

# INTERNAL INFORMATION BULLETIN

December 1975

No. 4 in 1975

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65 cents

Published by  
**SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY**  
14 Charles Lane, New York, N.Y. 10014

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## Winning New Members to the Socialist Workers Party

[The following is the edited transcript of the presentations and discussion from the workshop on Winning New Members at the Socialist Workers Party Convention, August 1975. The workshop was chaired by Joel Britton from Chicago.]

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### Joel Britton

We won't try to recapitulate here all the points made during the convention discussion, but as Betsey Stone pointed out in the Tasks and Perspectives report, "We must prepare for the kind of period when opportunities will exist for our movement to grow rapidly." With the tasks we've laid out for antiracist work, union work, women's liberation activity, election campaigning, etc., we've got our work cut out for us. In carrying out these activities, we'll run into many people who will be interested in socialist ideas and should be members of the Socialist Workers party.

To fully accomplish the ambitious tasks we've set for ourselves we need a lot of help; we need more members of the SWP.

Of course, we know that in getting out our ideas, whether in the form of "The Bill of Rights for Working People," or by building the antiracist movement, the key thing will be our example and how we inspire people with a vision of a new society. I don't know if everyone was struck like I was by one of the letters Betsey read from an Oklahoma supporter of Camejo and Reid. The writer was very impressed with a basic concept of ours that we often take for granted, that Camejo and Reid are for a society that puts human needs before profits. It is going to be basic ideas like that that will win a lot of people to our movement in the coming years, and we want to get out those ideas far and wide.

We know that the Young Socialist Alliance is winning people to its ranks, and many serious YSA members will join the Socialist Workers party. We anticipate that source of recruitment will continue.

But tonight we want to focus on recruitment directly to the Socialist Workers party. We've always recruited some people directly to the party, even in periods when 90 percent or more of our new members were from the YSA. But we've begun to recruit more people directly to the party and we anticipate that we can increase such recruitment if we systematically organize it.

To make the turn that we've been discussing at the convention, we will have to change certain ways of doing things. We'll have to do some new things, as well as continue to expand some older methods. For most party branches, it is something new to systematically think about how to organize recruitment work. The idea of

assigning recruitment directors is new in most branches. Many branches will also want to have recruitment committees. Organizers and members of branch executive committees should be concerned with this area and executive committees should plan to have regular discussions. It will be important to have reports and discussions in the branches on how our contact and recruitment work is going. We want to organize the work—prepare lists and send mailings immediately to people who come around and express interest, whether at campaign functions, forums, or social affairs. We want to have *personal contact* with people who come around. If we don't go out of our way to meet with and talk to people who come around we might not see them again for a long time. We want to think about individuals' educational needs: what pamphlet or book to read next, a class especially set up for new people, or adjusting our regular educational programs to include special discussion groups for people newly interested in our ideas.

In Chicago this summer we had a very serious study of Trotsky's three-volume history of the Russian Revolution, and we thought it would be just too much to organize a separate class for non-members. Our contacts were very much interested in studying this topic, even though it was a big undertaking. So we organized a special discussion group composed of a few experienced party educators and all the newest people that met after the weekly lectures. Our experience was that this is a very valuable way of carrying on education for non-members—even for those who were unable to do all the reading.

We don't want to substitute recruitment directors and committees for the recruitment work of the branch as a whole or for what individual comrades should be doing. We want to encourage everyone to be able to "talk socialism" to people on their jobs, on their campus, in their antiracist work, their USLA activities, to YSAers who aren't in the party, and so on. Everyone should be involved in the kind of day-to-day contact work and discussion that will be the backbone for winning people to the party.

Several contributions in the discussion bulletins had some good ideas for carrying out recruitment work: Barry Sheppard's report in *SWP Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. 33, No. 4; "Organizing Party Contact Work" by Linda Thompson in No. 11; "For More Conscious and Systematic Organization of Contact Work" by Jack Rasmus in No. 15; and an article called "On our Trade-Union Work," by Steve Beumer in No. 14. Steve makes an excellent point about comrades taking a certain personal responsibility for their contacts and not simply turning in names of interested people for a branch contact list (although that's important). He suggested keeping a list of your own, especially of people you see and talk with regularly, on a sales location or at your work place.

Of special importance were the points made about the kind of atmosphere we want to create around our

movement and headquarters. The general tone of our approach to new people is important. When people raise what we might consider to be silly questions or some point that's a little off the wall politically, we shouldn't just get into a big harangue with them, but feel them out and find out where they're at, what their interests are, and what the best approach is to begin talking to them.

The points about money that were raised in our discussion are very important. This is something that has to be thought out in all our activities, whether it is forums, campaign rallies, dinners, and social affairs. We don't want to price ourselves out of the market for at least certain people who are either unemployed, on welfare, or whatever.

Time should be set aside to do recruitment work. We don't generally have the same consciousness or institutionalized norms for setting aside time to do contact work as we do for other work. Except perhaps for our weekly forums and occasional campaign rallies, we don't have a regular "recruitment time" comparable to our Saturday sales mobilization when most comrades go out every week to sell the press. Of course this is the type of work that doesn't lend itself so easily to that kind of scheduling. It has to be more of an ongoing thing. But we do have to organize our work so that everyone isn't so busy carrying out various tasks that they don't have time to set aside an evening or afternoon to talk to prospective members.

I think it's important to avoid being overanxious about people joining when they first come around. I've been at some campaign rallies where four or five speakers conclude their talks with some kind of recruitment pitch—"Join the Socialist Workers Party, join the YSA." In general, I think it's good that we're more open about asking people to join, but we should also ask people to "join with us" in carrying out this, that, or another thing. "Join with us in our election campaign;" "join with us in our antiracist work;" "join with us in helping defend Latin American political prisoners." In the course of working with us on a daily or weekly basis, prospective members will be drawn closer to us and will have more political discussions. People will get to know us and our politics much better and faster.

If we do these things and others mentioned in the convention reports and discussion and those that will be discussed here tonight, we will not only do some real good recruiting in this next period, but we'll also maximize the chances of holding people once they join. The chances will be greater of integrating them into our movement, where they begin to take on responsibilities and help build the movement and see the movement as their movement.

A couple months ago, in preparation for this gathering, the National Office sent out a recruitment survey to branch organizers. The first question was the name of the recruitment director. At that time most branches had to answer "none." Many of the other questions also had to be left blank or answered "no." "Is there a branch recruitment committee?" "How often does the recruitment committee meet?" etc. But there were a few branches where we had assigned recruitment directors and had begun to put together recruitment committees; and I think the discussion here tonight will reflect some of this more recent contact and recruitment work.

Several comrades have presentations they'll make and then we'll have questions and discussion from the floor.

Hopefully comrades will report on how recruitment is going in your areas or some particular incident in your branch that you think expresses a general point that would be useful for everyone here. Perhaps there are a few individuals who would like to get up and make a few points about how you were recruited or how certain things the branch did kept you from joining sooner than you might otherwise have.

I don't see Willie Mae Reid, so I think I'll say something about her. I asked if she would be able to come here tonight and explain why it took her a year and a half before she joined the party from the time she first came around. She mentioned that like a lot of us when we first come around, she had a lot of hang-ups about joining an organization, and various political questions that bothered her. It took time to work them out.

But Willie also told me of some experiences she had when she was a "contact," that might be particularly relevant to the discussion we're having tonight. One of the things she pointed out was that she had a job in Chicago's Loop a few minutes walk from the SWP headquarters, and she told how she found that after coming to a couple of forums directly from work she felt very much out of place because she tended to be overdressed compared to the rest of the crowd. So she would take a subway all the way home and then come back later for the forum, after getting into her dungarees and sweatshirt.

I think there might be a lesson here. We often become very casual about our forums and other public affairs but for many new people it's a big night out. It's a special thing. Or if they come from work where they have to dress up on the job, it's a big hassle to go through the kind of thing Willie felt she had to go through in order to feel comfortable.

Then she said that if I wanted to I could mention the fact that she sometimes got called late at night, often after she had hit the sack, reminding her to come to a forum or something. Someone was conscientiously calling to remind people on the forum list. Comrades doing that, of course, were carrying out a necessary function. We should call contacts and remind them of activities, find out if they need a ride, etc.

But I thought that was another little story that should be related, because the lateness of the calls was something that bothered her.

B.R. Washington of Detroit will go into some of his experiences in doing recruitment work on the job.

### **B.R. Washington, Detroit**

I want to go briefly into a number of things we were able to do in the Detroit area. We have a few comrades working at a hospital in the city of Detroit, a hospital that has just become unionized over the last three or four months. The comrades who work in the hospital obviously supported the union organizing drive. In talking to fellow workers about the necessity of having a union there—the administration and people who controlled the hospital had resisted a union for almost fifty years—we began to get into discussions with individuals on the job. We also got into heated debates with individuals from other organizations, particularly the Black Christian Nationalists. They opposed having a union because they didn't think it would

be any good and in order to get it, there would have to be some type of struggle, mass struggle, which they opposed. But out of these debates we got a number of people around us. People listened to these debates in the locker room and the hallways. Some of them began to say, "I think your ideas are pretty good; I agree with you." What began to happen was that by presenting a clear alternative to those who opposed the union the SWPers on the job began to be seen as those who understood a little more.

Once initial conversations took place we began to find ourselves getting into discussions around other issues. For example, we often carried the *Militant*, YS, or "Bill of Rights for Working People" and when people asked "What's going on in Boston?" we would show them our press and explain what was going on in Boston or other areas of the country. If a rebellion occurred in the Black community in another city we could explain to them what had happened.

They also liked our attitude toward mass action. At the time that the organizing drive was going on, the question of the May 17 march on Boston was being proposed to a number of Black organizations in the Detroit area, organizations who had members in this particular hospital but were abstaining from the Boston struggle. This gives you an idea of the interrelationship of how people think and their interests, particularly on the job situation. But the people we were talking to were interested in the Boston march and confronting the racist attacks there. When we stated our support and sold buttons for the demonstration, they came to us quite naturally and asked how they could go to Boston and what they could do. We told them that they could help sell buttons for the demonstration and talk to other people about the march. We were successful in getting these individuals that we had just met maybe eight or nine months ago to sell buttons, read the *Militant*, and even subscribe to the *Militant*.

We also continuously talked to them about our politics. We reached a stage where in talking to these individuals it was no longer just a general question, not just a question of Boston or the Joanne Little defense case. There developed a stage where one thing led to another and they would ask, "How do you know all this? How do you know what's going on in Boston? How do you know what is going on in different parts of the country?" We then began explaining our views on a whole range of questions to those who saw us as knowing more than they could get from the bourgeois media or from other individuals. In a sense, mini-educational developed in our conversations with these individuals. Over a period of time we developed not only a political, but a social relationship with them. They began to ask us about different events that were coming down.

What I want to stress is that it takes a period of time to do this. Recruitment isn't as rapid as it often was in the antiwar movement. There you'd have a person coming to the Student Mobilization Committee; two weeks later that person would be a member of the YSA; three months later they'd be a member of the party. Some of the people we're working with now on our jobs have families, others have what I would call "social hang-ups," and so forth. Some have not had political experience before. Although they may have gone through the rebellions in the late 1960's, they've not had actual concrete experience with political organizations. It takes a little more time to explain what

you're doing in the party and how you are going to make this giant revolution. For example, people who work on a particular job ask: "How am I going to control this factory?" It's right here for them, a factory that they work in every day and they have no idea about how to control this whole apparatus.

We were pretty successful in bringing people around and bringing them to different activities such as forums. And I have already mentioned the role they helped play in the Joanne Little case and SCAR work.

The last thing I want to mention is that in making contact with individuals on the job, and bringing them around the party, the number of contacts tends to expand, like in any other area of work. We meet people whose mother, father, or sister, works in a different plant that happens to be on strike. They want to know what to do and they heard that you have participated in things like this, and they want advice. You begin to get a whole range of contacts from different places. Where I work a close contact's brother-in-law is a shop steward in a Ford plant. We went over to talk to him about the economic crisis and layoffs in the Ford plant and it gave me knowledge about something I didn't know before. It was also quite enlightening to have a discussion in that plant on busing because a number of them did not support busing in Detroit. You get into many discussions with people like that. The point is that the contact work keeps expanding until you meet different layers of people.

#### Joel Britton

Mac Warren will discuss how to combine recruitment work with our work in the antiracist movement.

#### Mac Warren, Boston

The SWP and YSA are active supporters of the Student Coalition Against Racism, a youth organization. Much of the work SCAR is carrying out is on the campuses, but in some areas the work leaves the campuses around specific issues where we run into people who aren't necessarily youth and aren't necessarily on campus.

That's the case for a lot of our work in Boston where on a daily basis we are in contact with people from community agencies, the NAACP and other organizations in the Black community that don't necessarily have anything to do with youth.

Through our work at Boston University we approached different professors about helping out in the work with SCAR on campus. One of them became very friendly to the Student Coalition and we were able to get him to help us out in a number of different activities. Prior to this he had been interested in the party and had read some of our publications. He was brought around the party and attended almost all the preconvention discussion and he's here at the convention this week.

This was done through the work of the party and YSA recruitment directors. It was carried out on an organized basis where the contacts that we have in this area of work, both around the party and the YSA, are approached by different comrades involved in the work about coming to campaign banquets and other events.

In dealing with the antiracist work on a daily basis, especially in a crisis situation as in Boston, the advice and

opinions of party members working in SCAR is really valuable for people we're working with when they are looking for answers to questions about what to do next. Because we are there on a consistent basis we are able to project what is needed and what must be done at different points. In the community meetings in the last few days we were able to sit down and have discussions with people. Some of them will begin to wonder why it is that we can come to meetings and lay out projections and come up with answers to questions. They wonder why it is that these people are so confident when they speak, that they really know what they are talking about and it has been confirmed in practice. They want to know what else we're doing. We've been able to have discussions with some of these activists about the party and about the YSA.

### **Joel Britton**

Linda Thompson will speak on the contact work that was done during the Willie Mae Reid campaign for mayor of Chicago.

### **Linda Thompson, Chicago**

Joel already went into some of the thinking that came out of the Chicago experience that was largely stimulated by the response we got from both the 1974 statewide campaign and the 1975 mayoral election. I have always been concerned about this question of recruitment because of my own experience in joining the movement, which was one of those bad ones that Joel was talking about.

It was back in 1960, just after the YSA was getting off the ground and was trying to form a local in Providence with a number of very inexperienced comrades. I was the only female around in an all-male local, and I felt for almost a year that I had to fight to get into the local.

I was considered apolitical then, I guess, even though I was waking up in response to the new radicalization that was going on, with the Cuban revolution and the civil rights movement. But I didn't know all the jargon. I didn't know what all the initials stood for, so I was considered one of those apolitical people that come around. Anyway here I am, so let's not worry too much about that.

There are certain points where we can facilitate recruitment and make it easier for people to come in. My own opinion is that this work really hasn't been organized in the party before. We were used to getting most of our recruits to the party from the YSA and I feel that we got kind of lazy on this question. We didn't have to do too much work, we thought, although now looking back with hindsight we probably should have done a lot more all along. We are undertaking it now in the fashion it should be undertaken. I think that even in the earlier days, around the formation of the YSA, when the mass movements were not so much a part of our activity, we did more contact work. You know it used to be routine to ask people over for dinner, but that kind of fell off as a norm during the antiwar movement. This might explain it in one sense, but it doesn't justify it. The pace of activity of many comrades and all the meetings we build go to waste if we don't do the follow-up. The point Joel made about making time is important. We have to set aside the time for what is

perhaps the most important area of our work: winning new people and building the party.

I would like to go into some of the things that we did to raise the consciousness of the branch, and how we began to involve the party members in this work. Although we started the work in our statewide campaign we improved on it in the course of our mayoral election. One thing we decided to do when we found that there were many people who wouldn't come to the hall was to take the approach of going to them. I think this is one of the important keys to good contact work, the idea that we have to go to where people are at and not expect them to come to us or ignore them if they don't come down to the hall.

We projected a series of socials for the campaign with the idea of "Come meet the candidates" that would be held in areas where we had supporters. Before the division of the Chicago branch we had an orientation to the Southside, which is predominantly Black and where we had done much of our petitioning. The bulk of the names on our campaign mailing list were from this area. So we built our first social there, and nine contacts came, seven of them Black. About five comrades came, which is the reverse of a typical party social where most of those present are in the YSA or party. We tried to reverse that situation consciously, and found that it worked. We had very intensive discussions that evening. The event lasted about five hours; and we got to know the people, find out what was on their minds, and learned quite a bit about the community and organizations on the Southside. So in addition to drawing prospective members closer, it enriched the party's experience and knowledge.

We continued this type of activity and the number of contacts grew. We had twenty-two at one cook-out at my house where I invited everyone in my neighborhood. In my neighborhood everyone sits out on stoops at night when it's hot in the summer, so I go up and down the street and talk to everybody. I've gotten to know everybody on my street at least and a lot in the neighborhood. I've run into ex-McGovern supporters, Stalinists, and ex-SDSers—they're all there in the neighborhood. I invited them over and we had a cook-out. About 15 direct party contacts and about 8 people from the neighborhood came. We handed out the Bill of Rights for Working People and other campaign literature. We have got to begin to do this kind of thing. We can do this kind of work not only on the job or at school, but even where we live.

After a while supporters began to give socials for us. Through the work comrades were doing in AFSCME Local 2000, a Black woman supporter of Willie Mae Reid's campaign gave a social for Willie to which four Black women contacts came. That's the kind of thing we should do more of, where we don't have to do all the work ourselves and where our supporters get involved.

We plan to do a number of socials when we get back to Chicago and expect that the division of the branch will obviously help.

Generalizing from our experience I think the role that social life plays in the party recruitment work is very important. A lot of times it is very important how people feel, do they have friends, are you rapping with them, etc.

I was talking to an older comrade in Chicago about building the party in the 1940s and regroupment in the 1950s. He said that at one point the party used to hold public dances and dinners, and I asked, "You didn't give a

political talk or anything? Didn't you have a speech or something?" He said, "No, we just had a social where two or three hundred supporters of the party came and enjoyed themselves." While we're not in a stage to do that yet, it does make you think a little about ways of building the party different than we've thought.

I think we have to view contact work as a field we develop in the party, just as comrades learn how to give a speech, organize a meeting, and sell the press. We have to practice it. I think that some of our candidates have had the most experience and are the best at doing contact work. They've had experience talking to people, getting feedback, and not coming up with fast answers, but being sensitive to what level people are really at.

I want to stress the point Joel made: that this is not just the work of the recruitment director or committees. We want our entire membership to do contact work. Everybody should have contacts. If they have not generated their own contacts, they should be given names of prospective members to talk to.

One last point I'd like to make is to note the phenomenon of some comrades returning to the party after leaving it for a period of even years. I don't know whether the national office has lists of ex-members, but certainly in the branches we could put them together. We should check these people out. They are getting more inspired because of the present political developments, and I think we can go after them. In Chicago we've already begun to get some people back in who left a little while ago.

### **Joel Britton**

The next speaker will be Susan Garry from the Houston branch who will report on some Chicano recruitment in Texas.

### **Susan Garry, Houston**

I'd like to give a general picture of Chicano recruitment in Texas based on my experience in the last year working in the YSA.

Of course, there is no magic key to recruiting Chicanos or recruiting anyone. The objective situation in the Chicano community as a whole, coupled with the pressure of the economic crisis, have set the stage for Chicano recruitment in Texas. They have provided us with a situation in Texas that is more favorable than previous times.

Today the word "socialism" doesn't create the same kind of negative response in the Chicano movement as it did a few years ago. An example of the change is that Jose Gutierrez of Crystal City, who is a leader in the RUP, recently went with a delegation to Cuba to see what socialism looks like and how the Chicano community in this country can relate to socialism.

So in dealing with recruitment in the Chicano community we are dealing with a different layer of people in terms of political consciousness. There is a growing political consciousness among a certain layer of Chicano activists, and in the Chicano community as a whole, because of the work of the RUP and the UFW.

In Texas, we've recruited a number of people basically through the campaign, mainly off the campus. Many of them had experience in political activities. Others did not.

Basically we found that by getting out our positions on police brutality, undocumented Mexican workers, and the farmworkers struggle, and by supporting openly Raza Unida Party candidates and conducting discussions with people in the Chicano community, Chicanos realize we stand with them in their struggle. They realize this even more when we actually do something.

For example, in October of last year we helped organize, along with the Brown Berets, a demonstration of 1,000 against cop terror in Austin. The Brown Berets worked hand in hand with the YSA and SWP members to build a peaceful and very effective demonstration against cop terror. The Brown Berets in Texas are not hostile to collaborating with us, and in Dallas two of them joined the YSA.

The party and YSA are helping to organize support locally and throughout the state for the farmworkers strike in Texas. Also, in San Antonio we've developed a very warm relationship with Tu Casa, which is an organization for undocumented Mexican workers. We've worked with them in various coalitions, most recently around the farmworker issue.

When Peter Camejo toured Texas last spring he spoke at community meetings throughout the state including the Valley. One result was a class series jointly sponsored by Tu Casa and the SWP which discussed political issues of the day from a socialist perspective. Also, members of Tu Casa have participated in activities like our forums in Houston.

Camejo's ability to speak fluent Spanish is very helpful in recruiting Chicanos and other Latinos. Forty Chicanos endorsed Camejo's campaign in Texas this spring as he came through. Comrades who speak Spanish in Texas find the work easier. Communication is increased tremendously and the ability to establish rapport is greatly eased. In fact, a number of comrades in Texas are learning Spanish on their own or in classes, specifically to make it easier to work with Chicanos.

Another factor in recruitment that will continue to be important is the *Militant's* news coverage of *La causa*. Where politically there might be differences between Chicano activists and SWP members, the respect for the *Militant* is widespread in the Chicano movement.

The number of Chicano recruits has been around sixteen in Texas in the last year. But the importance of the events I described and the work we are doing is laying the groundwork and developing the roots for much greater collaboration and activity in *La causa*.

### **Joel Britton**

Let's open up the meeting now for general discussion, and if people can keep their remarks or questions to three or four minutes, it'll give an opportunity for more people to speak.

### **Brett Merkey, Pittsburgh**

Because of the extreme difficulty we've had in maintaining contact with shift workers in Pittsburgh and also the opportunities we've had for direct recruitment to the party, we were forced in the direction of having a party recruitment director some time ago. If there are any of

those people in the room now they should get up and say a few words, because I think a lot of good lessons were learned in Pittsburgh.

I just want to say a few words about the use of the *Militant* as a recruitment tool. Each week the *Militant* carries analytical articles and editorials, and a typical comrade will normally skip them. You see an article entitled "Free Joanne Little" and think, well, I'm in favor of that, so I might as well skip that article and read another one. I'd like to emphasize that those editorial articles have arguments put in a very simple way that we can use to help convince people with. The ideas that we have to teach the working class in order to make a revolution really are very simple.

I don't know about other branches, but the main form that contact work takes in Pittsburgh is over a big pitcher of beer. To give you an example of how this works, one of the primary topics of discussion in Pittsburgh is runaway plants: industries moving South because they say the pay rates are too high in Pittsburgh. One day after work I talked to a large group of people over a pitcher of beer at somebody's house. We started by discussing runaway plants, and one of the topics that came up was workers control; why can't we take over the factory? I brought it up, in an abstract sense, and they disagreed with me, saying we can't run a factory. We discussed it for some time and before long one guy got up and slammed his fist on the table and said, "By God, you're right, we can run the factory!" And then he looked at me and asked, "Do you think your party could do it for us if we invited them in?"

What I just wanted to emphasize is that working people will learn our ideas quickly when they can see that they are in their interest, and we are entering a period when this is true.

I want to emphasize one thing that Joel said, and that is flexibility in approaching workers. For example don't simply turn someone off because they are wearing a crucifix on their chest. My first political act was in 1968, when my father and I helped get George Wallace on the ballot in Florida. I just want to emphasize that in 1968 I was pro-Wallace; in 1969 I was a flaming ultraleft in SDS; in 1970 I joined the YSA.

Sincere and radical-minded people can mistakenly be a supporter of Wallace or some other capitalist politician for awhile.

### **Annette Gardner, Chicago**

At a past function Jack Barnes said that his favorite picket sign was one carried by a worker on a sanitation strike which simply said, "I am a man." Well, maybe this is going to sound a little bit like heresy, but my first identity is as a human being, not as a Trotskyist. I am a Trotskyist because I am a human being and want to stay that way. I feel that this system doesn't allow me to be that, and I think we are going to recruit a hell of a lot of people who feel the same way. And that "I am a person" is reflected in how we treat each other too, and for me one of the biggest turn-offs (it took me three years to join the YSA) was watching a part-time YSA organizer almost drive himself crazy with activity. I said to myself, there's no way in hell I'm going to join those crazy people. At the time I didn't politically agree with the YSA either, so it was a double thing.

I've been in the movement for almost three years now, and sometimes I still ask, what am I doing with these crazy people? I still get phone calls in the middle of the night. The reason Willie got her phone call in the middle of the night was that the comrade had been down at the hall busting their ass and got home at 10:30 at night and said, "Oh my god, I've got a forum list to call."

We can say all we want about treating new people with special consideration. That's fine and good, but if I walk into an organization and all of a sudden get special treatment, I'm going to say, "Hey, what's coming off? You guys are giving each other the hard-ass routine and making exceptions for me?"

I guess what I'm trying to say is that the revolution could happen in the next couple of years or it could happen in the next twenty years, and I'd like to see every one of us in this room there. That takes conscious work, development and pacing of ourselves too.

### **John Hummer, Oakland-Berkeley**

Until very recently I was from San Jose, so I think my remarks might be useful to those comrades who are out in regional locals. As you know, our regional local did a pretty fine job and now there is a branch there.

The first thing I'd like to mention are things we did towards recruitment in connection with the Olga Rodriguez gubernatorial campaign. We organized street rallies, school rallies and the first city-wide socialist rally in San Jose. From this activity we were able to get recruits. I reported at the last YSA convention in St. Louis that nine of our eleven members were recruited around the Rodriguez campaign at that time.

Also, we made sure to go to every single political event that our opponent groups were putting on, especially the CP. Every time the CP put on an event we were there with our campaign literature. The general impression we created was that we were everywhere. There were only a few of us, but you have to be diligent at this sort of thing.

Following the Rodriguez campaign we redefined our recruitment work. We clearly defined the duties of the recruitment director, and as a regional local with a small force, we decided to make the executive committee, in effect, the recruitment committee. By doing so we insisted on regular progress reports on close contacts, what their situation was and how close they were to joining. We had regular mailings, which is also helpful if a regional local can do it. We discovered that we had to follow up in a more concrete way on our recruits and contacts, so we organized a public educational series at the San Jose State University, specifically inviting our contacts and recent recruits.

In addition to our recruitment work we decided to create a periphery. One thing we see in our turn now, and one thing leading up to our turn is that the Trotskyist movement, for the first time maybe since the end of the war, is developing a wide periphery. These are people who aren't necessarily ready to join at this time, but who see us as the main fighters against racism and sexism and like our role in such things as the fight to free Joanne Little. So we made headway mainly in our antiracist work in the San Jose area, and that was the weak spot of most of our political opponents. They all defaulted. Our main opponents in the area are the Stalinists: the CP and the Revolutionary Union. I am sure everybody here knows

Revolutionary Union's reactionary position on busing. So we very consciously organized a series of forums and public events focusing on the antiracist struggle. The culminating event was the tour by Nan Bailey this spring. It was at that specific point that the relationship of forces changed in San Jose, and I think that is the reason we have a branch there now.

The Revolutionary Union and the RSB mobilized for Nan's forum. RSB mobilized their forces from not only San Jose State University, but from the surrounding junior colleges. And they weren't the only ones who came. There was a sizable audience of Black students, high school students included. At that forum the Maoists were smashed in the most beautiful way I have ever seen. The Black students watched as if it were a ping-pong match. Nan Bailey would speak, then a Maoist would speak, then Nan would speak, and it went back and forth, and eventually they began to figure out what the Maoists were really saying and what Nan Bailey was saying. Pretty soon they began hopping up and just denouncing the RSB. Somebody would say, "Somebody's going to throw a brick at me because I'm Black, and that's racist." The relationship of forces changed in San Jose. We developed excellent relations with the women's center doing Joanne Little defense work. And we became known to Black students as *the* socialists in San Jose.

### Jack Rasmus

There's a saying in the labor movement, that the organizer doesn't organize the workers, the boss does. And it's true. What that saying represents is that it is the objective conditions that count. But that's not true in a mechanical sense, because objective conditions alone don't always make the difference. I've been in a number of organizing drives where the workers have been so depressed by the conditions that it doesn't lead to an attempt to take the boss on, but leads to a demoralization, and that's often reflected in the phrase, "I'm only going to work here a little while, then I'm going to go somewhere else" or "I don't really need this job."

What often counts is the subjective element, that is, the organizer meeting the workers half-way, reaching out. The important element in doing so is that the organizer has to give the workers a feeling of trust, and he has to give them a feeling of hope, that there is a way out of this apparent dead end. In doing so the organizer gives them confidence. We call this subjective element "reaching out," and it is parallel here to recruitment work.

This is an area where I think we have been greatly amiss; we haven't focused enough attention on reaching out to people. We can't wait for them to come to us because we're going to miss a lot of them if we do. We've got to go to them; we've got to meet them halfway.

I don't want to go into a lot of specific examples; I indicated some ways in the discussion bulletin. But we've got to emphasize more work in selling at unemployment lines and workplaces. Whenever there's a strike or a boycott, or even an organizing activity, we've got to be there, just to go down and talk to people and let them know who we are. You'd be surprised how receptive people are on an unemployment line, or on strike and picket lines. Just for someone to know, even it's a stranger, that you

support them. After you walk on a picket line for a while you begin to feel that no one gives a damn.

We've got to be experimental and exploratory. We've got to be aggressive in reaching out to people. We've got to create bridges for our propaganda work in the period ahead.

But reaching out is not enough. In addition to reaching out we have to follow up, because we don't organize anything without following up. Follow up is often a personal matter and here again there is a similarity to union organizing. People have to take personal responsibility for following up. There are a number of ways to follow up and here we also have to be experimental.

I want to say something about the personal approach to a lot of people we will be coming in contact with. One is, there has been a tendency to presume a lot, to presume that people know a lot of the history and the terms. And you know you can come across very arrogant to someone this way, because it makes them feel, I must be stupid, I don't know what that means. We have to be very careful about that, because it turns people off and makes them feel inferior or makes them feel mad. We've also got to be prepared to answer some pretty basic questions. If every one of us cannot answer in 25 or words or so, or a couple of phrases or so, "What is socialism?" we're in trouble. We have to be able to explain the difference between socialism and Communism. A lot of people ask that question and it's confusing to them. We have to answer questions like, how will a labor party be different from the Democratic party? Third parties never were successful before, how do we know they will be successful now? How will inflation and unemployment be ended under socialism? What's going to happen, are we going to have a congress? How are we going to run things after socialism?—basic questions.

There's another saying in the labor movement, that you've got to organize before you unionize. Just because someone votes for a union and carries a card, doesn't mean they think union; it doesn't mean they know how to act union. We've got to take the same approach. Just because we want someone in the party doesn't mean they have to know everything about socialism. It doesn't mean they have to have a complete understanding of all our politics. Let's get them in the party and teach them a lot of the details there. We've got to lower a lot of our "standards." Sometimes we think everyone has to have the experience of someone who has been in the YSA six months or a year. The people we are coming into contact now won't have the time. A lot of them have families and obligations. If you have a family, are working a job, and are active in a union, there isn't a hell of a lot of time left. For some people, their party work will be their union work. They won't feel as much at ease with reading, and we're going to have to spend more personal attention with these people. We're going to have to talk with them and explain things, which means spending more time with them after they join the party.

### Steve Johnson, Milwaukee

I'd like to relate an experience we had recently of a contact of long standing who just joined. He is a long-time activist in the Black Masses party, which is a Black radical organization in Milwaukee that disbanded about nine months ago. The members of the Black Masses party

have always been close to the SWP and the YSA. The one new member I'm speaking of has been reading the *Militant* ever since 1972 when he first came into contact with the party through the Jenness and Pulley campaign. Since the YSA was recently established there a little over a year ago we have been in constant contact with him, inviting him to forums, and trying to engage him in different activities the YSA was involved with on the campus and in the community. For a while he dropped out of political activity, but we still kept in contact with him, inviting him to campaign forums and meetings to help us do other things. Just recently he has become active again, and we invited him to our preconvention discussion which proved to be very successful. It impressed him and he learned much more about our movement and joined the party.

I think that what this shows is that in our recruitment work we can't expect to reap gains immediately. We have to take a very patient approach. As Lenin said, "Patiently explain." We shouldn't get discouraged if somebody doesn't join in, say, a month or two. I think the type of people we are going to be recruiting in the coming period are going to have jobs and families. We are going to have to pay attention to new recruits even after they join. Comrades should continue talking to them just as much as possible, answer any questions they might have, and make them feel a part of the movement.

#### **Bill Scheer, Washington, D.C.**

I have a comment and then a question. First the comment: I think that in doing Black recruitment there is sometimes a tendency for comrades to talk only about what they consider to be Black issues. Sometimes a young Black worker will come up to the bookstore or forum and the whole focus of the discussion with him will be around what we would consider to be Black issues, as opposed to a broader discussion about our politics.

In D.C. a large number of our contacts are Black. The city's about 75 percent Black and a large number, probably a majority, are attracted to the YSA initially because they are looking for socialist answers. They're interested in our response to inflation, unemployment, Portugal and other issues. It's important to discuss these questions with these contacts, not just what is going on in Boston, although obviously that is going to be a major factor in our recruitment.

Now my question. The question of a candidacy program was raised earlier today, I believe by George Breitman. I was wondering if the national office could give us their thinking on this proposal. In a sense the question has already been posed. For example, in D.C. we have a young Black contact who has a family and doesn't have very much time. He came out of the Black Panther party and was disoriented by that experience. He is hesitant to join partly because the level of activity is very great. So there's been a running discussion with him and he intends to join the party after the convention. If we are going to be flexible, which I think we have to be, then is it possible for local branches to institute some kind of informal candidacy program where the person would come to branch meetings, begin to contribute, go to a series of classes over a five or six week period, and carry out some of the activities of a member. This would be a short period of

time, just to get more of a feel, and then at the end of the period the question of membership could be considered.

I think in most cases we would want to recruit directly to the party and avoid going through this kind of process, but the issue is posed in some cases and it seems to me that if we are flexible we ought to consider having branches make the decision to do this kind of thing on their own if they think it would help recruit these people.

#### **Joel Britton**

Branches should not set up formal candidacy programs without consulting the national office. If we are going to do it we will do it on a national basis. Many of the things that Bill mentioned, however, are things that could be done without a formal candidacy program. People who are supporters and are considering joining should certainly be asked at some point to help contribute financially. They might be asked to come to a special point at a branch meeting on an election campaign; I know that is done in a number of branches. It should also be made clear to people coming around us that they don't have to be the super, all-time, record-setting activist. It's not a requirement of party membership to be as active as someone who is maybe ten years younger than you, has no family responsibilities, and doesn't have as rough a job. Those are the kinds of things a candidacy program wouldn't necessarily solve.

#### **John Isenhower, Southside Chicago**

I have enjoyed the discussion tonight for a lot of different reasons, but one of the things that came through to me are the different ways that people approach the question of recruitment. Something that might be helpful to people when they go back and start thinking out how to organize a recruitment committee is to think about one of the things that Joel suggested. He asked people to think about the way they were recruited to the party. This set off a whole series of thoughts in my mind. I flashed back to when I first became recruited to the Trotskyist movement. I had been around a while and read a lot of stuff, but I think it was Fred Murphy who stuck a bunch of leaflets in my hand. And I was really scared. Here I was handing out socialist leaflets. I thought I was a socialist, but here's the acid test. So when comrades are riding the bus back, go over the experiences you had when you were recruited and maybe that will help get the ball rolling and get recruitment going in your branch.

#### **John Cannon, Milwaukee**

I just wanted to pick up on one of the comments Joel made in his introduction and try to relate it to the turn. He said that we have to be careful not to harangue people when we first come into contact with them.

People are recruited to our movement at all different levels of thinking and consciousness. For example, when I was recruited, which was only about ten months ago, I still had, and still do (I won't lose it), a very strong sense of class hatred and very real emotions about the problems we face. Also, I had done some studying about socialism and had been convinced of the socialist future and the necessity for it. So what had to be done so far as recruiting

me to the movement was very little. All that had to be done was just to show an example. I had never been in contact with other groups before, but I had participated in the antiwar movement in Madison where I went to school. I participated and marched in demonstrations and there are thousands, millions of people like me, that were like me then, that we still have to reach.

It's important to listen to people. When I first tried to recruit other people to the movement I wanted to give them everything that was stated in "What Socialists Stand For." After a time I realized that that isn't the way. What we have to do is listen to people and find out where their heads are at, let them tell us what problems they have, what they think of the situation, what they think of politics. And we should very calmly try to explain our position. As it has been pointed out, we don't have to recruit and shouldn't have the perspective of trying to recruit people in one night. It's a real problem with comrades who have been in as short a time as I have. And from what has been reported, I guess most people have been in about as long as I have. So it's important to take a longer-term approach.

One of the things that has been pointed out is that we often tend to take comrades for granted because we see them so much of the day. Contacts that come around sense this when you appear to be very unfriendly or wise-cracking to a comrade, and see that the way you treat them is so much different.

Another point I want to mention is the danger of being arrogant. This is a real problem because of the image the ruling class portrays of radicals and revolutionists, that we are hair-brained and know-it-alls and we talk about the dictatorship of the proletariat and this and that. People don't understand that. Those from normal backgrounds just want to hear the answers that are in the Bill of Rights for Working People pamphlet.

### **Vivian Sahrer, Atlanta**

I didn't want to talk so much about how I was recruited but more about some correct moves the Atlanta branch made, that helped me stay in the movement.

When I joined the YSA I was 25. That isn't terrifically old, but I was coming to the local from a different perspective than most people. I had been married for over eight years and had three children. I had been a housewife for eight years. Even though I wasn't very much older I really felt uncomfortable about going into this youth group. But the Atlanta movement made some really good moves that made me feel much better.

For one thing, the only kind of political work I had been in before was women's liberation work, and when I got into the YSA they didn't say to me, well now you are a socialist and understand that women's liberation can only come through socialist revolution so you'll be doing just as much for women if you are a forum director, or something. They left me in women's liberation work. So I had confidence that I could carry out some work with some experience.

After a while I was put onto finances. This was also really thought out by the YSA. They knew this was the kind of assignment I could do a lot of at home. It was also

the kind of assignment where I wouldn't have to go into coalition meetings on specific nights, if I had problems with one of my children or they got sick. The ledger is always going to be there the next night; it's a flexible type of thing. That also helped me a great deal. I was able to remain active, which made me feel really good.

After I was in Atlanta for a couple of months I became a member of the branch. I think I was allowed in the branch a little bit sooner than I otherwise would have been. But I think they realized that I was still a little uncomfortable about being in the YSA. After another eight months I was graduated from the YSA. I really felt comfortable in the YSA by this time, but there was a time problem being in both organizations. It was understood that this was a problem so I was simply graduated.

I wasn't pushed out on sales. In fact I copped out on a lot of sales, just by saying that I had children. But I think that if we are going to deal with people we should be more lenient than more hard on this question, because eventually people begin to politically understand the meaning of sales. Now I sell.

Finances is the same thing. Our average sustainer pledge is \$10, and mine is \$5. And I don't get any hassle about it. (I'm financial director for one thing.) The way our branch approaches finances is that it is a political question and that it's known that not everyone can contribute the same amount. We don't go prying into people's personal budgets; we don't even go into individual meetings and say, "how much rent do you pay?" We say: "this is what the movement needs, and how much can you give?" That way it is understood that not everyone can give the same amount.

I think these discussions we are having about shortening the meetings, direct recruiting to the party, and being aware that not all people are going to have the same amount of time to spend in the movement are really going to make a difference. It will make a difference not only in recruiting people, but also in keeping them in.

### **Jon Hillson, Boston**

Our recruitment work in Boston has just begun to be organized and is still very modest. But I think there are some things we have done that go along with the themes of what has been said here.

I think the key thing in our recruitment work in Boston and nationally is a question of attitude. A number of comrades used the formulation of "reaching out." I think it is a sense of "turning outward." It means that we don't have to tell a comrade to go talk to a new person standing alone in a corner or behind the coatrack at a forum or banquet. It means that we avoid situations where there is a group of comrades all together and there are three or four independents just looking. There has to be an attitude that the reason non-members are there is that we brought them and we are going to do everything we can to introduce ourselves to them. We want to show them there may be no difference between them and us except that they haven't made a decision to work with us on a more systematic basis.

I think the organizational forms that we use, a recruitment director or recruitment committee or combination with a campaign committee, all depend on the kind of experience and circumstances we are in.

If there are a number of people around us that we are confident we can recruit over a period of time, every single one of them should know there is a comrade they can talk to. I think that's not seen as a bad thing. At first I thought that if a prospective member thinks there is one person that's going to try to recruit them, they might not like it. It's a lot better than having a situation where a prospective member comes to the hall or a forum where they get 66 different dinners and get the same question 15 times, "How did you come around? How did you get interested?" I think it is a much more natural thing when they begin to know someone and know them on a more social and political basis and are able to expand on the number of topics they are familiar with and can talk to comrades about.

I think the dinners are a very good way of doing things, but I think there's also another added attraction, and that is that it's a good way to assimilate our newer comrades and utilize the energy and enthusiasm they bring with them into our movement. I think a lot of the best recruiters we have, the people with a lot of enthusiasm, are people who recently joined our movement, whether to the YSA or to the party.

All the recruitment skills and techniques we used are linked to a very specific kind of period we are in. There will be a time when we won't have recruitment work per se. People will knock on headquarters doors in different cities and we will sign up ten, fifteen, forty people in a given day, and it won't require an elaborate process. We aren't at that point yet, but I think the discussion we are having, and the techniques we are beginning to learn are the basis of opening up to the first trickle of people who are going to become the mass that are going to make us the mass party.

#### **Tim Craine, Detroit**

I'd like to respond to the question Bill raised earlier about whether the party should move toward establishing some sort of candidacy status. Joel mentioned the party does not have it at present, but there are a number of ways we can involve potential recruits. I'd like to speak a little about the experience of Detroit over the past few years, because we have had the opportunity to recruit some people directly to the party. We have established as normal procedure inviting potential recruits to become regular visitors to branch meetings. This has in some cases lasted over a period of a month or two. It has given our contacts the opportunity to see how we function and to encourage that prospective member to become more involved in our day-to-day work, such as sales and what not. Ultimately, to my recollection, about five people over the last two years have directly joined the SWP in Detroit after having been invited to come as branch visitors. There have been a few other cases where the visitors have decided not to join. This is in keeping with the idea that we want to open the party up. When we talk about making our campaign committees working committees where we bring in our campaign supporters and actually make them part of the campaign committee, we're also talking about opening the party up in the same way.

Another experience we had in Detroit this summer, and evidently other branches have done it too, was inviting contacts to attend preconvention discussion. Mike Kelly

pointed out in one of the discussion bulletins that we actually went on an aggressive campaign to ask as many people as we thought might be receptive to attend our preconvention discussion. We gave each of them copies of the political resolution to study. As a result, I think, at least three or four people are here at the convention who actually started coming around the party through the preconvention discussion. They had been casual contacts before and had sat in on some of our branch preconvention discussion. They are now attending the convention, and in all likelihood most of them will join in the near future.

As we go into this period we've got to think very broadly in terms of taking that step forward and inviting our contacts to attend all sorts of party functions, including branch meetings, because this is a means of facilitating recruitment.

#### **Sarah Roedder, Washington, D.C.**

When everyone is involved in recruitment work one of the important things to do is for comrades who are newer at it to talk about the discussions they're having with contacts and with other comrades in the local. This helps get ideas of what questions to raise with contacts and what type of activity to involve them in.

I want to say something about recruiting people as *individuals*. We are a cadre organization recruiting individuals, not layers. In relation to this one of the things I have found is that comrades have very deep emotions about our political ideas and when they present them to new people they often tend to come across as confronting the person and getting in their face when talking to them. The most important thing I've found (I was really bad about this) to help prevent myself from doing this with contacts is to let the simple rationality of our ideas carry itself across without having to put a whole emotional spiel behind it. That's really helpful because it lets the person respond to you more easily and you get a better sense of where they are at.

The other thing I've found that is useful to me is to be able to say "I don't know" when asked a question I can't answer. I say, "I'll try to find somebody in the organization who knows something about that." That also helps make the contact feel at ease.

Another thing I wanted to mention was there are millions of people in this country who are religious. Comrades are going to have to learn how to discuss with prospective members who have religious backgrounds. I was a religious fanatic before I joined the movement, and comrades took it on. There are a lot of reasons people are religious and you should find out those first, find out why they are religious and what is holding them to their religion. If it's humanism, there's nothing more real than the humanism of the socialist movement. The most important thing in breaking away from religion was the fact that there are tremendous tasks to be done. I joined during the antiwar movement. The most important task was ending the war in Vietnam as far as I was concerned, and it was clear that the church wasn't going to end the war in Vietnam, but the movement would. A lot of comrades take the approach of trying to show how the church has been reactionary. That's useful for some individuals, but it's more important to talk to the individual about humanism and also about the fact there

is a task to be done and you should belong to an organization that can deal with it.

### **Jean Savage, Upper West Side**

An important thing to consider is helping new recruits feel comfortable with how a democratic centralist organization functions.

One of the ways of dealing with that is setting up classes for people who are new to the party, and I think the Bea Hansen tape on the organizational question [*Organizational Procedures of the SWP*, by Bea Hansen, \$3.50, available from National Tape Service, SWP, 14 Charles Lane, N.Y., N.Y, 10014] is something people should consider using.

Another thing we should be conscious of is our functioning at national conferences where we hold national fraction meetings. Many of us tend to forget to explain to new members how we function in a national fraction, why we vote the way floor leaders vote, what floor leaders are, what the national committee is, what the political committee is. Those are things people usually don't understand right away.

### **Joel Britton**

This has been a very interesting and varied discussion and a lot of good ideas have been raised. I think the key thing now is to go back to our own areas and experiment with some of the ideas that have been put forward here.

## Women's Liberation Workshop

[The following are the edited reports and discussion at the Women's Liberation workshop held at the SWP national convention, August 1975.]

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### Linda Jenness

We will begin with four reports on some of the areas of women's liberation we want to emphasize so that people can draw national lessons from them, and then I think we will have plenty of time for discussion from the floor.

Seeing so many of you here reminds me that when we were discussing holding this workshop, one of the reasons we thought it was important was the great opportunities and interest in women's liberation that we've noticed. We wanted to emphasize that and make sure that branches felt free to really get back into women's liberation activities. I think it was Evelyn Reed who said, "Well, I don't think there will be any problem with that; people are chomping at the bit, and all they need is a green light." Having all of you here tonight proves that Evelyn was right on that.

I'm not going to go over all the points Betsey made in her Tasks and Perspectives report. Her basic report in regard to women's liberation was that we have found increased opportunities that we think we should begin to relate to. This change in the mood has several expressions, ranging from the significant forces we found for the Joanne Little defense to the broad coalitions supporting the Equal Rights Amendment. These are just some of the expressions of this new activity and increasing interest.

We want to start paying closer attention to the opportunities opening up to us, beginning with what I think is going to take serious investigation, or what Evelyn Reed often refers to as "sleuthing around," in your own area to find out exactly what the new developments are. This includes checking out some of the women's liberation groups which we had sort of given up on during the last year or two for various reasons. They had become very sectarian, inward-looking, and anti-Trotskyist, and engaged in red-baiting so we had not participated in them. This includes the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, for example, which we have not been involved in. I think we should take a new look at this group and see who they are bringing around, and if there has been a transformation of the leadership. Let's find out who's in there, what they're doing, and what they're interested in.

It also includes groups like the Boston Socialist Feminists organization, which according to the information I have, attracts anywhere from 100 to 150 people to its meetings. Even though we know many leaders from that group who have been hostile to us, I agree with what Betsey said in her report today, that some of these people are changing. But I also know that if you have 100 or 150

women coming to a meeting that not all of them are going to be hostile to us. In fact, many of them have probably never heard of the YSA or the SWP and are grappling with the questions of socialism and feminism. We should go there and find out what they are talking about and get to know them.

Before going to reports about what we're doing in several cities I'd like to note that we've separated out two areas of our women's liberation work for special workshops. One was the Coalition of Labor Union Women workshop which we had this afternoon and the other is the ERA workshop. We separated these two areas out because we are involved in national campaigns, and in the case of the ERA we are planning on stepping up our national campaign. One thing we've noted is that, while the main fight around the ERA for the past couple of years was in those states which haven't yet passed it and the fight is to get it ratified in those states, it's become clearer that the ERA fight is nationally much broader than just getting it passed in those states. There are basically three fights.

One is to get it passed in states that haven't passed it, like Illinois, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Utah, and several others. Then there's the fight to defend the ERA in places which have passed it but where the right wing is mobilizing to try to reverse it. As you know, two states have rescinded the ERA. It's not known yet whether this is constitutional, but the anti-ERA forces are trying to do it. We've seen in Colorado a big attack on the ERA by right-wing groups trying to get it reversed, and a coalition is forming to defend the state's ratification.

The third area is the phenomenon of states trying to adopt a state ERA that they can begin to work on and implement regardless of what happens to the national one. For instance, New York and New Jersey are states where state ERAs will be on the ballot in a referendum in the fall elections. So of course coalitions have been formed to make sure people vote yes on this referendum.

By the time you include those three areas, and probably other kinds of fights around the ERA, it touches almost every state. So even though we aren't going to discuss in this workshop our national campaign in support of ERA which we are making a part of our national election campaign, it is an important part of our general women's liberation work. I also want to emphasize that whereas we separated CLUW out for a special workshop, as we did last year, we don't want to think of it as totally divorced from our women's liberation work; it isn't. It's part of our women's liberation work and we want to try to think of ways that CLUW can relate to other feminist issues and general women's liberation activities in any given city.

In the CLUW workshop, for example, I reported that in Los Angeles the CLUW chapter had endorsed the August 26 demonstration commemorating women's suffrage and demanding a whole range of changes favorable to women.

The last thing I want to mention is that each branch should have a women's liberation director. Most of the

branches don't have women's liberation directors and haven't had one for a while. We've had CLUW directors and, in some cases, abortion work directors. But I think we should consider again in the branches having someone take on the assignment of women's liberation director even if it isn't the only assignment a woman comrade has. It is someone who is responsible for keeping on top of this work, thinking it out, probing new opportunities.

We'll start off with the abortion work we've done in Boston.

### **Diana Travis, Boston**

As many of you know, Dr. Edelin was indicted for performing a legal abortion in February, 1973. His trial took place and became a national focus of attention through last January and February.

During the trial I think it was evident to most people, it was evident to most of the women I talked to, that it was a frame-up, that most of the things raised against him were made up. Most people did not expect that Edelin would be convicted. However, the jury, which had three women, ten Catholics, and was all white, found the Black doctor guilty.

The response to his conviction was almost immediate. The Boston Area Socialist-Feminist group put out a call for a demonstration against his conviction. They got the drop on us; it was the month right after the National Student Coalition Against Racism conference in Boston, and the whole branch was trying to tie into that.

The only thing they did to build the demonstration was put out a public service announcement that was picked up by a radio station and two TV stations. But 2,000 women turned out, pouring through the streets of Boston's downtown. It was an exciting demonstration. People were chanting, angry, carrying homemade signs, and using all the old abortion chants; it was great.

Right away we knew that it was very important to have an ongoing response and try to get more support in Boston for Dr. Edelin. Soon after his conviction hospitals in Boston and around the country quit doing any abortions after twenty weeks, and a lot of hospitals and doctors refused to do abortions at all and wouldn't even refer people to other hospitals.

We had a discussion in our executive committee and branch meeting, trying to figure out some way we could do some ongoing work around this. Since the Boston Women's Abortion Action Coalition disbanded following the Supreme Court decision on abortion, we have been working in the Committee to Defend Abortion Rights, which had been active around a doctor indicted on a "grave-robbing" charge a year ago last July. (That case involves medical experimentation on fetuses.) So what we did was call some activists from the Committee to Defend Abortion Rights and called some people like Dr. Barbara Roberts, who is in Boston, and asked them to come to a meeting to discuss what we could do.

Twenty-five people came to this first meeting; everyone was very excited and wanted to do something, to have talks and get press and get more supporters. They decided to call a protest meeting at Faneuil Hall for March 20. We had two weeks to build the meeting, but everyone was eager to do it, and we had a very fantastic meeting, where

Gloria Steinem came from New York and spoke. Speakers included a priest who had been defrocked for performing a baptism on a woman who had had an abortion previously, Elaine Noble, representatives from NOW, the leader of the American Jewish Congress, Dr. Barbara Roberts, and representatives from NSCAR and the NAACP. It was a very broad meeting.

For the first time in I don't know how many years Faneuil Hall had been filled to overflowing and standing-room only. The press coverage was fantastic. After March 20, we decided to issue a call for a whole week of activities, which took place during the latter part of April and the first part of May. It was sort of like the abortion action week that we had in 1972. We decided to call for a national week; you didn't have to do a whole week of activity, but people supported activities during that week around defending Dr. Edelin and defending abortion rights.

We tried to involve the groups who were at the March 20 meeting to help build a real coalition. Right away one of the first things we did was change the committee's name to *Coalition to Defend Abortion Rights*, and we made every effort we could to involve all these groups in taking some responsibility for an action during the week.

We sent out a letter. We got *Ms Magazine* to give us their mailing list of women's organizations. We sent it around the country and began to get endorsements from people throughout the country who said they were going to do something. Unfortunately I didn't bring my notes here so I can't remember everyone, but we had people from as far away as Iowa who said they would do something to help support Dr. Edelin.

We began to get very big organizational endorsements. For the first time in I don't know how many years the National Organization of Women in Massachusetts joined something and joined our coalition and said, "We want to join something; none of us are activists, but we want to join, and we'll put out a mailing for you." That was a real big thing for NOW. One of their members came to our meeting and was very excited and donated \$200.

We were terribly excited about the enthusiasm of all these people. The Clinton Hastings clinic in Boston, very well known for its abortion stands and one of the first to do an abortion after the '73 Supreme Court decision, took responsibility for organizing what was one of the best things during the week of abortion action, a forum on high school women and abortion. They sent out a letter to all the high school counselors and high school women around the Boston area and had all sorts of women there.

Another example of what happened was that the Radcliffe College Women's Center decided they'd have a fund-raising dance for us. So they spent all the money they had for a band and had a fund-raising dance and gave us all the money.

The National Black Feminist Organization endorsed and took responsibility for organizing a night on Black women and abortion. There were a bunch of women interested in films who organized a film night during the week. The Rhode Island Women's Theater did a benefit performance during the week.

The most exciting thing, I think, was the fact that all of the organizations that supported this were actually taking responsibility for work and actually doing it. It was a real coalition. We were all working together and although we

had a lot of political differences and knew it, there was no red-baiting. There were two staff members, and I was one of them, and they all knew I was in the Socialist Workers Party and no one openly reacted unfavorably to that.

We also had a demonstration called for May 3 to culminate our activities, which was very well attended. About 1,000 women came, there were good speakers, and it was covered in the major media. During the week we had lots of programs and were on four or five different talk shows prior to it.

There are just two things left that I want to discuss. One is our Black work. During the spring we were building for the May 17 NAACP action in support of busing, and the response in the Black community to Dr. Edelin's conviction was immediate. It was another attack on a Black person coinciding with the entire racist hysteria going on in Boston and they responded immediately. Tom Atkins of the Boston NAACP had a news conference in support of Dr. Edelin. He endorsed the demonstration and agreed to come and speak at it. Unfortunately he wasn't able to speak because he was delayed on a flight from Detroit. A lot of Blacks really rallied around Dr. Edelin's defense including Alma Lewis who is against abortion but defended him because he's Black. We tried to draw this in by having an NSCAR representative speak at both the rallies and to help build for May 17. We went to Black functions, like the event for Dr. Edelin at the Alma Lewis school and tried to get participation in the abortion action week also.

The other thing is that none of our opponents did anything around this; they all defaulted, every single one of them. However, the Boston Area Socialist/Feminist Organization began coming to our meetings. We had weekly meetings during the spring and there were never less than 22 or 23 people, and sometimes 30 independents. BASFO came to these meetings and asked us to adopt a whole range of demands including general health care. They didn't think it was enough to defend Dr. Edelin and abortion rights, but they were soundly defeated every time. They kept coming and plugging away, but their leaders said they would have to withdraw from the coalition since we didn't have a wider range of issues to talk about. Women got up from NOW and said the only reason NOW was in the coalition was because it wanted to defend Dr. Edelin. Women from the Clinton Hastings clinic, from Equity Action League also said, "Look, this is the only reason we're in. We're not in for this other range of activities." I found out later from a member of BASFO I had never met before who I picked up hitchhiking and talked to that BASFO was very divided about pulling out of the coalition. She said, "We were split right down the middle," and that women had walked out of the meeting. I also learned from her that BASFO has a lot of women.

At any rate BASFO never red-baited us in the coalition. The differences were discussed politically, and they were soundly defeated.

We didn't do a lot this summer around Dr. Edelin's defense but expect to this fall because his appeal will be coming up. We hope that more can be done around the country. He's going to go on speaking tours, to Atlanta and some other places. We want to begin to build support. People were so enthused that we ended up after this week of activity with \$1,000 in the bank, so we're well set to begin work this fall and are looking forward to it. There

are women who are all set, who told us, "Just give us a call."

### Judy Hagans, Chicago

I want to talk about how the Joanne Little defense activities developed in Chicago, some of the types of activities that were carried out, the individuals and groups that became involved in the work, and how the party, the YSA and SCAR participated.

During the spring there was a Black radio station announcer who was single-handedly conducting a Joanne Little fund-raising campaign, constantly giving reports about her case on the radio, and held a big fund-raising event. Shortly after that, we found out that there was an unknown group of women that were interested in doing Joanne Little defense work. We scouted around and found out where they were meeting and began going to their meetings. We had no idea what the group was like or who was involved. We just said we'll conduct a probe to see what we could do. And it was good that we did, because we were able to get involved in a big way, and I think we helped make a big impact in Chicago in terms of reviving women's liberation work and Black liberation work as well, because the two can't be separated when you talk about Joanne Little.

At first the group called itself the Committee to Defend Joanne Little, or the Joanne Little Defense Committee, and its main activity was petitioning, gathering endless numbers of signatures to be sent to the governor to free Joanne Little. It was fortunate that one of the women in the committee was related to a lawyer in Raleigh, N.C., who was involved in the group that had saved Joanne Little's life while she was a fugitive. We thought we might be able to have some kind of activity that one of the lawyers might be able to attend, and that would be a fund-raising activity.

Before going into exactly what we did, I should discuss who was involved in the work. We found that almost overnight a really broad coalition had come together. And some of the groups we found in this coalition were New American Movement, women who had a feminist printing shop (which came in really handy), Chicago Women's Liberation Union, which claims a membership of 400 people and whom we hadn't worked with since the old days of WONAAC. There were people from the Independent Voters Association and a couple of members of the Young Workers Liberation League. Also involved was the chairwoman of the Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression; Black women from the League of Revolutionary Black Workers; the National Black Feminist Organization; and women from Rising Up Angry, and the Black Workers Congress. There were also some independent Black women who proved to be key to the work, one of whom had been the head of the Welfare Rights Organization in Chicago.

There were some problems in the group at first because it was sort of like the old SDS in the 1960's with its "participatory democracy." There was no agenda, anybody could say anything, and nobody chaired. We just came together and talked. A lot of good Black women were attracted to the group in the beginning but then dropped out because the group didn't have much direction and

seemed disorganized and it was very frustrating to come to the meetings.

But because of the Rising Up Angry woman whose father-in-law is related to the lawyer, talk of a rally started developing and we found out that Joanne Little was coming to Chicago. It's amazing how events will force a group that's really disorganized, to organize under the pressure of events. And when Joanne Little is coming you can't screw it up. So we had a lot of debates since the woman who had the connection to Joanne Little was projecting that perhaps we could have a sit-down spaghetti dinner with 300 people anxious to meet Joanne Little and maybe have a smaller thing with some of the women who were involved in organizing it. However, we found that there were other people who agreed with us that we wanted to have the biggest, broadest rally possible to build support for Joanne Little.

The group really started to pull together and it turned out that we had a rally when Joanne Little came in July. We were able to get a large number of endorsers even though we had just three or four weeks to build the whole thing. Everything didn't run smoothly by any means, but we got a pretty wide range of endorsers for the rally and the speakers were very representative of the movements in Chicago.

One thing that really struck me and just about everyone was the speech that Willie Barrows, who's a vice-president of Operation PUSH, gave. She gave the most rousing feminist talk that I think anyone in that audience had ever heard. Everyone was surprised to hear pure feminism coming from a Black preacher who was tied to a reformist organization like PUSH. I think that shows that if you just look you find feminism everywhere, and it's really on the rise among Black women.

We did a lot of the traditional things to build it, like having literature tables, shaking cans, and passing out leaflets, mostly in Southside shopping centers. The response was overwhelming; people who are probably on welfare gave a dollar because they know that Joanne Little was framed up because she's Black and because she's a woman. There was virtually no hostility to the activities we carried on.

When we saw the potential for doing some real, concrete building around the Joanne Little defense, the party quickly pulled together a joint fraction with the YSA and reestablished the assignment of women's liberation director. I think we took a really good approach because we were open to doing as much as we could while not expecting more than we should have from the committee. It really paid off because the YSA and party made contact with a group that we weren't even aware of or that we hadn't been able to work with for a number of years.

Another thing that is interesting is the example of how rapidly a coalition of people with very divergent ideas, just as in Boston, can pull together when the issue is hot, like defense of Dr. Edelin or Joanne Little. These two issues are probably on the same level in terms of electrifying people and getting things into motion. We were really surprised because we expected there to be red-baiting and SWP-baiting, but we didn't find that. People just accepted us as respected partners in this coalition and we had a lot of weight. It was amazing if you've been in organizations in the past where you had to struggle just for the right to sit down in the room, to be asked to chair the next meeting

because you know how to chair a meeting and how to organize it. It just shows that people are more open to working with us.

As I said, everything didn't go smoothly within this coalition. For one thing, it changed its name to the Chicago Women's Defense Committee because I think events propelled people to move. The fact that Joanne Little was coming forced people who didn't necessarily want to go out and build a mass movement to act like they did. The coalition changed its name in the midst of all this activity, and a number of forces argued that we had to keep our eyes open for other defense cases, local cases. They were looking for anything to get away from really building a mass movement. Of course, there was nothing else they could do so everyone had to do Joanne Little work.

Just before Joanne came to Chicago we found out that the Joanne Little defense committee nationally was calling for a demonstration and rally in Raleigh, N.C., at the opening of the trial. Well, the Women's Defense Committee didn't want to deal with it, but we thought it would be terrible to miss this opportunity in Chicago to latch onto all of this momentum. So what we did very quickly, almost overnight, was to get SCAR to draw up a letter and get some of the key Black women, Charlotte Walker, and Ginger Mack, the woman who had been the welfare rights leader, to cosign the letter calling for a citywide coalition to build for sending a bus to Raleigh. The Chicago Women's Defense Committee was put into a very awkward position because on the one hand we had raised the question of going to Raleigh and they had said, well, we'll take it up later, but there were only two weeks to build it. So when SCAR moved right in they couldn't do anything but endorse it. In fact the woman who appeared at the rally was from the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. No one had actually talked about where they were from in the coalition but everyone knew who everybody was. I told her at the rally I was doing an article for the *Militant* and I wanted to make sure I had the name of the organization right, and she said she didn't think they would even want their name printed in the *Militant*. But she was forced to say that there will be a meeting on Wednesday at the SCAR office, giving the address and phone number of the SCAR office to organize the bus to the rally. That was a really big victory for us because we were able to keep up the Joanne Little activities when the group that had the ball dropped it, just like SDS did back in the early '60s after they called the first national demonstration against the war in Vietnam.

As I said before, Charlotte Walker of the Alliance Against Racism and Repression was one of the coauthors of the call for the bus coalition, the July 14th Coalition. I think she gained a lot of respect for us. She bought a *Militant* subscription; she plugged the *Militant* at meetings; and she started bringing people who were around the Alliance to the SCAR office. There's one woman who is going to be going to DeKalb University who wants to start a SCAR chapter there. In fact, she even invited Andrew Pulley and other SCAR activists to the Alliance's annual picnic, which really blew some CPers' minds. But she was impressed with our willingness to work with anyone and everyone who wanted to do Joanne Little defense work and the fact that the Communist party would never come in openly and work with us. She was disgusted with the

way they SWP-baited.

Another gain was that one woman from CLUW became very interested in our PRDF suit and she went to Raleigh. I think there will be a basis for further discussion with her and possible recruitment. There was another woman who had been active with us around USLA and then came in to work around Joanne Little, and I think she's a YSAer here.

A third thing we did with Joanne Little's tour of Chicago was around our campaign. Willie Mae Reid and Peter Camejo were both in town about this same time. Willie Mae went to the news conference Joanne Little had, and gave her a letter of support.

So there are a lot of things that can be gained if you just keep your eyes open and are willing to go into uncharted territory. We really don't have anything to lose, the opportunities are out there and we should move on out there and start bringing people into the party and YSA.

### **Christina Adachi, Pittsburgh**

One recent development in the women's liberation movement that we should be watching and participating in when we can is the increased interest of feminists in socialism. This has found its expression in theoretical articles in women's publications, socialist-feminist organizations, and conferences like the national socialist-feminist conference that took place in Antioch, Ohio, over the July 4 weekend.

This conference was organized by a coalition of nine different groups; the New American Movement Women's Caucus, Berkeley-Oakland Women's Union, Boston Area Socialist-Feminist Organization, Chicago Women's Liberation Union, Lexington Socialist-Feminist Union, New York City Women's Union, Radical Women Seattle, Twin Cities Women's Union, and Valley Women's Union from North Hampton, Mass.

The conference was organized around the following three principles of unity. One, "we recognize the need for and support the existence of the women's movement throughout the revolutionary process." Two, "we agree that all oppressions, whether based on race, class, sex, or lesbianism are interrelated and the fight for liberation must be simultaneous and cooperative." And three, "we agree that socialist feminism is a strategy for revolution."

Despite the fact that publicity for the conference stated that it was open to any woman who agreed with the three principles of unity, the leadership tried to exclude the YSA and SWP. This decision was made by the coalition of nine different groups before the conference even began. The conference itself never had a chance to vote on that decision.

Sixteen comrades from various cities attended the conference anyway and listened to the type of discussion that was taking place, talked to women about our views and sold our literature. We were modestly successful in this endeavor, given the fact we were not permitted to set up our tables inside the conference or even on the campus, having to settle for the nearest public sidewalks. That, I might add, was bad enough, but it was made even worse by the fact that the Spartacist League, which was also being excluded from the conference, saw what we were doing and came and set up their table right next to ours. Every time any woman would come to either table, the

Spartacist League woman would immediately jump on her and begin screaming and yelling. It made a lot of women just totally avoid the area where we were located.

Anyway, between 1200 and 1600 women attended the conference. Over 2,000 tried to register, either through the mail or in person, and hundreds were turned away after registration was closed. The conference itself was highly disorganized and abstract. The conference organizers really intended it to be three days of discussion and sharing experiences rather than to set up any type of national organization or to agree on any kind of concrete actions. The structure of the conference reflected this perspective. It consisted mainly of small group discussions and workshops. There were no sessions where resolutions or proposals could be brought up or votes would be taken. The closest thing to a plenary were two criticism/self-criticism sessions. These sessions were conducted in a totally undemocratic manner. Any speaker who identified herself as a member of any organization with men, other than NAM, or anyone who the chair decided was putting forward what she called "a position" was immediately ruled out of order.

The primary emphasis of this conference was on culture, cooperative life styles, and alternative institutions. A sampling of the workshops, for example, included, how to practice law as a socialist-feminist, how to set up a concert for and by women, who runs the park, revolutionary relationships, and the "politics" of rape.

Despite the obvious shortcomings of this conference it is highly significant that over 2,000 women from all over the country came to a conference on socialist feminism. I am sure a good number of these women were frustrated by the disorganization and lack of direction of the conference. They are women that want to do something. This is reflected in the response of the women to one of our comrades, Hattie McCutcheon, when she spoke in one of the criticism/self-criticism sessions. She did not identify herself as a member of the YSA or SWP, but talked about the need for action around concrete issues, like the ERA, Joanne Little, and affirmative action. Her remarks were received with tremendous enthusiasm. Hattie also reported a highly positive response in one of the workshops to the idea of women supporting the Willie Mae Reid campaign. In other words, many of these women were serious feminists. Many of them were not only receptive to our ideas but are looking for an organization just like the YSA or SWP.

I think this is the case generally. Many cities have had or are planning to have follow-up meetings to the conference. Some of these meetings have been quite large. Groups like the Boston Area Socialist-Feminist Organization have large meetings. While some of these women are sectarian, rabidly anti-Trotskyist, the thousands of feminists who have come to the conclusion that the total liberation of women is not possible under capitalism, and who are now becoming active in the socialist feminist movement, also include hundreds that are open to our ideas.

We should be active participants in this discussion, attending the follow-up meetings, meetings of groups like the Boston Area Socialist Feminist Organization, to check out these groups. Our support to the goals of the feminist movement has been proved in practice. We have the theoretical understanding and a wealth of literature with

which to participate in and take full advantage of this new development, and that is what we should be doing.

### Kris Vasquez, Houston

I feel kind of funny speaking up here, because all of the women who have been speaking so far have been speaking about activities that have been going on for a period of time, and Mujeres Unidas has just begun organizing in Texas recently.

We did have a very large Conferencia de Mujeres por la Raza back in 1971 in Houston, which more or less laid the foundation for Chicanas to begin thinking of feminist organizations. Five hundred Chicanas from around the country attended that gathering, but we didn't see any further conferences or organizations until 1973 when Mujeres Unidas began to organize. It was mainly a women's group within La Raza Unida party to develop Raza women for leadership positions within the *partido*.

Mujeres Unidas held a very successful one-day symposium in 1973 at which representatives from the Democratic, Republican, RUP and Socialist Workers party had speakers. A forum called "Political Alternatives" was held where I spoke. It was attended by 100 women. The organization put out one issue of a newsletter right after that, but then we didn't see the organization again for two months.

The reason for this was that there was a split in the leadership over the guidelines for joining the organization, whereby the Raza Unida women wanted to utilize the group in drawing women to join the RUP, which we were not against. But there were other women who felt this would tend to narrow the recruitment of young women who didn't want to have any kind of political affiliation with any one group, so therefore the organization never met again.

From then until 1975 Mujeres Unidas was mainly organized in San Antonio and in Crystal City. Finally, we held our first organizing meeting in Houston this May where 30 women showed up. Since then we have grown to a membership of 75. Half the membership are high school women, the other half are students on campus and community women.

Just to give you an example of some of the meetings we have, when the high school women came their mothers came with them. If you're a Chicana you understand. Anyway, some of the mothers joined the organization; others said, "Well, I'll have to talk to my husband."

A woman professor of Mexican American literature at the University of Houston chaired this first meeting. She is also a very active member of the Houston La Raza Unida party. To just give you the kind of tone of the meeting, she opened up as to what guidelines they wanted the organization to follow and so on. Then she called on me and asked, "Kris, do you have any comments to make on what we could possibly do in the future?"

Since that meeting the goals that we have set have been to educate women on their role in history; even Chicana history is not covered in courses on women's history, unfortunately. Also we have tried to develop women for attaining leadership positions in every facet of life within the La Raza Unida party, within the campus organizations, and within the schools and in the community, which are beginning to have some very militant women. We also

wanted to train women to help lead in some of the social struggles that are taking place, like the farmworkers and undocumented workers.

It is rather difficult to function in the summer in Houston because the university is mainly a commuter college and the problem we have is trying to get the women in the community to come on campus. So what we've done is alternated meetings between the campus and the communities. The membership has been getting so big that we've tried to divide the group in order to have Mujeres Unidas groups at the various high schools when the school semester starts. Then we'll try to have just one monthly meeting where we'll have a combination of the high school and college students together.

The areas of work that Mujeres Unidas has been working in and intends to work in are farmworkers support work, the Texas strike that's happening right now, bilingual education, and trying to set up a Chicana study course within the women's study course on campus. One is now being offered off campus at a community college for the first time. We also are organizing a state-wide Chicana conference for November, for which Olga Rodriguez is one of the persons on the speaking list.

The meetings are very, very open. We get continuous reports from the farmworkers movement and make announcements on the Socialist Workers campaign. The RUP also makes announcements about their campaign, but there's no kind of sectarian tone.

It's just a very young, healthy group where anything can be brought out on the floor. Sylvia Sabasta who is a comrade in SCAR gave a report on the Joanne Little rally this summer, and the resolution was passed right away in support of the rally.

As I said, the women are very young and at times this tends to pose a threat to the Raza Unida men in Houston because there is a feeling of solidarity and respect for each other within the women's organization, and the RUP men can't do anything about it. They can't red-bait us or anything because they might be hurting the feelings of the women involved in the group. So this has done a lot in our favor and has helped us in other areas of work, like the farmworkers and so on that we've been undertaking in Houston.

Louise Jeffo, who is the acting chairperson, has turned over the organization to me on a couple of occasions, once when she went to Mexico City to attend the women's conference (we had a whole delegation of women who went) and another time when she had to go out of town for another reason. It alternates; when she can't chair a meeting she let's me chair and take care of it, and we collaborate as to what we want to discuss on the agenda and what type of things we want to get the women involved in.

With the opening of schools and the activities that are coming up in Houston and San Antonio, like Mexican independence day which is celebrated for a whole week in Texas, we will be having literature tables up, to get some Pathfinder literature out. Some of the women have the literature; one woman bought a copy of *Woman's Evolution* and the next thing I knew we were talking about how we could get Evelyn Reed to Houston. So this is very good. One of the women is on the program council that allocates

money for speakers and she said she'd like to see if we could possibly get Evelyn to come for the women's studies and Chicano studies, that maybe between the two of them we could get something going.

We are planning to have talks and films besides the conference to raise money. With these activities our group should be able to recruit more women.

It would be good if the party and YSA could sponsor some talks on women's liberation on campus; we would be able to draw in a lot of these women. They've been asking questions about what is the YSA, what is the party, what is their role, because they see us everywhere and they don't understand at times exactly what we're doing.

Another thing is the ERA work. That's had a lot of influence on some of the women. There is work we could do on that. And of course the campaign we're running for Pedro Vasquez, I'm sure some of the Chicanas will become involved in it. The USLA campaign for political prisoners work, the undocumented workers work, are also a very good way to draw some of the women into SCAR. There's a lot of women in the high schools and we could really involve them in this work.

We have a very good advantage in that the "left opposition," (there's a minor "left opposition" in Houston—a few members of PL, the October League, and so on) don't have Chicanas in their organizations. So none of them can attend these meetings since they are only for Chicanas. They haven't paid attention to the group, and the group is continuously growing right now.

The different social struggles the party and YSA are fighting for is exactly what the women in Mujeres Unidas want. It's what they're fighting for too.

### **Holly Harkness, Minneapolis**

I'd like to talk about our recent work with the socialist-feminist group in Minneapolis, the Twin Cities Women's Union, and a little bit about our relationship with them.

Twin Cities Women's Union was one of the coordinators of the national socialist feminist conference that was held at Antioch this summer. They've been talking about socialist feminism for a long time. The group has about 40 to 50 women who consider themselves members, and they might have about 100 more in their periphery who participate in one or more of their groups. I'm not really sure how they are organized, but they have different work groups that sometimes work on different projects. One is a self-help clinic which some members are totally involved in and don't do any of the other work of the Women's Union. They also have a theater group, and a poster collective. They've also become more and more active in the political life of Minneapolis, and internally they've been holding classes on Marxism and talking about socialism.

We began to recognize the importance of working with these women just over the last year. They came out of some of their internal debates and discussions. We met up with them in three areas. One is that they have a women's school where they have classes on every subject you can imagine, from Chinese character drawing to swimming and things like that, to political classes, like Spanish for political work. They also have a socialist-feminist class where they study Marxism.

We thought it would be important for us to participate in this school and hold our classes on Marxism in order to

acquaint women there with our socialist views. At this time they are very unclear about what socialist-feminist politics really is. There was a lot of mix-up in the way the classes were organized. I was going to teach it, but then I decided to go on the YSA regional team so another comrade took it over and we had to change the format of the class. I guess they didn't realize I was in the SWP, although it was no secret. But on the day of registration when people came for the first class, they confronted the woman who was taking over the class from me and they viciously chastised her for sneaking in and trying to rip off their organization. The women's union was their thing, and how dare we come in there. It was quite a shocking thing, because it was a women's school and we thought we had something to contribute to it. So we began to step back and look at them a little bit differently after that.

We also had some experience with them when we began to work in coalitions with them. There were two coalitions that we participated in that they were also in. One was around the food stamps rally and the other was around international women's day.

They took the initiative to begin an international women's day coalition and we had been thinking that would be a good idea so we were happy to work with them. However they tried to impose their entire political program on the event. They wanted their entire program of support to the peace treaty in Vietnam, down with the multinational food corporations, and a few women's slogans in there somewhere all listed on the leaflet. This was even before they tried to broaden out the coalition to get more women in. After a few debates in the women's coalition meetings we were able to get it narrowed down to just a few slogans. Our comrades in the march focused on women's slogans, which were the most popular. But they also announced at the coalition meetings that no one could sell their newspapers at the rally after the march in Minneapolis. It was obvious that this was directed at members of the SWP and the YSA, since we were the only groups participating that had newspapers to sell. We protested this and finally were allowed to sell from our table.

Many times comrades who were working with this group became very frustrated at the way we were being treated and got fed up with their anti-Trotskyist prejudices. We pretty much realized that it was important to try to deal with them in a comradely way, and the more we tried to work with them and get into discussions with them the better it was in the long run. We had confidence in the party's politics and knew we are the only organization that had successfully linked up socialism and feminism and can contribute to their discussions informally and formally.

And we were also pretty proud of the history of our work in the women's liberation movement. We're proud of our theoretical contributions, as well as our active efforts to help build the movement. Even though you don't see as many women's liberation actions these days, the ideas of feminism have really spread in the past few years, and there are a lot of feminists who are out of there.

Women's liberation was one of the main planks in the SWP campaign platform, which will help draw more women around us. We've seen this in Minneapolis already. Mary Hillery is our candidate for mayor, and she's been known statewide for her activities during the abortion movement. This respect for our participation in the

abortion movement showed itself when Mary's campaign was endorsed by the Hennepin County Women's Political Caucus. It was the first time they had ever done anything like that. They also endorsed my campaign for school board because our campaign was in favor of kicking the sexist textbooks out of the schools.

So we are going to be looking forward to working with these women of the Women's Political Caucus, because some of them are quite radical.

But I want to get back to the Women's Union. Even though we found the leaders of the Twin Cities Women's Union reluctant to discuss politics with us, we went to a meeting to try to negotiate an invitation from them to the socialist feminist conference. Every time we would get around to discussing our political differences, they would get up and walk out of the room or say, "I have to go talk on the phone." They didn't want to discuss things with us, and I think it's because they were unsure of what their politics really are. This was also true when they tried to exclude us from coalitions or tried to prevent us from selling the *Militant*.

The grounds that they use for excluding us is that we are "sectarian," "disrupters," and are against an independent women's movement. These are serious charges, and if you are fairly new in the feminist movement and don't know anything about the left it is something to consider. For us to disprove them it is not enough for us to simply say, "that's not true; it's a lie." It's far more effective for us to simply show in practice, by actively building Joanne Little coalitions, doing ERA work, participating in international women's day demonstrations, that the exact opposite is true. This way we can often reveal that the real sectarians are the leaders of their own organization.

For example, they didn't even show up at the Joanne Little coalition rally on July 14 when the trial opened. It was an historic demonstration in Minneapolis because of the turn-out of Black women. The reason they didn't come was that they were having a criticism/self-criticism session about the socialist-feminist conference that was just over.

But we also have to realize when working with these groups that not all the members are against the SWP and the YSA. Many of their members don't even know who we are. This was illustrated to me when I went to the women's school to teach classes. We were all sitting around having coffee and I sat down next to a woman and noticed she was reading the book *Feminism and Socialism*, edited by Linda Jenness, and I thought, "Gee, I didn't know these people read our literature." So I said, "I noticed you're reading that book," and she said, "Yes, this organization is socialist and I don't know much about socialism so when I saw this book in the library I thought I would take it out to find out about it." So I said, "Yes, it's a good book; I've read it." I told her I'm a member of the Socialist Workers party and that Linda Jenness was our candidate for president in 1972 and I kept on talking until the meeting began.

We were also able to have a member of the women's union come with us to the founding conference of NSCAR in February.

There's lots of women we want to talk to and reach in these organizations, and we can't do that by just standing on the sidelines and looking at them as opponent organizations that will always be hostile to us. The only

way to do it is to jump right into the struggles as they arise and demonstrate that with our theory and practice we are the only consistent socialist-feminist group.

In Minneapolis we hope to open a debate in the pages of *Goldflower*, the women's newspaper in Minneapolis, on the politics of socialist-feminism and the nature of exclusion in the women's movement.

### Jessica Starr, San Diego

This workshop is very interesting because everyone who has spoken so far, and I'm sure the remarks from people yet to speak, are really about how we are going to deal with the women's liberation movement again, and in a different way than we have in the last couple of years when things slowed down.

In San Diego we've begun to have some discussions about how we can get back into the women's liberation movement in the city and begin to talk to women about socialism and joining the YSA and party.

Without even concentrating specifically on women's liberation work, in the last four months we've recruited seven women to the YSA. Most of these women considered themselves to be feminists before they joined. They actually got involved with us through SCAR work because on one particular campus, for example, the women's center wasn't doing anything, and SCAR looked like a good thing to get involved with. So in a local of 20, one third of the comrades are women comrades who will be involved in all aspects of work and learning about Trotskyism.

We haven't done a lot of work in San Diego around specific women's issues, but it has become clear to us, as a number of speakers have said, that there are a lot of women out there who are very interested in feminist ideas, that feminist ideas have spread far and wide and have seeped into every crevice of society. Also what's beginning to happen as a result of the whole economic crisis, that we describe in our political resolution, is that women as well as everyone else are more open to socialist ideas.

We had some specific examples in San Diego of work in the feminist movement that I'd like to tell you about. One was the activity around this abortion situation where the Catholic Church made a direct attack against NOW and threatened to excommunicate anyone who believed in a woman's right to have an abortion and tried to take Communion. All you had to say is, "yes, I believe in a woman's right to choose," and you were refused the sacraments. Anyway, NOW organized a vigil around a Catholic Church in San Diego. They didn't want to have a demonstration; they wanted to have it low-key and said we shouldn't even bring picket signs. Over 300 people showed up on very short notice. (Some accounts say 500 were there.) It was a very spirited action, even though it was supposed to be a nice quiet vigil.

The anti-abortion people were out in the front of the church trying to protect it, and it just felt so good to be in a women's liberation demonstration again, it was like the first time in a long time I had been on one.

Another example is that Kate Millet had a dialogue with Herbert Marcuse, who is still the guru up at the University of California in San Diego. Any time he opens his mouth a thousand students show up. They had a dialogue on feminism and socialism. I understand that the tickets were actually sold out a couple of months in advance; there was

tremendous interest in this. Kate Millet came out as a socialist at this meeting and encouraged women to form socialist-feminist organizations. She said this was how the revolution was going to be made. She had some rather distasteful remarks about "the left" and about how you shouldn't get involved in a socialist group that had men in it. However, she did declare herself a socialist and as a result a lot of women on that campus are now thinking about organizing socialist feminist organizations and are thinking of themselves as socialists.

The third thing was the Joanne Little picket line which was built primarily, by the way, by these new women YSAers. And 150 people, overwhelmingly women from the feminist movement, showed up for this picket. It was very successful, and it really started us thinking that we were really very much out of touch with the various groups in the feminist movement in San Diego. This demonstration was built by going around to the various feminist groups, taking leaflets and putting notices in newsletters, etc. It really put us back in touch for the first time in a long time, and this made us think about what we should do about it.

It's not that we haven't done anything. We've had some very successful forums, for example. Our largest forums in the last year have been around women's issues. We showed two films and slide shows that NOW puts out, one on sexism in the media and another on sexism in textbooks. The hall was packed. The international women's movement was another one, and the forum about abortion when that was going on. We also had one on an issue where some women fire-fighters were allowed to go into a training program to become fire-fighters because of affirmative action legislation, but were totally harrassed, and were flunked out of the school in a very discriminatory manner. They're appealing this action. We also had a very successful meeting for Evelyn Reed.

What I think we should be doing, though, is taking a more conscious look at the feminist movement in whatever city we happen to be in. We've been asked in San Diego, for example, to give classes on socialism and feminism. We get calls at the headquarters from women's studies teachers who know that we're feminists and socialists and want to get our ideas on the subject and ask us to speak before their classes. As a matter of fact, we got a \$100 honoraria to have a comrade speak at one of the classes on just this topic. The community colleges are good places to do this; many of them have women's studies courses.

Another good development is that a new chapter of NOW which is concentrating in the Chicano community seems to be interested in having us give classes on feminism and socialism.

I think that we should think about some projects that the branches and YSA could get involved in. We should think through forums so that we regularly have forums that have to do with women's issues. A lot of them come to mind. Some of them will be on specific issues that will be going on in particular cities. International women's day will be coming up, the ERA is a big issue, women in the labor movement and CLUW, women political prisoners. Just a forum on feminism and socialism draws a lot of women. A forum that goes over Evelyn Reed's book. If Evelyn hasn't been to your city, have a comrade read the book and study it a bit and give a forum on that; we did that in San Diego. Childcare and abortion—there's a lot of

issues. And we should think through ways to have forums on women's issues and build the forums in the women's movement and attract women to our headquarters, get them into our bookstore and begin to talk to them on an individual level about our movement.

We're also thinking about some forums or classes on campus this fall that will be on feminism and socialism, and we'll have to think through the best way to build these, whether they should be strictly sponsored by the YSA or whether we want to draw in the women's center. We should try to have these forums and classes on campus because women are looking for things like that to go to. On a lot of campuses there isn't a real activist women's organization that's doing anything and we can have a class like this that will draw women who want to be involved in something.

We also might want to think about some sort of miniconference or perhaps two or three classes on a Saturday afternoon in the headquarters itself that would go into different aspects of feminism and socialism. I found the few times I was able to speak on this topic that the questions are all on socialism, that women come to these classes who are already feminists and they want to know about socialism. They have questions about democracy, what's happened in Eastern Europe, the crisis in the United States, whether there is really going to be a revolution, what role do women play in that revolution, and what role does the women's movement play before the revolution—all sorts of questions we have answers for, and we can convince women that we are the group to join.

Another thing is that I think we should keep on top of NOW. I know in many cities this is the only large women's organization. In San Diego they draw over 100, sometimes as many as 250 women to their regular monthly meetings. These women are not all reformist women who will have nothing to do with socialist politics. They are also drawing young women who are looking for a feminist organization; they know about NOW and they go to a NOW meeting. We should be there. We should be there with the *Militant*, with some of our women's pamphlets, and we should be there talking to people and getting involved in some of the things NOW is doing, like around abortion, or the ERA. I know in California they've declared a women's strike day for October, and I think the national board of NOW is considering whether to make it a national strike day. We should be finding out more about that.

Lastly, I think we should have women's liberation directors again, even if there's not a big movement in the city and we're not going to do much more than find out what's going on and organize a few classes or forums. It's good to have a comrade who's responsible for keeping on top of the various publications, groups, and bookstores, to be able to report to the branch what's going on and have her eyes open for any possible activities that we can get involved in. As the comrade from Chicago said, there's feminism all over the place, and we just have to go out and find it and get women involved.

### **Suzanne Haig, Chicago southside**

I want to discuss the women's conference which I also attended at Antioch.

One of the problems with the leadership there, is that these groups, such as the Chicago Women's Liberation

Union, under the guise of socialism, are trying to hold the women's liberation movement away from, and keep women from getting involved in the SWP or other left organizations. One of the ways they keep women from getting involved with Marxism, is through red-baiting, but also by counterposing cultural life-styles to political action. It's my feeling that the women's movement, as a social movement, is always going to be this way, discussing questions of life style, what to do with the family, and I think this is a positive thing. The politics, the thrust of women to move away from Democrats and Republicans to build a mass movement, is the important thing we want to be involved in. We also have to realize that this is the kind of thing women are always going to be talking about, and it is good, before, during and after the revolution, because it is these kinds of things that are going to allow for us to create the kind of society under socialism where women can be truly liberated.

So I think we are going to find these kinds of discussions in the women's liberation movement from now to the revolution. The important thing is that groups such as the CWLU counterpose this to political action.

I was very excited by the women's conference because I had never seen anything like this since the '69-'70 ferment of the women's movement. Women were there from every possible organization, CLUW, ERA groups, District One, and lesbian groups—a wealth of groups from all around the country. Many were involved in actions we hadn't even known about. There were about 125 women just from Illinois. One woman I was talking to from Springfield had organized a group around the ERA. No one knew about this; she was active in her own area. But I think this is indicative of some of the women there. Although the discussion was an abstract one and the leadership refused to organize any kind of ongoing movement or focus on any particular issue, I think it was very positive. I used the word "ferment," because that is what it was. I have never heard such a high-level discussion among so many women on such important questions. Questions like: What is the family? Is it positive or negative? What can be done? What are the ways the family can be changed? Can it be done under capitalism? Is the revolution necessary? What is the relation of the women's movement to the working class and the movement of the oppressed nationalities? One of the main discussions there was how does the women's movement link up with the perspective of a socialist revolution. Should women fight for a revolution, for example, which is going to make women's liberation possible, and then build a women's movement? Should we build a women's movement now and forget the working class? Or should we link up in some way? They didn't have an answer. Should we support the struggles of oppressed nationalities? There were discussions pro and con on all sorts of things. Of course we had the answers to these questions. That is probably one of the reasons we were excluded from the conference. It was like a vacuum. Things were circling around the SWP and we couldn't speak with our answers. However, we found ways of getting heard. There was a panel of lesbian women from around the country, which included two women from Atlanta. They spoke about the work around ERA and how it was important to build non-exclusionary coalitions, to fight for the rights of socialists and lesbians to be involved

with NOW and other groups and trade unionists. I understand from talking to comrades from Atlanta that these were women very close to us. They were putting forward ideas close to ours. It was interesting that non-exclusion was being stressed at a conference that was practicing exclusion. These same women also stressed the need to fight on desegregation and mentioned they had organized to go to Boston. They discussed the struggle in District One. So our politics and the input we have had in other movements was reflected there from some of the women that participated.

The fact that 1600 women were discussing such high level questions shows that we can participate with our ideas through forums and classes, and also by getting involved in organizations that up to now have excluded us.

### **Eva Chertov, Atlanta**

Due to our ERA work in Atlanta we have maintained constant touch with the women's movement through the past two years. I think this explains why we have not only ERA work going strong, but also abortion work that I'm going to talk about tonight, as well as contact with the socialist-feminist grouping and a large lesbian movement. We also do CLUW work. For this reason we are organizing our women's liberation work right now through a steering committee made up of the heads of the two principal fractions, the abortion and ERA fractions; the party and YSA organizers; and the coordinator of the steering committee.

The steering committee takes up questions that come up along the way that don't relate directly to either the abortion work or ERA work. For example, when the socialist-feminist group was formed we discussed that in the steering committee and then took recommendations to the branch.

The Atlanta branch reinitiated its abortion work around the call put out for the week of educational activities for defense of abortion rights and Dr. Kenneth Edelin this past April. We only had the time and personnel to put together a one-shot action rather than an entire educational week. In thinking about the action we thought the best would be a panel that would explain what the present status of the abortion laws is nationally and in Georgia, and that would explain the importance of the Edelin case for a woman's right to choose abortion.

We took the perspective of using the building of the panel as a probe to see how far we could go to carry out more on-going activity. In thinking out who to contact for the formation of a broad ad hoc committee to sponsor the panel, we not only compiled the names of well-known past abortion activists and women's speakers in the women's movement, but also decided to turn up some new stones and see what was there. We decided, and rightly so, that the abortion clinics would have a vested interest in being part of a coalition to stop further abortion cutbacks, and that we might be able to get sizable donations from them towards this effort.

We know from sales of the *Militant* in the Black community carrying coverage of the Edelin conviction that there was widespread solidarity with Edelin since it was clear that racism had a lot to do with his conviction. We thought it would be possible to link up with an even larger number of Black women than before in connection with Edelin's defense. At two coalition meetings prior to

our panel in May we were able to get representatives from the main abortion clinic at Grady Hospital, the main public hospital in Atlanta, and from other private clinics. We were able to get the head of the political action committee of NOW, two women's campus groups, people from the Rape Crisis Center, the Georgia representative of National Association to Repeal Abortion Laws who is also a woman pediatrician. In lining up endorsements for the committee we also received enthusiastic response from Black women we had met in ERA work.

The original name of the coalition was a very long, strung-out name due to a compromise with the woman from NOW who insisted on having the words "right to choose" in the name. We didn't think it was worth arguing about, so it was the Georgia Ad Hoc Committee to Defend a Woman's Right to Choose an Abortion—not very useful in terms of media, but it kept people together.

The panel we held on May 11 had panelists from two private clinics, one public clinic, the president of the Atlanta chapter of NOW, a Black woman lawyer heading the local chapter of the National Conference of Black Lawyers. An excellent message from Miriam Richmond who is the Black community affairs director of WKOK radio expressing a Black feminist point of view in support of Edelin and abortion rights was read. Two major television stations covered the event, and an audience of about 60 people contributed \$200, toward the Edelin defense and activity of the committee.

Prior to this panel, we found zero understanding of the Edelin conviction among mainly the white feminist groups. Most didn't even know he was Black and didn't realize the racist hysteria was a factor in his trial. We had to educate a lot around this point. Since this was before the major articles came out in *McCall's* and *Ms.* on his case, we had only the *Militant* to back up our arguments. Almost all the panelists had to borrow or buy the *Militant* to read up on the details about Edelin's conviction.

The other main point that a lot of them didn't understand was the legal implications of the Edelin conviction. That is, a lot of them didn't understand that if the Edelin conviction is upheld that this would establish a legal precedent whereby a fetus could be ruled a human being at any stage of development. This would wipe out the present abortion law. If you can say that a fetus is a human being viable from 20-24 weeks, then why not 16 or 12 or 1 week? As the *Militant* and *McCalls* have reported, it is this very question that has led hundreds of doctors to decide to stop performing abortions in the second trimester, and some have stopped entirely until the Edelin conviction is settled one way or another.

In Georgia one of our endorsers from the Grady crisis center has told us of doctors refusing abortions to rape victims because they say they are afraid of what the right to life will do to them.

Our panel attracted a number of activists who were brand new to the women's movement and were enthusiastic about working on abortion. I think this is very characteristic of the abortion coalitions, as Diana reported about Boston. Many of these women were women who prior to the law were forced to have and bear unwanted children. These are very young women, some of them brought their children to the meetings. And a number were the kind of women we met in the 1972 speakouts who had

gone through the horrifying experiences and didn't understand what was going on but who had heard that abortion rights were being attacked and they were right there. That was the kind of spirit they had.

The committee shortened its name to one similar to the Boston committee; it's now the Georgia Committee to Defend Abortion Rights (GCDR). Around the time of the formation of our committee two major tv stations had major debates with the "right to lifers," and I represented the committee at both of these. And the Sunday supplement of the *Journal-Constitution*, the principal newspaper in Georgia, had a four-page spread on the "right to life" groups in the state.

From the debates and the article in the Sunday supplement, it became pretty clear that the "right to life" is very encouraged by the Edelin conviction. In Georgia they are moving into swank new offices and have announced that they will take part in a national campaign to be launched in September to overturn the Supreme Court decision. We ought to listen to our enemies and take them seriously.

We have gotten the agreement of the Edelin defense committee to have Dr. Edelin in Atlanta for the weekend of September 26-27.

On Friday the 26th we are planning a big rally and already have extremely broad endorsement for the rally and possibility of speakers. On Saturday the twenty-seventh we're planning a one-day educational conference. We found from discussing with the abortion counselors in the coalition that there are many, many women in Georgia who don't know that abortion in Georgia is legal. They don't even know what the laws say their rights are in terms of abortion. And they don't know where to get an abortion. Furthermore, as we got involved more in this coalition, we found many things we didn't know, such as the degree to which abortion rights are restricted in Georgia and nationally.

There is one report I'd like to recommend to all the comrades, the Christopher Tietze report that went out summarizing the entire experience with abortion since the law was passed in which he gives a geographic breakdown. I believe his summary states that it is a tiny percentage of all hospitals in the country that are permitting abortion to the degree that is stated in the law. Most of them have tremendous restrictions.

There's another special report on the constitutional aspects of abortion that is very informative and useful in this period that comrades should read, and the conclusion of that report is that to restrict a woman's right to abortion would be equal to restricting all civil rights. It's very important for us to read. It's available from the federal government.

We felt that a conference with good resource people was what was needed at this point. It would also be a place where we could educate on the role of the independent women's movement in winning the present law and gather more forces for the Georgia Committee to Defend Abortion Rights.

On July 26 we held a wine and cheese party to announce the Committee's plans at the Kennedy Center, a kind of political center in the middle of the Black community. The wine and cheese party was paid for by a private clinic, and the rent was paid for by a city councilman. More Black women were present at this event than at any previous

woman's activity, including ERA activities, that we've organized. These women were mainly workers in abortion clinics. It also involved prominent Black doctors who are influential in family planning networks which are state-wide.

We're coming into contact with a new layer of Black women which of course can benefit all the other areas of work that we are involved in.

Just a couple words about NOW and our abortion work. If we had tried to do this abortion work through NOW's reproductive committee we would never have been able to move as far as we have in such a short time. We would have totally been locked within the cage of their lobbying orientation. Even though the majority of women are rather young, they can't really be characterized as radical. Also their original response when we contacted them to endorse the efforts of the committee was that they weren't sure they could endorse Edelin because of the nature of the abortion he had performed. At least that was the opinion of their state-wide president; but the Atlanta president differed with this view and spoke at the panel. They also spent over two weeks on the phone trying to get the okay from someone in their national office.

We helped build a coalition and urged individual NOW members to come in as individual members and the most serious of those in NOW worked with us. Meanwhile we began to get big-name endorsers and to build very broad support. We got the national Edelin committee to let our committee organize his trip to Atlanta. So right before I left for the convention the head of NOW's political action committee called to say that the Atlanta chapter endorses the coalition and will donate \$50.

We're also going to use the contacts we've made through CLUW and ERA work, with union women, to help bring them into the Edelin defense work. We don't know whether it's best to go before CLUW right now and ask for resolutions, since the October League has resolutioned them to death. But we do want to try on an individual basis to go to AFSCME leaders we have met and invite them to this kind of event.

I think we should underline what we say in the *Militant* that the Edelin case provides a national focus in the U.S. like the Morgentaler case does in Canada. The coalitions as experienced in Atlanta and Boston are easy to build. Edelin has received considerable national publicity and there's a tremendous desire on the part of women to defend abortion rights and Edelin. He's also an articulate spokesperson for the position that a woman has a right to choose. In Atlanta the socialists have taken the initiative and there's been no red-baiting even though we're working with some very conservative forces.

We should also be right on top of what the "right to lifers" are doing. We shouldn't just pass them off as a bunch of nuts. They have tried to develop sophisticated arguments and are trying to come on as a little less religious oriented. But their arguments are easy to smash. We also want to stay on top of all the latest bills they are trying to introduce on a national level.

We have some excellent pamphlets on abortion that we've produced. There's other material from the federal government. There's also a thing called the Abortion Watch in different states where you might get excellent information. People should know their local situation and what restrictions exist there.

## Great Britain

First of all I want to give greetings from the International Marxist Group in Britain to the comrades here, and I'd like to talk about the work we are doing on women's oppression.

I think for a period in the IMG that the leadership wasn't on top of the work on women's oppression; it wasn't really centralized. Of course, we've been active in the women's movement since it was initiated, but for a period in Britain we hadn't really centralized the work or worked out clear priorities. However, within the last two years we've made very important breakthroughs.

The point that Linda made in her opening remarks about understanding that our work against women's oppression isn't the only work in the women's liberation movement but that we have a whole variety of things to do on women's oppression is important. In Britain we had to make very precise analyses about how the radicalization of women would be structured in this period. We saw that not all women who radicalized went into the women's liberation movement, as we tended to think several years ago. Rather it was expressed and channeled through various organizations, importantly through the trade union movement where you have a very different situation than in the U.S. You have two times more women than men joining trade unions right now. I think that is quite significant.

The most important thing we're doing now and the most exciting campaign, of course, is the abortion campaign. But I think we have to look back to see what kind of work we've done in the previous period too, which actually laid the basis for our taking the abortion campaign.

One of them was the work in the women's charter campaign, which in many ways is very similar to the CLUW campaign that the comrades of the SWP are involved in. Many of the problems that were discussed today are the problems we've had to confront and grapple with as well.

The other work was our campaign against the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child. In Britain we have a strong anti-abortion group that can mobilize, for example 85,000 on marches on a "right-to-life" basis. That is largely due to the strength of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in the north of England. Our campaign against the anti-abortion forces really began to lay the basis for us to be able to grasp the opportunities that were opened in the campaign against the White bill.

What has happened in Britain—just very, very briefly—is that James White, a Labour MP, introduced a bill to restrict a woman's right to abortion. When it was picked up in the press, and for a long time after its first reading in parliament, it was portrayed as a very positive thing, as something to just get rid of the most negative aspects of the present abortion law, the more liberal abortion law that was introduced in 1967.

However, when people began to read the bill, they understood that it was a massive attack on women's right to abortion. At the second reading of the bill, at our initiative, the Workers Women's Charter called a demonstration which attracted many more people than we had anticipated and we held a big meeting in Central Hall, which is a huge hall right next to parliament, with over a

thousand people on that demonstration. At that stage it became clear that there was a basis for continuing the campaign and taking up a real campaign to defeat the White Amendment bill.

Before I go into the campaign, I should just outline what this bill would do, because it is extremely severe and would take away the right to abortion for 80,000 women. It basically eliminates the social clause of the 1967 act. It has a number of very restrictive points in it; denying abortion to foreign women in Britain; saying that you could not publish information about abortion at all, which would mean, for example, that any woman who wanted to write in a journal on her abortion experience, or survey various clinics, or whatever; that would be illegal under this new bill. It would have been incredibly restrictive. It was an attack on the rights of the working class as a whole, and particularly on women. So it was very essential that we were there, that we were there at the beginning, that we actually initiated this campaign.

Of course, we can say we initiated the campaign. The campaign has been one of the most successful campaigns that the IMG has been involved in, and that means we have to be absolutely on top of the developments in the campaign so that we can really take the campaign on the correct road.

What happened was that out of the first big meeting outside parliament we called for setting up a united front body to continue the campaign, which was very well attended, and a whole variety of national organizations sent representatives—all the political organizations, women's groups, national union of students. At that meeting it was agreed to set up the National Abortion Campaign on two grounds. First of all, against any restrictive legislation, and second, for a woman's right to choose. Now, that organization has grown and comrades will have read in the articles in *Intercontinental Press* of the successful demonstration that we built through the National Abortion Campaign that attracted 25,000, which was one of the largest. Also the large number of trade union banners that were on the demonstration was extremely impressive.

The next thing that we plan for the National Abortion Campaign is an October 18-19 conference, which will basically be a conference where we will discuss how to take the campaign forward and how to launch some mass initiative following the conference. We've discussed various ideas, whether it should be a large mass rally in the new year, or perhaps a mass demonstration.

One of the main dangers in the campaign has been the whole question of the reformists. Right now some independents in the campaign, or reformists in the campaign, feel we've had enough of this campaign of defending our rights. They propose that a piece of legislation be introduced which they say would be "positive." We've had to fight against this, to say that the White bill is still a possibility and that our immediate task is to defeat the White amendment bill. However, this will open up a debate at the conference.

An example of the success of the campaign has been the invitation by the Communist party—the strength of the Communist party in Britain, of course, is extremely strong—to cosponsor the conference with the National Abortion Campaign. We said that that is not what we want to do. We think the main debate there is to defend the basis of NAC, that is against any restrictive legislation. We think the CP will attempt to move into the conference

and attempt to take this legislation which is now being discussed, the "positive" legislation—which when I left was some kind of restrictive legislation—and there will be a big debate around the very basis of the campaign, around the fundamental right of women to abortion.

Just two things flow from this. At the October 18-19 conference we plan to have some workshops on the question of international work on abortion. Comrades will be aware that recently we had an international initiative in Portugal, a week of action around abortion, which took place since I left Britain. We discussed the possibility of having an international demonstration in Italy, which would be very important for the Italian comrades as well, who are beginning to do work around abortion right now.

The other thing that is of interest to the comrades of the SWP in particular, is that we have discussed the possibility of having some kind of workshop on the Edelin case at the conference. We hope to have some discussions with the women here who are particularly involved with that so we know what to project.

### **Debbie Gobat, West-North Chicago**

In discussing the whole turn of the party and the women's liberation movement, it's obvious that there is a layer of women that we can't forget about; that's the non-union women workers. In that context I'd like to tell comrades a little bit about an organization in Chicago called Women Employed.

Women Employed is made up of office workers in the Chicago loop area. The group has about 300 women members. You have to realize that there are over 3,000 women clerical workers just in the Chicago loop area alone.

The goal of this organization is to help protect the rights of women office workers. The organization is about two years old and the founding convention drew about 600 women. It's about to hold its second convention in October at which they expect between 800-900 women. This organization is much bigger than CLUW, NOW or any other women's organization in Chicago.

You might have read about some of the gains that this organization has been able to make in the last few years in the *Militant*. They were able to win half a million dollars in back pay at CNA Insurance Company for several women workers. They've brought several suits against various companies, such as Sears and Kraft Foods for their non-compliance with affirmative action programs, and also against several companies for their lack of affirmative action programs. They sued a prominent attorney for firing his secretary for her activities in Women Employed. And EEOC is paying most of the legal costs in this action.

They were able to force the director of insurance in Illinois to investigate several federal agencies on their insurance policies.

One thing that was mentioned in the CLUW workshop this afternoon—and I think it is important to clarify it a little bit—was that there was a meeting of over 700 women in Chicago. It was called a Walker Accountability Session—Walker is the governor of Illinois. One of his campaign promises was that he was going to hold accountability sessions with the people of Illinois. So for over seven or eight months Women Employed had been

trying to get such a session with the governor and he had refused. Then all of a sudden out of the clear, blue sky, he decided he was going to hold an accountability session for women and he called seven other women's groups, excluding Women Employed, and asked them to cosponsor such a session. Every single one of these groups, including CLUW and NOW, said, "Wait a minute, this is a Women Employed thing, aren't you going to have them involved in this?" It ended up that the chairperson of Women Employed chaired the accountability session.

One really exciting thing in the last months is that for the first time Women Employed has come out for union organizing. They've started a union organizing drive at CNA insurance, the same company where they were able to get back pay for some of the women. They are still in the research stage, and so far the only union that has been interested is the Teamsters Union. Since there are a lot of women involved in the farmworkers struggle in Women Employed, the Teamsters are kind of off the list.

I'm personally in the leadership of the legal secretaries part of Women Employed. The rest of the leadership, the core leadership, are social democrats who are heavily involved in community organizing groups. Several are ex-SDSers. Besides the fact that these women are politically wrong, they are all on ego trips. They bring women into the movement and get them all excited and active, and then they decide they're getting too active, too ambitious, and they smash them. Several women have resigned from the organization because of this.

This leadership has the idea—they don't come out and say this—they want to keep the organization small so they can control it, instead of building it as large as possible.

This makes working with these women very difficult. I'm sure it irritates them very much that they have to rely on me in order to do anything with the legal secretaries. I'm introduced to new staff members as, "Well, there's Debbie from the SWP, you have to watch her." One of the staff members behind my back tried to call some of the women who work in my law firm to try to organize something, and every single one of them said, "Wait a minute, I want to talk to Debbie about it before I can do anything."

## Mexico

June 29 was really an important date for us in Mexico. We held our first pro-abortion rally, and about 1,000 people came. We handed out about 14,000 leaflets prior to this, and doing this with a hand-cranked mimeograph was no easy task. So after we got out 14,000 leaflets, we were expecting maybe 100 or 200 people there, and 1,000 people showed up. We said, "This is fantastic!"

This was organized by two feminist groups and also by the two sympathizing groups of the Fourth International in Mexico. The main demand was abortion, but there were two clear sides. One was abortion is a woman's right to choose; the other said, abortion as a last resort. That means, if you've already put your foot in you might as well patch it up some way.

Let me explain. When we were handing out the leaflets we went to several other marches, and we didn't know how housewives would react to our action. We kept thinking that we were going to be thrown out, or lynched, or something like that. But it was really amazing to see the housewives, many of whom have great difficulty reading,

take the leaflets, read them slowly and then keep them. Some would come back and ask questions about them, but nobody would be hostile towards us.

After our rally there was a feminist play put on by one of the two feminist groups, and written by the group. It was really good, and people enjoyed it. It helped to clarify most of the issues that we were talking about.

We are now trying to form a coalition for abortion. This is really just a beginning because there is no real movement in Mexico right now. There are several small feminist groups, not only in Mexico City, but all over the country, and we are trying to get them all together. Last year we had seven conferences on women's liberation, and we plan to have one this year.

So, there isn't a movement yet, but we're trying to get in there, get it started.

## Canada

As you probably know from reading the *Militant*, our main focus in the women's movement has been around Dr. Morgentaler's case. Dr. Morgentaler is a Montreal doctor who was charged on 13 separate charges with performing illegal abortions.

We formed defense committees across Canada and sponsored several large actions. I was primarily active in the tribunal held on March 9, 1974, the day after International Women's day. It was very large and very broad, and very well sponsored.

Our last action by the Montreal Committee to Defend Dr. Morgentaler was October 1974. After that, we kind of went into a downturn in the women's movement across Canada. We really didn't get back into it until May 10. We first heard about the demonstration at the international women's day celebrations this year, 1975. The Socialist League, as well as several independent women, started getting together and saying that we should seize back some of the initiative that the government has taken away from us. So they started having meetings right away, right around March, and up until the demonstration May 10.

It was the largest women's demonstration ever held in English Canada, the largest ever. There were 1,500 women. The main demands were, "Safe, effective birth control," "Childcare, not property rights," "Repeal abortion laws, and "Free Dr. Morgentaler." The original demands did not include Dr. Morgentaler. But about six or seven comrades went to one of their meetings and said, "Listen, we really feel you have to have Dr. Morgentaler as one of your main demands, because he was just convicted by the Supreme Court of Canada, overturning a lower court decision to acquit him." He had to go to jail. They finally agreed to that demand. One of the particular hassles was that they had already sent out an endorsement letter saying these are our demands, will you please send in your card for endorsement. And one of the main ones was the YWCA, and they had backed out on us before. They said they came out for abortion law repeal, but when it came to Dr. Morgentaler, they said, "Well, he broke the law and I'm not so sure about that." So they backed out from the defense committee. They carried a lot of weight in the committee, and have a lot of women at the meeting. This was one of the main reasons that they were objecting to including him in their demands.

But in spite of that the "Y" continued to endorse the march, which was quite a victory for our side. We had

several comrades in leading positions. One was a chief marshal, a lot of comrades, including myself, were marshals, and several comrades were main speakers. One was on the steering committee. And we were really working well together. To voice what another comrade said, it was the best time I've had in ages. It was all our old abortion slogans, and was terrific.

The Revolutionary Marxist Group and the Socialist League were involved in the planning but not the Spartacist League of course. They just went in and agitated.

We got pretty good TV coverage. But the press unfortunately played the whole thing down. They said there were only about 300 women. And they put the story on the front page of the third section of the *Toronto Star* and it wasn't much at all.

After May 10, around June or July, Dr. Morgentaler was acquitted again on the same charge. And this caused a lot of hue and cry. Because here he was sitting in jail for the first charge that the lower court acquitted him of, and there they had acquitted him again. They were careful on their jury selection this time; they had half men, half women; they had Catholics, the whole thing. And they acquitted him. So he got a lot of support. There are a lot of similarities between Edelin and Morgentaler. One is that Edelin was supported by a lot of people who didn't support abortion but who felt that he was being attacked because he's a Black doctor. Morgentaler got a lot of support simply on the overturn of the trial by jury. How did the Supreme Court of Canada have the right to overturn a lower court decision where he was tried by his peers? As a result of that, the justice minister has introduced legislation making this illegal. Of course it won't be retroactive for Morgentaler. The justice minister is one of the biggest foes of the abortion movement.

Right now we are starting our main intervention into a group called CARAL, Canadian Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws. And it prides itself in being a large abortion group that brings in the other abortion groups like Freedom of Choice, Doctors for Repeal, all very reformist groups. But it has very large endorsement, and it's a cross-Canada group. Right now they are calling for a demonstration and rally on October 4. I'm also involved in that and we've been pressing toward a demonstration and a rally, and it looks like it will pretty well go through.

## Linda Jenness

A couple of points to wind things up before we leave. As I was walking over here a comrade said, "Where are you going?" I said, "The women's liberation workshop." They asked, "Is that the ERA workshop?" I said, "No, that's tomorrow." "Is it the CLUW workshop?" "No, that was this afternoon." "Gee," they said, "what else are we doing in women's liberation?" I think this workshop certainly shows that we've been doing a lot, and we're going to be doing a lot more.

One noticeable thing about all the remarks is the breadth of these coalitions that have been formed very easily and quickly around the different issues—abortion in both Boston and Atlanta, Joanne Little, etc.

On Abortion: Rita Shaw pointed out to me, and I think she's absolutely right, that in order for areas to do this work they must get some of the basic material. One thing would be the feminist *amicus* brief that supported the right of minors to have abortions in the state of Washington. This case was won in January, 1975. We'll get some xerox copies of that. It was an *amicus* brief supported by WONAAC and, I think, nine other groups. There's also general information available free from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. There are all sorts of statistics and information you can get about your state laws from the National Association For the Repeal of Abortion Laws. So people who are involved in that work should make the effort to write and get those statistics and information.

The other thing to emphasize is the remarks Jessica and some others made on the importance of, and the opportunities to do some good educational work right now. I think all the speakers remarked on the interest women are showing in socialist ideas as well as feminist ideas. They are discussing a broad range of ideas that we have discussed and that we have literature on, books, pamphlets, and speakers. All the areas should think out how to conduct an educational campaign with classes, forums, and what have you. We'll be doing that nationally too through the press, and in other ways.

The last thing I would say is that I agree with Betsey when she said this afternoon that we should not hold back on doing these things. I think we have all gotten ideas of things we haven't done yet, but could do in our areas. So we should just go *do* them.