

P.O. Box 471 Cooper Station  
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December 14, 1970

To All Organizers, NC Members, and At-Largers

Dear Comrades,

There has recently been a split in Female Liberation, a Boston women's liberation organization. News of the split has travelled around the country; it is important for YSAers to understand the political issues behind this split and the factual background out of which these differences developed.

Enclosed is a report by Chris Hildebrand and Jeanne Lafferty, SWP and YSA women's liberation work directors in Boston, which outlines the events leading up to the split and the political basis of the split. Statements by Female Liberation and the newly-reconstituted Cell 16 will be mailed out under separate cover.

The split involves some of the most basic questions to which the feminist movement must address itself: the questions of mass action, non-exclusion, and red-baiting. YSAers should be prepared to explain the events in Boston and the political issues involved to women in the movement.

Comradely,

*Cindy Jaquith*  
Cindy Jaquith  
YSA Women's Liberation  
Work Director

## Report on the Recent Split in Boston Female Liberation, December 12, 1970

This report will deal with the evolution of Female Liberation and the role of the YSA in it. Most of the factual details of the recent split are contained in the statements put out by Female Liberation, which comrades will receive in a separate mailing. Comrades should also acquaint themselves with the information contained in the interview with four YSAers recruited from Female Liberation, in the Nov. 27, 1970 Militant.

Female Liberation was formed in Boston in early 1968 as a small, closed group of women. At that time it was best known for its publication of A Journal of Female Liberation and for the fact that it was one of the earliest feminist organizations.

Roxanne Dunbar was one of the leaders of this group. She wanted Female Liberation to be a small cadre organization and opposed the idea of Female Liberation reaching out to involve new women. Despite this, the group held a successful conference in May, 1969, which attracted 600 women and spurred the growth of the women's movement in Boston. Rather than taking advantage of the mushrooming of feminist activity in the city to build the group, Female Liberation maintained its small group perspective and also changed its name to Cell 16. Nevertheless, Cell 16 grew in numbers, published more journals, and distributed other feminist literature.

In the fall of 1969, Cell 16 was formally dissolved, and the name Female Liberation reinstated. Several months later, Dunbar left Boston to organize in New Orleans. The group began to slowly become more public; in addition to continuing the journal, it held orientation sessions for new women and participated in a coalition to protest sexist advertising in the Boston Globe. Gradually, democratic norms began to take hold in the group, with weekly business meetings and collective planning of activities.

In the spring of 1970 three leading activists in Female Liberation decided to join the YSA. A fourth joined during the summer.

Female Liberation continued to develop in a more action-oriented direction and to consciously reach out to new women. The YSA supported this development along with the majority of women in the group, who wanted to see Female Liberation orient to building a mass women's movement. A major step in that direction was the participation of Female Liberation in the August 26 action, as one of the key builders of that demonstration.

This fall, Female Liberation opened a new office and began to attract many new women around it, including some women who had left the organization in the past. Campus chapters began to grow. The Female Liberation conference held in November drew nearly 500 women.

The new turn in Female Liberation was enthusiastically greeted by all members, except the grouping of five women around Abby Rockefeller, which included some of the women who had been in the organization the longest. They were not interested in attending business meetings or participating in other activities, except for working on the journal. At the same time, Rockefeller was continuing

to finance the group to a large extent.

As the outward, activist orientation of Female Liberation became clear, Rockefeller became increasingly hostile to the group and finally demanded that the journal have a separate account, that all money from sales of the journal be returned to this account, and that the group change its name.

The membership voted down her proposal, correctly claiming that such decisions had to be made democratically, and that the amount of money one can donate to the movement does not determine one's power within the group. The members of Female Liberation felt that each woman, no matter how poor she was, must have an equal say in all decisions.

The Rockefeller grouping then put out a statement announcing that they had formed Cell 16, consisting of five women, and clearly outlining an elitist, small group perspective. The Cell 16 statement opposed the institution of democratically-run business meetings, opposed Female Liberation joining with other women in coalitions, opposed the principle of non-exclusion, and defended their "right" to decide the future of the group.

Cell 16 has tried to cover up political differences by resorting to red-baiting, as well. Because the YSA and SWP women are among the strongest proponents of an open, action-oriented group, much of Cell 16's fire has been directed at us. Their perspective has gained no adherents within the activist core of Female Liberation, however. These women, on the contrary, are all the more determined to build Female Liberation into a stronger, larger organization and to repudiate red-baiting in the women's movement.

During this conflict, the membership has invited the Cell 16 people to attend a meeting and explain their differences with the majority in order to work out a common agreement. They have refused to do this, saying that they do not recognize the legitimacy of democratically-run business meetings.

Rockefeller has attempted to strap the organization by legally contesting the post office box, the bank account, locking women out of the office, etc. She claims that only she can determine how the funds of the organization are to be spent, even though a significant amount of funds in the Female Liberation bank account was raised by the group's activities, not donated by Rockefeller.

Female Liberation is resolved to continue to build the organization despite Cell 16's defection. Along with several other women's groups, Female Liberation is working to build a broad Boston-wide coalition to plan actions for next spring. The group plans to initiate a new journal, which should be available in January. Work in the campus chapters will be expanded, as well as general educational activities, such as consciousness-raising, forums, films, etc.

The role of the YSA in this conflict has been to oppose the

the elitist perspective of Cell 16 and to fight to uphold the democratic and non-exclusionary principles of Female Liberation.

The evolution of Female Liberation from a small, closed group to the organization it is today represents an important step forward for the movement, both in Boston and nationally. Female Liberation sets an important example for the type of feminist organization needed to build the movement into a mass movement.

At the same time, Female Liberation recognizes the right of Cell 16 to exist as a women's liberation group with its own perspective. However, we want to continue this debate on perspectives for the movement. One of the clearest ways we will be able to demonstrate the bankruptcy of an elitist, anti-action movement will be through the building of open, action-oriented groups which operate on the principles of democratic decision-making, non-exclusion, and a willingness to unite with other women for actions around common goals.

The new address for all correspondence with Female Liberation is the following:

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