

June 14, 1974

Attached is an exchange of correspondence which may be helpful for those involved in the activities of the Coalition of Trade Union Women.

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June 4, 1974

Lucinda Jackson  
New York

Dear Lucinda,

CLUW in Los Angeles has finally gotten started for real, after our false start of April 26th. On May 30th we had a large successful meeting attended by over 60 women. The meeting was built by word of mouth, but was very broad, including many staff members and executive board members from many different unions. Also there were many rank and file women brought there by the women who attended the Chicago conference. We brought several from our union, including one YWLLer. I strongly suspect most of the rank and filers there were brought by various political tendencies. The IS made its first appearance and they proved to be the most sectarian opponents to date.

The meeting decided to call a big all day conference, city-wide for Sat. July 13. Eight committees were set up to work on it. Almost everybody there signed up for at least one committee. This conference is projected to be the first of the three meetings necessary before a chapter can be chartered. I really had the feeling that this time we are getting off the ground and that the state conveners are really serious about building a good solid CLUW chapter here.

They seem very conservative about going after "official" endorsement from the AFL, etc. Their reasoning is that "we don't need their endorsement" and they claim that nationally CLUW wants to cooperate with the official labor movement but not seek endorsement formally as this will split the labor movement, since there are some unions and officials that oppose CLUW. However, I noticed that the Detroit Central Labor Council has endorsed. Do you have any further knowledge of this situation?

When the question of the UFW was raised by a woman who did not attend the Chicago conference, it was made clear by one of the state conveners that in her opinion if LA CLUW decides it wants to make support to the farmworkers a major priority, we have every right to do that and it will be o.k. nationally.

We are presently constituted as the "organizing committee for CLUW," and thus, according to the rules can take no actions in the name of CLUW. No one can join CLUW until the membership cards arrive from Detroit.

The potential for CLUW is tremendous here. I can tell that just from so many people at work expressing interest in it and the desire to get involved.

In solidarity,  
Charlene Hunter

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14 Charles Lane  
New York, N.Y. 10014  
June 8, 1974

Charlene Hunter  
Los Angeles

Dear Charlene,

Thanks for the reports, they are a big help. You noticed, I'm sure, that I considerably cut down and paraphrased your last one in order to send it out, but only for efficiency sake. The reports, as you send them, are most useful.

Your latest one is encouraging. In the next month or so The Militant will be covering several meetings of CLUW taking place around the country which will help give people a better idea of what's going on. Be sure to organize The Militant coverage for your July 13th meeting.

On the UFW. Apparently there is not going to be a problem with CLUW supporting the UFW. Several groups have done so with little or no opposition. That, of course, is good. We should understand, however, that the major priority for CLUW right now must be a general outreach, educational campaign to reach new women and win support and endorsement from the labor movement. Support to the UFW, as well as to other struggles, and any other activities that CLUW engages in should be seen as part and parcel of the general outreach campaign.

On the official endorsements. It is very important to get official endorsements. Most of the groups that I know of are going after official endorsement from any unions that they can. The more official endorsement that CLUW can get, the more authority and legitimacy it will have. If CLUW is successful in other areas doing that, it may influence the women in your area who are dragging their feet on it. In the meantime, women from the different unions in your area can certainly try to get their own unions to endorse and support CLUW, just as you have done in your union.

On IS: (see enclosed letter to Cathy Fowler.) Basically what we want to do is cut across their attempts to polarize CLUW between "rank and filers" and "bureaucrats." This would be self-defeating for CLUW in every way at this stage of its development. Be sure and keep me informed as to what they, and other opponents, are up to.

Several areas have done the same as L.A. in constituting themselves as "organizing committees for CLUW" or using some other name until they have met the requirements to become official chapters. That seems reasonable. The main thing to keep in mind is that we do want all the groups to become official chapters and to go through all the procedures properly for doing so. (The requirements are certainly not so difficult that they can't be

met. In fact, holding the three meetings necessary to become a chapter are proving quite productive.)

There is no question but that there is a lot of interest and enthusiasm for CLUW among rank and file women at the workplace. All of the areas report the same as you on that question.

In solidarity,  
Lucinda Jackson

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Portland, Oregon

Lucinda Jackson  
New York

Dear Lucinda,

Since the initial meeting of CLUW in Portland, which reported on the outcome of the national conference, the whole development of the people who make up CLUW has been marked by two characteristics: 1) enthusiasm about such a working women's organization, 2) desire to carry out concrete activity.

We have decided here that we need to do much outreach work and toward that end are planning a day-long informal conference centered around workshops that take up questions women are dealing with. They are: Child Care, Breaking into Male Jobs/Unions, What Are Women's Legal Rights, How to Organize Unions, Minority Women. Right now we have the involvement of both lower echelon union women officials and radical-type feminists. There is tremendous enthusiasm.

Two trends are rapidly developing which I suspect are common. One is opposition (rather strong here) to the decision of National that CLUW membership be restricted to union members. The other is a division between radical-feminists and long-time unionists. The radical fem., led by IS (I heard one of their national speakers on the subject last week), believe that CLUW is good for the same basic reason we do, but are workerist and not coalition builders. In essence their attack is to build CLUW despite union "bureaucrats." The union officials women's attitude is to broaden CLUW through traditional channels of business agents, etc. and not to alienate union allies.

Both are working together at the moment. However, I expect IS to divide themselves off as a group and threaten the unity of feeling that exists. This would be easy to gloss over in the interest of agreeing on specific goals, if we had any. With the exception of the June 29th thing, we don't.

In solidarity,  
Cathy Fowler

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14 Charles Lane  
New York, N.Y. 10014

June 14, 1974

Dear Cathy,

Thanks for your report. The enthusiasm in Portland, as well as your plans for general out-reach work, sound encouraging.

I want to comment on two things that you mention in your letter.

On CLUW membership being open to non-union women: If CLUW is to develop as a legitimate part of the union movement, with the support and endorsement of the union leadership, its basic characteristic must be that of a union women's organization. If the union movement comes to view CLUW as a competitive organization; or as just another "feminist group that happens to have some union women in it", they will shy away from it. CLUW cannot afford to have that happen at this formative stage. Its only hope is to gain legitimacy within the union movement, while at the same time involving rank and file women in activity. I don't think that we should push for CLUW to be open to non-union women. (If the whole Portland group is convinced that non-union women should be included, then, of course, I'm not suggesting that you go on a campaign to turn it around. However, we shouldn't add to that sentiment and should be prepared to tactfully approach it when the occasion arises.)

CLUW has the potential of playing a powerful role in bringing unorganized women into the organized labor movement and that will certainly be one of its main responsibilities. That can't happen, however, unless and until CLUW itself is established. That must come first.

What some areas have done, which seems a reasonable way to handle the situation, is to invite non-union women to attend if they are particularly interested, but with voice and no vote. That is, they are not official members, but are welcome to come, participate, and help out. The rule does not have to be super rigid. For instance, some areas have included as full members women who are involved in organizing drives, or who are staff members of unions but don't belong to the union.

The question of membership is still to be decided by the National Coordinating Committee. I imagine that they will decide that CLUW should be open to only union women and it would be best if there were not a fight over that. We can't put the cart before the horse. The first job is to get a union women's organization off the ground. Broadening it out can only be successful when CLUW itself becomes successful.

On the International Socialists: IS is participating in CLUW in several areas. Their approach, as you point out, is to try to establish CLUW by going around who they call the "bureaucrats." Their approach cannot be successful. CLUW at this point needs all

the women officials it can get in order to gain legitimacy and authority. If the current leadership of CLUW gets scared off, they can very easily stop CLUW in its tracks. You point out in your letter that the union women officials' attitude is to "broaden CLUW through traditional channels of business agents, etc. and not to alienate union allies." That is certainly a crucial part of broadening out CLUW right now.

I think we should talk to the ISers. We should point out to them that the women officials involved in CLUW are far from a homogeneous group, nor are they the female counter-parts of George Meany. Some of them can be won over to varying degrees. It would be a serious mistake to approach all the women officials as part of a "monolithic bureaucratic block." Recommend to them that they read Farrell Dobbs' books on the Teamsters with this question in mind.

We should also explain to them that we know what a real bureaucrat is, and we know what's wrong with a bureaucrat. The question is how to approach them, and it's here that we have a more intelligent strategy. You don't get rid of bureaucrats by denouncing them at meetings or trying to dismiss them. You have to know how to pressure them and how to outflank them. These women officials are going to find themselves in a situation where they either have to do as the rank and file wants done, or expose themselves as being against what the rank and file wants.

Also explain to the ISers that if CLUW becomes polarized right now it could destroy CLUW. A division between the "long time unionists" and the "radical-feminists" is the last thing CLUW needs.

Perhaps they won't listen or be won over to our view, but at least it will make them even more insecure about what they are doing.

Certainly all of our people should be clear on what must be emphasized at this stage of CLUW's development so that they do not feel pressured by IS's sectarian approach.

In solidarity,  
Lucinda Jackson