

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MINUTES, Number 29, June 15, 1971

Present: Barnes, Boehm, Breitman, Britton, Dobbs, A. Hansen,
J. Hansen, Horowitz, Lovell, Stone, Waters.

Visitors: Garza, Jones, Seigle

Chairman: J. Hansen

AGENDA: 1. Administrative Committee Report
 2. Chicano Resolution Report
 3. Abortion Action Campaign

1. ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

Barnes reported.

Motion: To concur with the recommendation of the Lower
Manhattan Branch to readmit E.P. into membership.

Carried.

2. CHICANO LIBERATION RESOLUTION

Britton reported.

Discussion.

Motion: To approve the general line of the resolution.

Carried.

3. ABORTION ACTION CAMPAIGN

Stone reported. (see attached)

Discussion.

Meeting adjourned.

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014

June 17, 1971

TO ALL ORGANIZERS, WOMEN'S LIBERATION DIRECTORS AND NC MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

The response to the call for a national conference to build a campaign for the repeal of all laws restricting the right of abortion has far exceeded our expectations. In response to the first letter calling the conference, hundreds of women have already written the office of the Committee for a Women's National Abortion Coalition, indicating that they want to attend.

A planning meeting for the conference, held in New York City on June 12, attracted approximately 225 women from 13 different states. Some 90 different organizations were represented at the meeting, including campus groups, various chapters of NOW, a number of state and local abortion coalitions, high school groups, Third World groups, gay groups, the International Socialists, the Communist Party, Planned Parenthood, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and others.

The planning meeting voted to move ahead to build a national abortion rights conference which could launch a national action for the repeal of anti-abortion laws. The demands for no forced sterilization and the repeal of restrictive anti-contraception laws were also approved as part of the campaign. It was agreed that the conference would be non-exclusionary, that it would be open to women only, and that it would be held in New York City July 16-18. It was also agreed that a working committee would be set up in New York to build the conference, composed of at least one representative from each group and open to all women.

Opposition to the perspective of focusing the campaign on the issue of abortion was raised by two different groups -- the International Socialists and a grouping of women who designated themselves as the "gay caucus." The gay caucus, which by no means included all the gay women present, pushed to have the meeting add a gay demand to the already agreed-upon demands for repeal of laws restricting the right to abortion and contraception, and the demand for no forced sterilization. They argued that since the theme of the abortion rights campaign was the right of women to control their own bodies, that the right of gay women to free sexual expression should be part of the campaign.

The International Socialists also proposed a number of additions, the most important being a motion to include "free abortion on demand" in the list of demands. They also supported the proposal to add the demand for the right of gay women to free sexual expression.

Because both the gay caucus and the IS were united in pushing the proposal to add a gay demand, much of the discussion at the meeting focused around this issue. At some points the discussion became quite heated, as women from the gay caucus attempted to cloud the question by insisting that if the women at the meeting voted down the gay demand, it would reflect the fact that they were prejudiced against gay people, and opposed to the struggle of gay women.

Speakers for the SWP and other groups pointed out that by mounting a campaign around the abortion issue, we were not opposing or "axing off" the struggles of gay women around other demands, as was being implied. On the contrary, the point was made that by uniting the largest numbers of women who want to act around the clear demand for the repeal of abortion laws, we can best help lay the basis for the struggle around other issues. It was pointed out that many demands are being raised by the feminist movement and women are struggling around these demands, but if we added these to the campaign, the abortion focus would be lost, and we would not be able to effectively put the government on the spot on this issue. Several speakers also clarified the fact that while the demands for the right to abortion and contraception and no forced sterilization are all directly related to the question of the right of women to choose whether to bear a child or not, the issue of the rights of gay women is clearly a separate issue.

The motion to add an additional gay demand was defeated, with about 40 women supporting it. After it was voted down, about half of these women, most of them from the gay caucus, walked out. They returned again at the end of the meeting and re-raised the idea of adding a gay demand, this time stipulating specifically that the demand for the right of gay women to free sexual expression should be put on every leaflet produced by the abortion coalition. Again, their motion was voted down.

The second main issue of debate was the question of whether to add the demand for "free abortion on demand" to the call. The central spokeswoman for this point of view was Judith Shapiro of the International Socialists. She called for the addition of this demand on the grounds that if we did not add it, the abortion campaign would only be "symbolic" and would not speak to the real needs of masses of women. She was answered by women who pointed out that the repeal of abortion laws is not simply a "symbolic" thing, but would represent a tremendous victory for millions of women in this country. The point was made that the best way to unite the present struggles taking place on a state level around the anti-abortion laws is to unite to demand that all such laws be abolished nationally.

The IS proposal to add "free abortion on demand" was also voted down, but there was less discussion, and therefore less clarity, on this issue. It will be important to continue the discussion around this question in the period leading up to the

conference, since it is a tactical question around which there may well be confusion and disagreement even among those women who clearly support the idea of a national campaign to repeal abortion laws.

By attempting to add a gay demand, and the demand for "free abortion on demand" to the campaign, both the ISers and the gay caucus were proposing changes which would have clearly narrowed the degree of participation in the campaign, and which would have cut across building the type of campaign which can have a real impact on this country. Many more women are ready to unite in action to demand the repeal of laws restricting the right to abortion than are ready to act around "free abortion on demand" or any of the demands of the gay movement. If a mass movement around abortion can be built which can involve these larger numbers, we cannot only have a tremendous show of force around an issue which is of great significance for all women, but we can lay a better basis for fighting for other demands and for winning large numbers of women to the feminist movement in general.

The June 12 meeting was an important first step in launching the abortion conference and campaign, and in beginning to clarify some of the issues which will be raised. Leaflets announcing the conference are now being printed up for wide distribution, along with endorser cards and other materials.

There is less than one month left to build the conference, so it will be important for every area to begin work on it immediately. In most places, existing abortion coalitions are being broadened out to provide a vehicle for building the conference. In a few areas, new ad hoc city committees will have to be set up. In smaller areas, campus women's liberation groups are the main organizations which are campaigning to bring people to the conference.

Regardless of the specific situation in each area, campus women's liberation groups will be key to the conference. Almost every campus on which we are active attracts a significant number of summer school students, and we should do our best to get as many of these students as possible to the conference. Leaflets should be passed out, information tables should be set up, and meetings held, so that the largest number of women possible will be informed about the conference.

Another area of activity which will be of great importance will be that of organizing Third World women. Plans are being made by Third World backers of the campaign to put out literature reflecting the support of Third World women for it, and relating the campaign demands to the needs of Black, Chicano, Asian, Puerto Rican, and Native American women.

There is every indication that any action which is built for repeal of laws restricting the right to abortion has the

potential for being very big -- so long as we make it clear just what the action is all about, and prevent all kinds of additional demands from being added which cloud the issue. An indication of the potential for bringing in larger forces is the fact that the Communist Party gave explicit support to the campaign in an article in the June 15 Daily World, which listed Alva Buxenbaum of the National Women's Commission of the Communist Party and Debbie Notkin of the SWP as endorsers of the planning meeting.

Comradely,

Betsy Stone

Betsy Stone
National Office