR is organized, forums, rallies, and/or marches are being planned for March 25-26 or the week beforehand. In cities like San Francisco and Detroit where SCAR has succeeded in tapping the large opposition to apartheid, marches and rallies are expected to take place and have received wide support, including campus organizations, Black community groups and trade unions. Nationally SCLC has endorsed the protests as have some local leaders of the NAACP. (The winter mobilizer incorrectly reports national endorsement by Operation PUSH. However, Rev. Willie Barrows--an Operation PUSH leader--has endorsed the actions.)

However, most cities have been slow in getting endorsers or forming campus and citywide coalitions to build March 25-26. Although this is true it is not too late to initiate campus and city coalitions around southern Africa. Most Black organizations, for example, are willing to endorse actions against South African racism. This, of course, will not necessarily lead to active participation in citywide coalitions.

We view the March 25-26 activities as the first step in organizing a national campaign against U.S. involvement in southern Africa. Therefore, we expect these protests to be of modest size. But this initial work will gain NSCAR more authority and important contacts for future activities.

Mashinini and Seatlholo tours

To help build these protests NSCAR has organized a national speaking tour for two of the central high school leaders of June 16--Tsietsi Mashinini and Khotso Seatlholo. Seatlholo went into exile in mid-January, and was the second president of Soweto Student Representative Council.

According to the NSCAR national office, response to their tour has been enthusiastic. On most campuses where they will

will be speaking, the meetings will be broadly sponsored.

Because Mashinini and Seatlholo are well-known leaders from South Africa, NSCAR is encouraging supporters of the tour to help provide security for their meetings. This is extremely important, since a number of exiles have been murdered directly or indirectly by agents of the South African secret police, BOSS.

Despite the outstanding credentials of the two student leaders, there have been some underhanded criticisms leveled at them by forces involved in the southern African movement. Some of the most serious attacks have come from leaders of the American Committee on Africa based in New York City. (The American Committee has been doing work on Africa for years and has contacts in the State Department and the United Nations.) These attacks, directed at NSCAR and at Mashinini, have been circulated by staff members of the American Committee. The committee has told some of NSCAR's contributors that they are not co-sponsoring the tour because of Mashinini's criticisms of the ANC (African National Council) and PAC (Pan African Congress), two nationalist currents in South Africa. They specifically mentioned an article that appeared in the Christian Science Monitor in January. Committee representatives have raised questions about the financial arrangements of the tour.

The most serious attacks have come in the form of agent-baiting of Mashinini. Using the Christian Science Monitor article, some individuals involved in various South Africa coalitions have inferred that Mashinini is either "naive" or an agent of the South African secret police. This has occurred in more than one area of the country.

These slanders of Mashinini and NSCAR are quite serious. Already several financial contributors to NSCAR have refused to give money for the tours because of these attacks. The International Aid and Defense Fund, for example, initially withdrew its co-sponsorship of the tour. Subsequently they reversed that decision after they had a discussion with a representative from the ANC who told them that Mashinini, in their opinion, was wrong in his criticisms of the ANC, but was a legitimate leader of the liberation struggle.

Comrades should be aware that NSCAR does not support one or another nationalist current in South Africa. NSCAR supports the overall fight for Black majority rule and opposes any attempts by the white regime and its imperialist backers to deny the Black majority control of their country.

NSCAR also opposes attempts by groups in the southern African movement to single out one group over another as the revolutionary organization. It is up to the South African

people to decide who their leaders are and how to conduct their struggle.

We believe that in the process of the revolutionary struggles in Zimbabwe and South Africa new organizations can emerge, and may even lead the struggle. Our main concern in the United States is to organize opposition to government ties--economic, political, and military--to the racist regimes. This represents the best and most effective way to aid the liberation struggles in southern Africa.

Since the purpose of the Mashinini and Seatlholo tours is to publicize the plight of the Black majority in South Africa and to explain how that majority is fighting back, slanders against them have only one meaning: to undermine NSCAR's attempts to get a viable solidarity movement organized.

Although the bulk of the criticisms of NSCAR's efforts have come from forces around the American Committee on Africa, the Stalinists have also attacked NSCAR. These attacks have come in the form of red-baiting.

About two weeks ago Ed Kennedy, a leader of the YWLL, and a member of the National Student Association (NSA) staff, called NSCAR and informed them that the NSA was breaking off all relations with NSCAR because it was dominated by the YSA. However, the NSA has not had a National Board meeting in months. The next one is in late February. It is possible that this was an individual action by Ed Kennedy, but it shows that the Stalinists are worried about NSCAR's southern African campaign and would like to wreck it.

In general, the Stalinists have done very little around southern Africa since the Carter victory. It appears they are taking a "wait-and-see" approach toward Carter and Young before deciding to support future protests around southern Africa. For example, at a recent (February 16) coalition meeting of a group initiated by the World Peace Council, which is thinking of holding a national conference on April 2, James Steele, YWLL national chairperson, explained that he thought any coalition on southern Africa should have a limited perspective this spring. It should only organize educational forums and teach-ins on southern Africa; no demonstrations.

It is clear that the debate over perspectives for building a viable campaign against U.S. complicity with the racist regimes in southern Africa is just beginning. Many of the questions raised in the Angola debate are again being raised. In that light, the response to the Soweto student leaders' tours indicates the correctness of NSCAR's initiative in calling for protests on March 25-26. No matter how large or small these actions

will be, NSCAR's authority will be enhanced and its strategy of independent actions primarily aimed at the government will gain more support.

NSCAR February 26 steering committee meeting

In New York City on February 26 NSCAR will be holding its national steering committee meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to assess the southern African campaign and begin a discussion on post-March 25-26 protests. The meeting will discuss the tours of the Soweto leaders and the recent campaign to undermine their authority.

The meeting will also assess where the fight for school desegregation stands; the April 9 anti-death penalty march in Atlanta; and the numerous defense cases NSCAR supports.

West Coast steering committee meeting

On March 5 NSCAR will hold a West Coast steering committee meeting at San Francisco State college. This will be the first time that NSCAR has held a steering committee meeting on the West Coast. The meeting will hear a national report from the New York steering committee meeting and discuss how to carry out NSCAR campaigns on the West Coast. The meeting will also hear reports on the Bakke struggle and the Los Angeles desegregation fight.

NSCAR expects to use this meeting to discuss its increased work among Chicanos and Native Americans. A rally is also being organized on Friday night.

Party's role in this work

Because of the breadth of activities that NSCAR is involved in, and the importance of the southern African campaign, it is important that branches help the YSA build viable SCAR chapters on the campuses. It is also important that party members try to take the southern African campaign into the unions. Almost every union is opposed to apartheid (this is the official position of the AFL-CIO, for example). Comrades in unions should seek endorsements for March 25-26 activities; get resolutions passed on southern Africa; and invite citywide coalition or NSCAR leaders to speak before their union meetings. We should especially try to get activists of Steelworkers Fight Back to support the different campaigns of NSCAR.

Militant coverage of the Mashinini and Seatlholo tours will be an important aid in building the March 25-26 protests. Comrades should be assigned to cover all their meetings for the Militant.

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
February 23, 1977

TO ORGANIZERS AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION DIRECTORS

Dear Comrades,

Attached is a resolution submitted to the April National Organization for Women (NOW) conference by Clare Fraenzl, Rhonda Rutherford, and more than eighty other NOW activists. The list of initial women signing the resolution is included.

The positive response this resolution has already received among NOW members is shown by the broad geographic representation of the list of signers, from California to Texas, to the Midwest, to New York, and by the large number of local NOW leaders who support it. Included in the list is one member of the NOW National Board, Bev Jones of Hershey, Pa.; the presidents of the NOW chapters in San Jose, San Antonio, and Boston; and numerous women who head up the ERA, abortion, child-care, and other task forces in their chapters. Kathleen Beasley, the Baltimore steelworker interviewed in the December 10, 1976, Militant concerning the sex discrimination suit she initiated, has added her name to the list.

The number of Black women on the initial list of signers is small. This reflects in part the small number of Black women presently in NOW. At the same time, with the increased activity among Black feminists, more are being attracted to NOW. A recent meeting of the Brooklyn, New York, NOW chapter drew five Black and five Puerto Rican women interested in learning more about NOW. Involving Black, Chicana, and Puerto Rican NOW members in discussions around the resolution will be especially important in the coming weeks.

This resolution has evoked a welcome response in just the short time since it was mailed to NOW chapters and leaders around the country. The response demonstrates the concern many NOW members feel about the attacks on women's rights and the need for NOW to chart a course of action to defend these rights. Some signers expressed concern that NOW does not reach out to trade-union women. Others signed because they saw the resolution as pointing the way toward winning Black, Chicana, and Puerto Rican women to NOW.

The impressive support already won for the Fraenzl-Rutherford proposal will help convince other NOW members to seriously consider the strategy laid out in the resolution.

At the February 19-20 national board meeting of NOW, held in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., it was announced that in all, six resolutions were submitted for the April conference by the February 15

deadline. Dianne Feeley, head of the ERA subcommittee of New York NOW, submitted a resolution calling for a fall 1977 national march on Washington, D.C., with building actions around August 26th. She proposed that the march focus on responding to one or more of the attacks on women's rights. The Boston NOW chapter introduced a resolution in support of school desegregation. The other three resolutions were on (1) demanding reparations from churches for their crimes against women; (2) battered wives; and (3) drug abuse of female mental patients. The board decided to extend the deadline for resolutions up to the time of the conference itself. Several other resolutions were submitted during the board meeting.

In the course of talking to NOW members and discussing the Fraenzl-Rutherford proposal, it has become clear that what is at stake in this important NOW discussion is far more than just calling a mass action to defend women's rights. The failure of the NOW leadership to respond thus far to the attacks is linked to the composition of NOW, the nature of the attacks--designed to divide the women's movement along economic and racial lines--and to the NOW leaders' political strategy of subordination to the Democratic Party. Reversing this course requires a thorough discussion of the central role working women and women of the oppressed nationalities must play in the feminist struggle. It also calls for a discussion of where women's allies lie--in the labor movement, the Black communities, and on the campuses--not in Washington.

This discussion promises to be very rich and educational for the entire NOW membership and the women's movement as a whole. In the Washington, D.C., NOW chapter, for example, when the Fraenzl-Rutherford proposal was discussed, a sharp debate ensued around the resolution's call for NOW to make its main priority the defense of Black, Chicana, Puerto Rican, and working women. Some white leaders of NOW challenged the idea that Black women suffer most from sex discrimination. Black NOW members present were among the most vocal in responding to this thinly veiled racist attack. Other NOW leaders have objected to emphasis on the needs of working women, saying this discriminates against housewives.

Initial discussions have also shown that many NOW members are not accustomed to political debate in their chapters. Frequently, resolutions submitted to NOW bodies are passed or rejected with minimal discussion. But to effectively think out and resolve the crisis faced by NOW, a lengthy, free, and open discussion of all these political questions is needed. Adequate time should be set aside in all NOW chapters before the convention to distribute resolutions to the membership and have a full political discussion on them. The same procedure should be followed at the convention.

The latest Do It NOW Newsletter, NOW's national publication,

prints an initial agenda for the national conference. Registration begins on Thursday, April 21. The conference opens Friday, April 22, with an Equal Rights Amendment demonstration. Friday and Saturday are devoted to workshops, a plenary, and the election of national officers. Discussion of resolutions is not scheduled until Sunday, April 24.

The newsletter states that registration fees are \$25 before March 18 and \$35 afterward. It also says that "No NOW member will be turned away at the door" for lack of funds. Because of the great expense of this conference, many NOW chapters will want to organize inexpensive transportation well in advance and carry out fund raising to assure that the largest number of members can attend.

The conference is open to all members of NOW, not just delegates. Non-delegates will have the opportunity to participate in workshops and many other activities.

Fraenzl and Rutherford will continue to collect names of new signers of their proposal and forward them to the NOW resolutions committee. However, the most important job of supporters of this proposal is now to circulate it as widely as possible and open the political discussion around strategy. It should be discussed with Black, Chicana, and Puerto Rican NOW members, and the task forces set up to reach out to these women. Supporters should get it into the hands of trade unionists in NOW, and to NOW's labor task forces. It should be discussed with ERA activists, abortion rights task forces, NOW members working on child care, and on other issues.

In several chapters, signers have already submitted the proposal to their local NOW newsletter, so the whole membership will be informed. (Copies of newsletters reprinting the resolution should be sent to the SWP national office.) Some chapters have decided to set aside at least one night in March devoted solely to discussion of this and other resolutions. Some of the most important discussions will be on an individual basis with NOW members.

As the first discussion in Washington, D.C., has shown, a central aspect of this resolution is the uncompromising stand it takes on the role of women of the oppressed nationalities. Black, Chicana, and Puerto Rican members of NOW who are also members of the Socialist Workers Party will play a leading role in this debate in explaining why the needs of the most oppressed and exploited women must become the starting point for developing NOW's perspectives if the organization is to grow and become a powerful force in the feminist struggle. Trade unionists in NOW will also play an important role in this discussion.

Fraenzl and Rutherford, in consultation with other signers, have mailed copies of the resolution to the feminist and movement press, urging them to reprint it. They point out that the ideas NOW members are now grappling with are critical to the future of the entire women's movement and they urge other organiza-

tions to hold similar discussions.

The Militant is reprinting the Fraenzl-Rutherford resolution and will continue to report on the NOW discussion as it unfolds. The Militant will be one of the most effective ways of reaching NOW members with a discussion of the strategy needed to combat the attacks on women's rights.

The Socialist Workers Party is also organizing speaking engagements for more than a dozen women leaders of the SWP from around the country. These women, who are activists in NOW, in Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican community struggles, or in their unions, will be speaking on the subject "Which Way Forward for the Women's Movement?" Each branch should consider organizing a meeting for one of these speakers sometime before the end of April. (A separate mailing has been sent out on these tours.)

Comradely,



Cindy Jaquith
SWP Women's Liberation
Director

The November 1975 defeat of state ERAs in New York and New Jersey signaled the beginning of a vicious assault on the gains won by women in the late '60s and early '70s. In recent months the attacks against us escalated dramatically: abortion rights, affirmative action plans, child care, maternity benefits, and the ERA have been dealt severe setbacks.

These attacks hit hardest at working women, especially Blacks, Chicanas, Puerto Ricans, Asians, and Native Americans. It is these sisters who suffer the most from losses of Medicaid funding for abortion or pregnancy disability benefits. In fact, the attacks are aimed at dividing women along economic and racial lines. Afraid to take a powerful, united women's movement head on, the enemies of women's liberation hope to pit more privileged women against poorer women, employed against unemployed, organized against unorganized. We must recognize this as a deadly trap for the women's movement and reject it.

NOW needs to discuss and develop a strategy for uniting women and our supporters to fight back on a local, state, and national level. The purpose of this resolution is to present ideas for such a strategy.

1. NOW must make its main priority defense of the rights of our Black, Chicana, Puerto Rican, Asian, Native American, and working sisters, rights that are in jeopardy today. These sisters are bearing the brunt of the recent attacks, but the rights of all women are in grave danger.

We need to pay special attention to defense of abortion rights, affirmative action gains, maternity benefits, child care, and ratification of the ERA. Forced sterilization schemes must be vigorously opposed.

Special efforts must be made to mobilize working women—including sisters who are unemployed or on welfare—and women who are victims of discrimination because of race or nationality. These women have the greatest stake in this fight and we should seek to bring them into NOW by the thousands. They are looking for allies and a way to fight back. NOW chapters should work to bring them into our ranks, and aid should be given to those Task Forces trying to reach out to Black, Chicana, Puerto Rican, Asian, Native American, and working women.

2. We must launch a campaign to counter the attacks on women's rights that includes rallies, picket lines, speak-outs and other public, visible events. Where it is possible, NOW chapters should help involve labor unions, civil rights, student, and other groups in these activities around mutually agreed upon goals.

3. The April NOW conference should issue a call for a national demonstration in the fall, like the one held May 16 for the ERA, around all these issues. We should attempt to draw together the broadest possible spectrum of forces to build a show of unity and strength.

4. Historically it is through our own independent movement that women have progressed. We marched, picketed, and spoke out to win the right to vote and legal abortion. Today, as the recent attacks have shown, we cannot sit back and rely on either of the two governing parties, the Democrats or Republicans, to "give" us our long overdue rights. We must build a powerful, united, independent movement of women and supporters of our rights to win our liberation.

Initial signers: Clare Fraenzl, Vice-Pres. for Liaison, Phila. NOW; Rhonda Rutherford, Phila. NOW; Sue von Lackum, Golden Gate (San Francisco) NOW; Diane Mullikin, Golden Gate (San Francisco) NOW; Andrea Brod, Board, Long Beach, Ca. NOW; Pat Crawford, Vice-Pres. for Child Care, San Francisco NOW; Linda Festa, former Vice-Pres., San Francisco NOW; Claudette Begin, Sec., San Jose NOW; Jana Cunningham, Public Relations Chair, San Jose NOW; Alice Desgrey, Pres., San Jose NOW; Janet Glaab, Chair, Fundraising Comm., San Jose NOW; Wayne Mercer, Chair, San Jose NOW Newsletter; Sonya Wyrick, Treas., San Jose NOW; Elsa Blum, Denver NOW; Phyllis Crawford, Denver NOW; Patricia Candy Sweet, Denver NOW; Carol Coates, Board, Louisville NOW; Kathy Colebanks, Vice-Pres. for Records, Louisville NOW; Leila Cushman, Board, Louisville NOW; Diana Gorshuch, Vice-Pres. for Finances, Louisville NOW; Annette Shaw, Louisville NOW; Debby Tarnopol, Louisville NOW; Kathleen Beasley, Chair, Employment Task Force, Baltimore NOW; Diane Prokipchak, At-large Board, No. Prince Georges Co., Md. NOW; Phyllis Lee, Abortion Comm. Coordinator, Baltimore NOW; Elaine Giddis, Pres., Boston NOW; Reba Williams, Boston NOW; Carol Gillard, Middlesex, Ma. NOW; Marcia King, Middlesex, Ma. NOW; Helen Moore, Middlesex, Ma. NOW; Norma Rae Wachs, Middlesex, Ma. NOW; Christine Miller, State Chair, Affirmative Action Task Force, Board, Ann Arbor, Mi. NOW; Rosalie Sullivan, State Coordinator, May 16 ERA demonstration, Detroit NOW; Lorraine Page, Minority Task Force, St. Paul, Mn. NOW; Sherry Carter, Board, Twin Cities (Mn.) NOW; Gillian Furst, ERA Rep., Twin Cities (Mn.) NOW; Terry Falcone, Central Monmouth, N.J. NOW; Karen Meyers Grant, Lakeland, N.J. NOW; Joan Rashid, Lakeland, N.J. NOW; Alice Conner, Newark, N.J. NOW; Lil Maurice, Newark, N.J. NOW; Kimi Nakata, Newark, N.J. NOW; Mini Jackumar, Princeton, N.J. NOW; Virginia Scott, Board, Bronx NOW; Jean Vertheim, Board, Bronx NOW; Dianne Feeley, Chair, ERA Subcomm., N.Y. NOW; Eileen Foley, ERA Subcomm., N.Y. NOW; Florence Hutkoff, ERA Subcomm., N.Y. NOW; Rosita Perea, Board, N.Y. NOW; Adele Wagner, Treas., N.Y. NOW; Suzanne Eric, Steering Comm., Queens NOW; Maureen MacDougal, Queens NOW; Jacquelyn L. Paine, Cleveland NOW; Ellen Rothchild, Cleveland NOW; Frances Edge, Toledo NOW; Dorothy Harvey, Toledo NOW; Sheila Ostrow, ERA Task Force Coordinator, Toledo NOW; Sue Skinner, Abortion Task Force Coordinator, Toledo NOW; Karen Thaller, Project Coordinator, Toledo NOW; Beverly Jones, NOW National Board (Pa.); Carol McHugh-Vitelli, Lehigh Valley, Pa. NOW; Lynne Hughes, Lower Bucks Co., Pa. NOW; Toby Ricca, Lower Bucks Co., Pa. NOW; Diane Bull, State Exec. Comm., Pa. NOW; Gail Baier, Pres., San Antonio NOW; Jo Della-Giustina, San Antonio NOW Council; Susan Garry, San Antonio NOW; Jean Marie Brough, State Convenor, National By-Laws Convention, Seattle-King Co., Wash. NOW; Heidi Messner, Publicity Coordinator, Seattle-King Co., Wash. NOW; Joan Sandler, Fundraising Coordinator, Seattle-King Co., Wash. NOW; Rita Shaw, ERA Task Force Coordinator, Seattle-King Co., Wash. NOW; Sylvia Bailey, Speakers Bureau Coordinator, Washington, D.C. NOW; Evelyn R. Baker, Washington, D.C. NOW; Leo Bugen, Washington, D.C. NOW; Clara Chichester, Washington, D.C. NOW; Barbara Cohen, Washington, D.C. NOW; Dorothy Hawkinson, Washington, D.C. NOW; Virginia V. Johnson, Washington, D.C. NOW; Olive Neal, Washington, D.C. NOW; Sara Smith, Chair, Aug. 26, 1976, Rally, Washington, D.C. NOW; Peggy Wiesenbergh, Washington, D.C. NOW; Adrienne Kaplan, Exec. Board, Milwaukee NOW; Carol Witon, Women in Poverty Task Force, Milwaukee NOW; (List of other chapters in formation)

MOTIVATION

The November 1975 defeat of state ERAs in New York and New Jersey signaled the beginning of a vicious attack on the gains won by women in the late '60s and early '70s. These defeats alerted feminists to the fact that the rights we have won cannot be taken for granted. The National Organization for Women responded by mobilizing thousands of equal rights supporters to march for the ERA in Springfield, Illinois, on May 16, 1976. It was the most successful women's rights demonstration in years.

Over the fall of 1976, the attacks against us have mushroomed:

—reactionary forces, including the Catholic Church hierarchy, succeeded in making opposition to legal abortion a central issue in the presidential campaign. Bowing to this massive anti-abortion campaign, and in the absence of a powerful countermobilization by the women's movement, Congress passed the Hyde amendment, cutting off Medicaid funds for abortion. If it is upheld in the courts, the Hyde amendment will deny abortion rights to 300,000 Medicaid recipients each year. Most of these women are Blacks, Chicanas, Puerto Ricans, or poor women. These are the same women who are the prime victims of racist forced sterilization schemes.

The Hyde amendment was a deliberate attack on the poorest women, aimed at dividing the women's movement. The anti-abortion forces clearly hoped that the relatively more privileged women not directly affected by the amendment would not come to the defense of the sisters under attack and would not see this as an assault on the abortion rights of all women. They also hoped to play on the racist sentiments of some women against sisters who have been forced onto welfare.

—the government proposed new guidelines exempting all but 6% of the businesses with government contracts from compliance with federal affirmative action guidelines.

—the December 7 Supreme Court ruling denying pregnancy benefits to General Electric workers threatens tens of thousands of women workers with loss of pay, seniority, or even their jobs in the coming years. Moreover, by making pregnancy a legitimate basis for discrimination, the court has reinforced a central pillar of job discrimination against women—the biological differences between the sexes.

—discriminatory layoffs on the basis of "last hired, first fired" have all but wiped out affirmative action gains. In New York City, for example, 1/3 of all women, 40% of all Black males, and over 50% of all Puerto Ricans were laid off during the '74-'75 cutbacks of city employees. The pattern in private industry is similar. The results are unemployment rates for women and minorities substantially higher than for white males. In addition, since reaching a high point of 61% in 1971, average wages for women have now fallen to 57% of a white male's. Black women earn even less.

—cutbacks have also closed thousands of child-care centers, forcing working women back into the home, often onto welfare.

—while a major victory for the ERA was won in Indiana, we still need three more states to ratify.

Each of these attacks has hurt minority women and working women the most severely. These are the majority of women, yet these are the women least represented in NOW. The attacks have been carried out with the goal of dividing women along race and economic lines. This is part of the conscious campaign by the corporations and their representatives at all levels of government to force women, along with Blacks and other minorities, to bear the brunt of the current economic crisis. "Out of the workplace and into the kitchen; keep them barefoot and pregnant" sums up their meaning for women.

A dangerous trap has been set for the women's movement. Our enemies hope to pit more privileged women against poor and minority women, employed against unemployed, organized against unorganized. We must recognize this trap and reject it.

This presents a special challenge to NOW, the largest and best known women's group in the nation. NOW has the responsibility and the opportunity to unite the women's movement and mobilize women and our supporters to defend the sisters currently under attack, with the understanding that an attack on one is an attack on all. To do this, NOW needs to discuss and work out a strategy for fighting back on a local, state, and national level. The purpose of this proposal is to present ideas for such a strategy.

1. NOW must make its priority the defense of the rights of our Black, Chicana, Puerto Rican, Asian, Native American, and working sisters, rights that are in jeopardy today. These women are the most affected by the recent attacks, but these are attacks on all women. We must pay special attention to defense of abortion rights, the ERA, affirmative action, equal pay, maternity rights, and child care. To defeat these attacks, we must mobilize minority and working women—the women who have the greatest stake in this fight, and whom we must bring into NOW by the thousands. NOW should give priority to involving organizations these sisters belong to and to aiding those Task Forces in NOW that are seeking to reach out to them and draw them into NOW.

2. We must begin to organize a counteroffensive against all the attacks—a public, visible campaign of activities that includes rallies, picket lines, educational conferences, and other events. Our goal is to draw ever larger and broader forces into these activities. Civil disobedience—small “zap” actions that can only involve a few dedicated individuals—will not attract these forces. It cuts across our goal of bringing masses of women into action.

Where it is possible, NOW chapters should involve labor unions, civil rights, student, women's, and other groups in these activities around mutually agreed upon goals. The success of NOW involving labor unions, CLUW, Black and civil rights, student, and other groups in ERA activities indicates that we can call on other powerful social forces to support our rights.

3. The April NOW conference should issue a call for a national demonstration in the fall, like the one held May 16 for the ERA, around all these issues. We should attempt to draw together the broadest possible spectrum of forces to build a show of unity and strength.

4. Historically, it is through organizing women of all political persuasions and views in our own independent movement that women have won our rights. We marched, picketed, and spoke out to win the right to vote and legal abortion. Today, as the recent attacks have shown, we cannot sit back and rely on either of the two governing parties—the Democrats or the Republicans—to “give” us our long overdue rights.

Initial signers: Clare Fraenzl, Vice-Pres. for Liaison, Phila. NOW; Rhonda Rutherford, Phila. NOW; Sue von Lackum, Golden Gate (San Francisco) NOW; Diane Mullikin, Golden Gate (San Francisco) NOW; Andrea Brod, Board, Long Beach, Ca. NOW; Pat Crawford, Vice-Pres. for Child Care, San Francisco NOW; Linda Festa, former Vice-Pres., San Francisco NOW; Claudette Begin, Sec., San Jose NOW; Jana Cunningham, Public Relations Chair, San Jose NOW; Alice Desgrey, Pres., San Jose NOW; Janet Glaab, Chair, Fundraising Comm., San Jose NOW; Wayne Mercer, Chair, San Jose NOW Newsletter; Sonya Wyrick, Treas., San Jose NOW; Elsa Blum, Denver NOW; Phyllis Crawford, Denver NOW; Patricia Candy Sweet, Denver NOW; Carol Coates, Board, Louisville NOW; Kathy Colebanks, Vice-Pres. for Records, Louisville NOW; Leila Cushman, Board, Louisville NOW; Diana Gorshuch, Vice-Pres. for Finances, Louisville NOW; Annette Shaw, Louisville NOW; Debby Tarnopol, Louisville NOW; Kathleen Beasley, Chair, Employment Task Force, Baltimore NOW; Diane Prokipchak, At-large Board, No. Prince Georges Co., Md. NOW; Phyllis Lee, Abortion Comm. Coordinator, Baltimore NOW; Elaine Giddis, Pres., Boston NOW; Reba Williams, Boston NOW; Carol Gillard, Middlesex, Ma. NOW; Marcia King, Middlesex, Ma. NOW; Helen Moore, Middlesex, Ma. NOW; Norma Rae Wachs, Middlesex, Ma. NOW; Christine Miller, State Chair, Affirmative Action Task Force, Board, Ann Arbor, Mi. NOW; Rosalie Sullivan, State Coordinator, May 16 ERA demonstration, Detroit NOW; Lorraine Page, Minority Task Force, St. Paul, Mn. NOW; Sherry Carter, Board, Twin Cities (Mn.) NOW; Gillian Furst, ERA Rep., Twin Cities (Mn.) NOW; Terry Falcone, Central Monmouth, N.J. NOW; Karen Meyers Grant, Lakeland, N.J. NOW; Joan Rashid, Lakeland, N.J. NOW; Alice Conner, Newark, N.J. NOW; Lil Maurice, Newark, N.J. NOW; Kimi Nakata, Newark, N.J. NOW; Mini Jackumar, Princeton, N.J. NOW; Virginia Scott, Board, Bronx NOW; Jean Vertheim, Board, Bronx NOW; Dianne Feeley, Chair, ERA Subcomm., N.Y. NOW; Eileen Foley, ERA Subcomm., N.Y. NOW; Florence Hutkoff, ERA Subcomm., N.Y. NOW; Rosita Perea, Board, N.Y. NOW; Adele Wagner, Treas., N.Y. NOW; Suzanne Eric, Steering Comm., Queens NOW; Maureen MacDougal, Queens NOW; Jacquelyn L. Paine, Cleveland NOW; Ellen Rothchild, Cleveland NOW; Frances Edge, Toledo NOW; Dorothy Harvey, Toledo NOW; Sheila Ostrow, ERA Task Force Coordinator, Toledo NOW; Sue Skinner, Abortion Task Force Coordinator, Toledo NOW; Karen Thaller, Project Coordinator, Toledo NOW; Beverly Jones, NOW National Board (Pa.); Carol McHugh-Vitelli, Lehigh Valley, Pa. NOW; Lynne Hughes, Lower Bucks Co., Pa. NOW; Toby Ricca, Lower Bucks Co., Pa. NOW; Diane Bull, State Exec. Comm., Pa. NOW; Gail Baier, Pres., San Antonio NOW; Jo Della-Giustina, San Antonio NOW Council; Susan Garry, San Antonio NOW; Jean Marie Brough, State Convenor, National By-Laws Convention, Seattle-King Co., Wash. NOW; Heidi Messner, Publicity Coordinator, Seattle-King Co., Wash. NOW; Joan Sandler, Fundraising Coordinator, Seattle-King Co., Wash. NOW; Rita Shaw, ERA Task Force Coordinator, Seattle-King Co., Wash. NOW; Sylvia Bailey, Speakers Bureau Coordinator, Washington, D.C. NOW; Evelyn R. Baker, Washington, D.C. NOW; Leo Bugen, Washington, D.C. NOW; Clara Chichester, Washington, D.C. NOW; Barbara Cohen, Washington, D.C. NOW; Dorothy Hawkinson, Washington, D.C. NOW; Virginia V. Johnson, Washington, D.C. NOW; Olive Neal, Washington, D.C. NOW; Sara Smith, Chair, Aug. 26, 1976, Rally, Washington, D.C. NOW; Peggy Wiesenber, Washington, D.C. NOW; Adrienne Kaplan, Exec. Board, Milwaukee NOW; Carol Witon, Women in Poverty Task Force, Milwaukee NOW. (List of supporting chapters in formation.)