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New York, NY 10014
July 21, 1978

TO ORGANIZERS AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION DIRECTORS

Post-July 9 Activities

Dear Comrades,

The successful July 9 national ERA march exceeded all expectations. The huge turnout--with estimates as high as 100,000--was more than twice the number projected on the eve of the demonstration by its organizers, the National Organization for Women (NOW).

As the Militant reported, the march was a massive outpouring of the majority sentiment favoring passage of the amendment and it is already having an impact including in Congress where the House Judiciary Committee voted July 18 in favor of extending the deadline for ratification by three years and three months.

The ERA campaign has clearly become a national focus for mobilizing supporters of women's equality. More than 200 different contingents from NOW chapters, unions, and other organizations participated in the march. With most campuses closed, thousands of students came from colleges and universities, the National Student Association had a contingent. Impressive numbers of Blacks marched in union contingents and several Black and Puerto Rican organizations had their own delegations.

Artists, church groups, research groups, gay rights groups enthusiastically chanted their support for ERA along with trade unionists from auto, steel, the Brooklyn shipyard, the coal miners, AFSCME, CLUW, BRAC, CWA, the meatcutters, and other unions.

This action was a significant demonstration of united action in the streets needed to build the movement that can win ERA. It also reaffirmed and enhanced NOW's position as the preeminent national women's rights organization.

The character, composition, size, and geographic scope of the action all help to point the way forward for the women's movement. It is clear that, until the questions are resolved one way or another, ERA ratification and the extension of the March 22, 1979 deadline, constitute the central, national issue facing the women's movement.

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It is an issue which has the capacity to mobilize in action the large numbers of women and the broadest array of allies, most significantly in the union movement.

What is required are continued mobilizations to demand ERA ratification and extension of the present deadline. Discussion is needed on how to implement NOW President Eleanor Smeal's call from the July 9 platform for "bigger and bigger demonstrations" for the ERA until victory.

Some NOW leaders and activists have already begun discussion of fall and spring mobilizations, perhaps in unratified states. A big demonstration this spring in Washington D.C. or coordinated actions in key states to push for either extension or ratification or both--perhaps on International Women's Day, March 8, which is just two weeks before the March 22 deadline--would be in order.

August 26 Actions

In the immediate foreground is the opportunity for actions Aug. 26, a traditional women's liberation day of activities. At its meeting in February, the NOW National Board called for local ERA walk-a-thons on Aug. 26 to show the broad support for ERA and to raise funds for the ratification campaign. We can help maintain the momentum of the July 9 action by involving the individuals and organizations we worked with on it in August 26 activities.

We can suggest that plans made be expanded to include activity that can draw in many of the new activists. In Oakland, California, East Bay NOW has discussed plans for a public rally Friday evening, Aug. 25, coupled with a walk-a-thon on Saturday, Aug. 26. Walk-a-thons that pass through heavily populated areas can attract more supporters, more media, and generally have greater impact.

The key is to keep up activity that can involve the many new women's rights fighters who came out July 9. Special emphasis should be placed on involving unionists. Where possible, broader layers of union supporters of ERA should be drawn into Aug. 26 activities. As builders of NOW we will want to do all we can to encourage union women, Black women, campus women and others who haven't already done so to join NOW and participate actively in it.

Recruitment

Many of the activists involved in the July 9 demonstration are interested in socialist ideas. For example, two thousand copies of The Militant and Young Socialist were bought by demonstrators in Washington D.C.

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Union fractions, women's liberation fractions, and branch executive committees will want to discuss plans for engaging these activists in discussions, through forums, classes, socialist election campaign activities, as well as informal discussions on the job, at dinner, and the like. Many will be drawn closer to us and some will be won to membership in the revolutionary party or youth organization.

October NOW National Conference

The June and July issues of the National NOW Times carried articles stating the time, place, and schedule for the next national NOW convention. It is set for October 6-9 at the Washington Hilton, Washington D.C. The NOW Times editors encourage readers to attend and brochures that are both membership applications and conference builders were distributed July 9.

It is important now to begin building the convention, by discussing the issues facing NOW, such as ERA, affirmative action, abortion rights, the workshops needed, possible resolutions that will be submitted, and how important it is to the ERA campaign and defending women's rights to get as many feminists as possible to attend. The fund-raising and organizing experience from July 9 will be especially useful in bringing more activists to the conference. NOW chapters will want to order the conference building brochure for distribution locally. The address is:

NOW National Conference
P.O. Box 7813
Washington, D.C. 20044

Resolutions and By-laws

The ERA emergency is part of the overall emergency the women's movement still faces. The Hyde Amendment cutting off federal funds for abortion has already been introduced into Congress with greater restrictions than last year. Legislation on pregnancy disability benefits with anti-abortion riders are also scheduled to be voted on soon in Congress. The June Supreme Court ruling in favor of Alan Bakke is a blow to affirmative action quotas that will have an impact on jobs for women and Blacks.

NOW chapter committees that have organized discussions and activities around these and other issues will want to begin planning resolutions to be submitted to the chapter membership, state committees, national committees, or other chapters in the state, region, or nationally. Following

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their year long discussions on sterilization abuse, NOW chapters in California are preparing to circulate a resolution favoring guidelines already scheduled to be voted on at the conference. It's important to prepare these discussions now in anticipation of the resolution deadline, which has not yet been announced.

This is also the time to continue to circulate the resolution initiated by the Milwaukee NOW chapter adding "political affiliation" to the constitutional safeguard, for membership in NOW. It will be discussed and voted on at the national conference. The July 9 demonstration is the best argument for maintaining an open democratic women's movement that includes every supporter of women's rights regardless of their political views. This resolution was printed in the July National NOW Times. It appears along with additional national by-laws changes that the NOW National Board is proposing to the conference delegates.

One of the Board changes that can have an impact on membership is the proposal that individuals must subscribe to NOW's purpose and policy both to join the organization or continue as members. This proposal is vague. It is being supported by those NOW leaders that have openly supported exclusion and it is being presented as a counter-proposal to the political affiliation resolution. This is one of the items on the agenda that the NOW National Board will be discussing at their next meeting, July 29-30 in Washington, D.C.

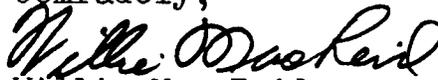
Oberlin Reports and Workshops

The meaning of July 9, the importance of the independent women's movement, its interrelationship with the labor movement, and the next steps forward will be discussed in reports, panels, and workshops at the Active Workers and Socialist Educational Conference August 5-12. A report on party women's liberation tasks and perspectives will be given in a workshop open to all comrades. A separate workshop on building NOW is scheduled for active NOW members only. In addition, workshops are planned that will discuss how women's liberation work has been carried out on the campus and in the unions.

A meeting with organizers and women's liberation directors will also take place.

July 9 has greatly increased opportunities to do women's liberation work more broadly. We want to make sure we take advantage of the new openings to build NOW and the women's movement.

Comradely,



Willie Mae Reid

Women's Liberation Director