



WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES

**Women's
Commission
Document**

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WOMEN'S LIBERATION

SECTION I: WOMEN'S LIBERATION, 1978

A new women's movement is beginning in America. It is still in the first stages of development--small, fragmented, not yet conscious of itself as a movement. But women have begun to move again, to stand up for themselves, together and as women.

The most important thing about this emerging women's movement is that working class women are being drawn into activity. This has already begun; the openings are there for working class women to claim this fight as their own, in a way they never claimed the middle class movement of the 60's.

1. WOMEN IN 1978

Let's take a look at the situation of women today. The changes over the last 10 years, clashing with the capitalist offensive, are making possible the birth of a new women's movement.

Even though working class and Black women did not participate in the movement of the 60's, its impact profoundly changed the outlook of all women. Today the "economic tenets," at least, of women's liberation are widely accepted--equal pay; the right to go after "men's" jobs; that women have a right to work. Women today have higher expectations.

Social Research, Inc., which has been surveying working class women since the 1940's, describes their most recent findings as "one of the most significant changes in attitude we have witnessed in more than a quarter of a century. The working class woman will never go back."

Up until 1965, Social Research, Inc. observed almost no change: working class women were confined to a triangle of husbands, kids, and home. They accepted with little question that women should be subservient to their husbands, that in the work world they would receive less pay and fewer opportunities.

By 1973 the story had changed. Working class women had a much greater sense of competence and self-confidence. They felt that women should be free to choose a career, home-making, or both. One-third said that women's liberation was "the best thing that's happened to us in ages" (this at a time when working class women were supposed to think that feminists were "bra-burners"). The life pattern foreseen by the younger women included returning to work after their two (and only two) children were in school. They then wanted their jobs to be something more personally rewarding than the ones they had before marriage.

Just a glance at the women's magazines demonstrates how widely accepted these ideas are. The old women's magazines now deal extensively with how to balance career and family. The glamour mags push having an interesting career as the newest way to catch that special man. Even some of the magazines for "expectant" mothers acknowledge that many mothers hold jobs. "Working Women" and "Working Mothers" are two of the new magazines.

In addition, the introduction of reliable birth control in the 60's and the legalization of abortion in 1973 allowed women to be free of compulsory pregnancy. This freedom enabled women to see themselves much more readily as able to control their lives and participate in the larger society--to see themselves as workers--than previously was possible.

The idea of women going into traditionally male jobs is no longer considered laughable (at least not by women). In 1975 women made up 5% of the skilled craftworkers (compared to 3% in 1964). Most women still do not consider becoming pipefitters or carpenters, but the idea that women deserve these jobs and can do them has taken root.

Women production workers in the Big 3, the bulk of whom have been hired since 1971, take for granted their right and ability to work in a factory. They do not consider themselves leaders of the fight for women's liberation, but simply auto workers. In steel, on the other hand, where women started getting hired only in 1974, the almost total lack of

of acceptance by their male co-workers, and the rough way to go given them by the companies, have forced the women to see their fight to keep their jobs as a women's struggle. The same is doubtless true in mining and other industries where there is no tradition at all of women working (unlike auto). But in any case, wherever women have entered "male-dominated" industries, they are determined to stay. Once they've brought home the big bucks, minimum wage or staying home are unacceptable.

Women In The Workforce

More women are in the workforce than ever before. There are three reasons for this: 1) women's changed consciousness of themselves, the new desire to work outside the home; 2) the (until recently) expanding economy which created millions of new jobs, particularly jobs which were traditionally done by women; and 3) economic necessity.

Look at these statistics: women are now 41% of the labor force (compared to 34% in 1964), and 53% of women aged 18-64 are in the labor force. Nine out of ten women will hold a job at some time in their lives. The traditional "ideal family"--husband works, wife stays home with the children--exists in only 7% of American families today.

Much of this growth in women's participation in the work force is due to the changing nature of the economy over the last 15 years. Until recently, the economy was still expanding. The social legislation passed in the 60's resulted in the creation of millions of new jobs in the clerical and public service sector.

Affirmative action programs--or the threat of them--have also opened up new jobs for women. Thousands of women have gotten into steel, auto, telephone crafts. Opening up these jobs was one of the victories of the women's movement, and the economy was elastic enough to allow it.

Added to the availability of jobs has been the necessity for women to work just to survive. The number of women heads of families has grown, and in many working class families two incomes are now a necessity. Inflation and the employers' offensive against wages have made themselves felt. In 1973, three-quarters of working women either had no husband or one who earned less than \$7000.

2. WOMEN UNDER ATTACK

Until recently the ruling class could tolerate the gains that were being made in the name of women's liberation. They needed more women in the workforce. It didn't hurt to grant the demand to legalize abortion. ERA seemed harmless.

But the change in the economy towards stagnation and recurring crisis means that women's liberation is no longer affordable for the capitalists. Today, we are seeing the beginnings of an attack on the gains women have made over the last 10-15 years. Later, as the crisis deepens, the fight will be over women's right to remain in the workforce.

The attack is just beginning; it will intensify. The expansion of "women's" jobs will slow down dramatically, as the economy slows down in general and the saturation point for the number of possible clerical and service jobs is reached. The attack on workers' living standards will tend to slow the growth of service and retail jobs. At the same time, automation will hurt in both clerical and retail. The employers' push for productivity tends to decrease the number of "men's" jobs in heavy industry--making it more and more difficult for women to get hired. A major recession will have a devastating affect on women in industry.

Recent legislation and court rulings attacking women's rights shows just how far the capitalist offensive has come.

* The December, 1976 Supreme Court decision that company insurance plans need not cover pregnancy.

* The Bakke decision--a signal to employers and schools that they can slow down or stop affirmative action programs.

* The Hyde Amendment--Medicaid funding for abortion has been cut off on the federal

level and in all but a dozen states. The government is even willing to raise welfare costs --once thought the most heinous of crimes--in order to make the point that abortion is immoral.

*The lack of progress on ERA ratification--Carter's lack of concern has been blatant.

The right-wing has picked up the cue and is building a conservative movement around women's issues. The capitalist class has given them some easy victories which in turn make the right more aggressive and confident.

The ideology of the right blames many of the problems in the country on the changed role of women. The family is falling apart, young people are becoming hoodlums, men aren't getting the jobs they need to be breadwinners, teenage girls are getting pregnant, welfare costs are escalating--all because women have abandoned their role as mother, wife, homemaker.

The right-wing is also mobilized around tax "reform". Although not specifically a women's issue, the tax revolt will have a devastating affect on women. The cuts in social spending demanded by Jarvis et al will hurt women and minorities the most. Hiring freezes make affirmative action programs for state or local government employees meaningless. Layoffs will affect women disproportionately. Library closings will end the after-school babysitter many working mothers depend on. Fewer clinics with shorter hours will mean having to take time off from work to take the kids to the doctor. The few daycare centers will get the ax. Elimination of "extras" in schools will mean goodbye to the lunchroom supervisors and classroom aides--largely mothers from the community. The net effect will be to make it more difficult for women to work or to take part in struggle--while at the same time increasing their anger and creating something close to home to fight about.

3. A NEW WOMEN'S MOVEMENT TAKES SHAPE

The attacks on women's rights over the last two years have given birth to resistance, to a new movement. The clearest sign is the massive turnout for the July 9 ERA march. A majority of the 100,000 women who came were middle class, but the participation of working class and Black women was larger than anything the old movement had seen. The labor contingent made up about 15-20% of the march. The women who marched were not there because they believed the ERA would guarantee equality between the sexes. They were there because they saw July 9 as the place to stand up and say, "No! We won't go back. We will not be second class citizens in this country." For many, it was their first demonstration, the first time they had made demands on the government.

Many had been involved in other struggles against abortion cuts, for acceptance in men's jobs, for decent wages, for lesbian rights. They saw ERA, as we do, as a symbol of the things they wanted and the rights they weren't willing to give up. They were looking for a way to fight.

But one demonstration does not a movement make.

The first signs of the resistance began about 18 months ago, with the state International Women's Year conferences. IWY began as a boring government project that was sure to produce nothing but a big yawn. Instead, there was a tremendous response. In some states, it was confrontation with the right-wing that spurred women into activity, to take IWY seriously. In many states, huge numbers turned out--two, three, four times as many as conference planners expected--just to be there to discuss the needs of women today. In New York, for example, 3,000 women were expected, 12,000 showed up. 35,000 attended the national IWY Convention in Houston.

Later, scores of small demonstrations occurred all over the country in response to the cutbacks in Medicaid abortions. HEW Secretary Joseph Califano could not go anywhere without meeting a picket line of angry women. Groups like CARASA formed.

In sharp contrast to a few years ago, today we see demonstrations frequently

around women's demands. In Akron, Ohio 800 women demonstrated against that city's restrictive abortion ordinance in September. In Cleveland, we were able to pull together a coalition to picket a Right To Life conference. NOW called a hasty demonstration to demand that the ERA get on the floor of the Senate and 6,000 women came to Washington. The Foundation for Matriarchy called a forum on the future of the women's movement in New York City in September and 1,200 women showed up.

At the same time, women in the unions are beginning to move. We participated in this development in the founding of the USW District 31 Women's Caucus. Later we are able to play a role in the UAW Region 1 Women's Council. Other developments are occurring in other unions.

The ERA Is The Unifying Symbol

The ERA is the symbol of women's rights. As the women's movement develops over the coming year we can expect the ERA to be the issue which unites women who are fighting on many different fronts. It is something everyone can agree on. It is the issue that the leadership of the middle class women's movement is willing to organize around. Especially through mass demonstrations, it is the issue that can best give the feeling of a broad, national women's movement. We will try to tie the varied women's work we do with the broader ERA movement.

Working Class Women

The women's liberation movement of the 70's has a real potential to reach working class women. They are open to the ideas of women's liberation as never before; the new attitude of the union leadership is legitimizing the idea of women fighting for their rights; and the crisis of capitalism with its attack on women's rights and material gains is certainly creating the incentive.

The recession that is coming will wreak havoc on the gains women have made in industry. Low seniority women in heavy industry will be laid off, as will many women in those sections which are mostly female--electronics, auto suppliers, textiles. Some more marginal factories will close for good. The tax revolt will put the squeeze on public employees. Everyone will feel it as inflation climbs higher. Unorganized workers will slip further and further behind. And throughout these attacks on the material gains women have won, will come a barrage of propaganda: women shouldn't be taking jobs away from men (who are under attack too).

Meanwhile, the new cooperation between the labor movement and the women's movement has created tremendous openings. The liberal wing of the labor movement is reaching out to the (now largely middle class) women's movement as one of its most important allies in forging a new "liberal coalition." The union leaders are beginning to take ERA ratification seriously, seeing in it their one good chance for a victory (if largely symbolic) over the right-wing which has been kicking their ass lately.

The closer the alliance between the labor movement and the women's movement, the better we like it. It will make the beginning stages of the new women's movement far easier to build. Union members struggling as women, and as women workers, becomes legitimate--even encouraged.

Right now, the trade union bureaucracy is willing to take up women's issues--but not all women's issues. The struggles of importance to women workers will eventually have to go beyond maternity legislation, beyond the ERA--beyond what can be won from the Democratic Party. The unions are not willing to take on the employers. Down the road, the love affair between the union bureaucracy and rank and file women activists will come to an end.

Below the level of the union bureaucracy, there is currently little working class leadership for the women's movement. In the long run, neither the current middle class leadership, nor those at the top of the unions who are now championing women's rights,

will be willing to lead the kind of struggles that will be needed.

Today, we have the opportunity to bring trade union women into the women's movement. But it is still a very tame movement, one that is supported not only by the trade union bureaucracy, but also by sections of the Democratic Party.

Eventually, if the women's movement is to deal with the real issues of women's liberation--jobs for all, equal pay, government funded child care, and so on--it will have to go beyond the labor bureaucracy and the Democratic Party because these issues challenge capitalism.

We have two jobs to do today. One is to force the women's movement to reach out to working class women and bring them into the movement. The other is to begin to lay the basis for building a movement that is independent of the trade union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. The leadership of that movement will come out of today's struggles. We must help to politically train these future leaders of the working women's liberation movement.

SECTION II: CLASS FORCES LINE UP

4. THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION AND THE CAPITALIST CLASS

As the crisis in capitalism deepens, the ruling class is forced to roll back the gains that were won through the women's liberation movement of the 60's. Carter and Congress have carried out this attack.

When Carter ran for office, he appealed to women for support. In exchange, he promised women a voice in government. He promised that the ERA would be passed. He promised no attack on abortion.

Many of the middle-class women's groups bought it hook, line, and sinker. The National Organization for Women folded their work into his campaign. They believed they would win on the ERA by getting Carter elected.

Shortly after his inauguration, Carter announced at a Vermont town meeting that he didn't believe the government should pay for abortions, thus laying the groundwork for passage of the Hyde Amendment and the subsequent Supreme Court ruling that states could choose not to provide abortion payments either.

Carter's efforts on behalf of the ERA began as a media show--a few last minute phone calls--and dwindled rapidly thereafter. Only one state has ratified the ERA since his election, and the amendment has been rescinded four times and rejected too many times to count in the last two years. The only victory for the ERA this year, the extension of the deadline, came not at the hands of Carter or the Democratic Party, but because 100,000 women marched on Capitol Hill.

So much for the champion of women's rights. Along with the labor movement and the liberal Black leaders, Carter's image is badly tarnished with the middle-class women's movement.

5. THE RIGHT-WING

At the same time, the right-wing is using women's issues to build a conservative movement in America today.

Two single-issue right-wing campaigns have arisen around women's issues; one against the ERA, the other against the right to abortion. These movements have gained phenomenal support over the last few years. Eagle Forum, which can be considered to be the leadership of the anti-ERA movement, claims a membership of 50,000 in its two years of existence. The National Right to Life Committee, an umbrella organization of anti-abortion groups, claims a membership of 11 million--obviously a gross exaggeration. Last summer's National Right to Life Committee Convention attracted 2,000 people. The 1978 March For Life (held annually on the anniversary of the Supreme Court abortion decision) attracted 40,000.

One thing is clear: the right-wing has struck a real chord of response in its anti-women's liberation campaigns. Tens of thousands of working and middle class women have been swept into these campaigns. Why? The right-wing speaks to many of the genuine fears and confusions that people have about changing life styles, changing values. They exploit these fears. For example, Eagle Forum warns that if the ERA is passed husbands will not support their wives and women will be forced to work.

The Anti-ERA Movement

Stop ERA is an "ad hoc committee" of Eagle Forum, a membership organization of 50,000 that grew out of the Phyllis Schlafly Report. Eagle Forum addresses only "family" issues.

The ERA is the only issue that Eagle Forum is active around, but they also list abortion, education, girls' athletics, as issues of concern. The right-wing activates broader forces, including the Right to Lifers in support of the activities of Stop ERA, and vice versa.

Interestingly enough, Eagle Forum cloaks itself in pseudo-feminist rhetoric. "We consider ourselves to be a women's rights organization," says Elaine Donnelly, head of Michigan Stop ERA. But what are women's rights? "The right for a wife to be supported by her husband. The right of girls to participate in athletics without competing against the opposite sex. The right to be exempt from the draft." Donnelly also claimed that she was in favor of the women's liberation movement of the 60's and that she would have marched with the suffragettes. The problem is that today the women's movement has "betrayed the best interests of family women."

The Anti-Abortion Movement

The National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) includes most anti-abortion groups and claims a membership of 11 million. They have an annual budget of \$3 million. The Committee has affiliates in all 50 states.

Although it is an overwhelmingly white organization, until its most recent convention, the NRLC had a Black president, Dr. Mildred Jefferson. The NRLC appealed to Blacks by calling abortion genocide. At a Cleveland Right to Life Conference held this September, one workshop was called: "Is Abortion Genocide?"

But the Right to Lifers are clearly racist. They exploit Black's concern about genocide, but they are silent on the issue of sterilization abuse. Dr. Jefferson convinced some Black leaders to lend their names to NRLC fundraisers, including Joe Frazier, Jesse Jackson and Dick Gregory (though none are members). Jefferson was turned out of the presidency at the last convention, and the leadership of the organization went to the more conservative wing. Dr. Carolyn Gerster is now president.

Although the Mormon Church, some Orthodox Jews and some fundamentalist Protestants are against abortion, it is the Catholic Church that has really built the anti-abortion movement. In 1975, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted the "Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities" which calls for "a systematic organization and allocation of the Church's resources of people, institutions and finances at various levels" to work against the right to abortion. Each cooperating diocese has a "pro-life coordinator" to oversee the work of the parish committees, which are organized by congressional districts in order to play a role in electoral politics.

The Catholic Church is one of the major financial backers of anti-abortion activities. Recently, documents have been leaked from the New York State Right to Life Committee that reveal that the State Catholic Conference and Cardinal Cooke have been assisting the New York State Right to Life Committee in collecting money after mass on "Respect Life Sunday." Last year, this one day collection netted over \$77,000--68%-- of the New York State Right to Life Committee's budget.

Right-Wing Organizations Build a Conservative Movement

Both the anti-ERA and anti-abortion campaigns are being used by the right-wing to build a larger conservative movement in the country today. Both make use of Richard Viguerie's conservative fund-raising machinery to collect tremendous amounts of money. Phyllis Schlafly, head of Eagle Forum, is also a member of the John Birch Society.

In addition, these women's issues are used by other right-wing organizations. For example, the Conservative Caucus put out a fundraising appeal to fight the ERA. "ERA would take away the basic rights and protection women have under the laws of God and the laws of the states," warns the Conservative Caucus mailing.

The Caucus provides money and technical assistance to Stop ERA in all of the unratified states. During ERA votes in Florida and North Carolina, the Conservative Caucus sent 150,000 letters to voters in Florida and 90,000 letters to voters in North Carolina, using Richard Viguerie's direct mail facilities. The mailing said that the ERA would "give the Federal bureaucrats and judges new powers over marriage, divorce and other areas now in state hands." Howard Phillips, director of the Caucus, contends that his mailings were responsible for the defeat of the ERA in those states.

The right-wing women's groups also work together. In 1977, the right mobilized in full force around International Women's Year, changing a ho-hum middle class, government forum into a battle front in the defense of women's rights. The anti-abortion, anti-ERA activists were joined by thousands of women from the Catholic, Mormon and Baptist churches as well as members of the John Birch Society and the Ku Klux Klan.

The many legislative victories that the right-wing has won over the last year and a half have given them a new surge of confidence. The anti-abortion movement in the last year has moved beyond lobbying and demonstrations into violent attacks on abortion clinics. They have vandalized clinics in Cleveland, Columbus, St. Paul, Burlington, Omaha, Des Moines, Cincinnati and elsewhere. Sit-ins and intimidation of women seeking abortions are even more widespread.

The demands of the right-wing dovetail nicely with the capitalist class' needs. The right-wing is not "forcing" Congress and the state legislatures to pass reactionary legislation. The battle today is not between a right-wing "women's movement" and the feminist movement; it is a class battle. The capitalist class is forced to attack women because of the economic crisis. But the fact that the movements against the ERA and abortion parade as women's movements makes the job of the capitalist class easier. Congress can pose as a neutral force, supporting one group of women against another.

6. THE LABOR MOVEMENT

Today, every major union is taking a serious look at its women membership (with the exception of the Teamsters). With large numbers of women entering the workforce, and women going into jobs that have been previously sexually segregated, there were bound to be major changes in the trade unions. In some cases, the bureaucracy has responded by integrating women into the structure of the union, setting up women's departments, committees, and councils. In other cases, the pressure of rank and file women has forced them to set up these structures. In still other unions, there are no formal structures, but there is increased attention to women's issues, and increased pressure from the secondary leaders and the ranks.

Women's Position in the Unions

Despite the advances of the women's movement, working women still remain concentrated in the lowest paying, unorganized jobs. Over 1.1 million women joined unions between 1956 and 1976, accounting for almost half the total growth in membership. While union growth itself rose by 13%, the numbers of women on the rolls rose by 34%. However, the

number of women entering the workforce outpaced the number joining unions. As a result, women are a proportionately smaller percentage of unions, going from 15% in 1956 to 11% in 1976. These figures are somewhat misleading, though. Women in associations, like the National Education Association, have increased by 80% between 1970 and 1976. These associations now bargain, have contracts, strike and otherwise behave like unions, so their membership should be considered part of the organized work force. Almost 16% of women workers were in unions or associations by 1976.

Women's unionization has grown most in the same areas in which unionization as a whole has grown: public employees. The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) more than doubled its female membership between 1970 and 1976; AFSCME now has 300,000 women members. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) experienced phenomenal growth, going from 88,300 to 267,600 women members in the same time. The NEA grew from 726,100 to 1,239,500.

The number of women in the USW rose from 120,000 to 162,500 between 1970 and 1976. Women in the United Auto Workers (UAW) maintained their own in terms of percentage of the union (12%), despite the fact that the union lost 31,000 women during the 1974 recession. In 1970 there were 155,000 women IBT members, most, of course, in sweetheart shops and canneries.

Working Women's Movement

In 1975 the I.S. passed a perspective on building a working class women's movement. We said that women who were concentrated in the highly organized and powerful sectors of the economy would play a major role in the development of a working class women's movement. We believed that these women would be in the best position to gain the political experience necessary to lead other women. The development of a rank and file women's movement in the major unions would have an impact on women in all sections of the economy. To implement this perspective, we encouraged women to enter the key unions--UAW, USW, IBT, and CWA.

Today, a new women's movement is beginning to take shape, with working class participation. The changing role of women in the work force, the new acceptance of the ideas of women's liberation by working class women, an increasing awareness of the need to fight the attacks against women, and the cooperation of the bureaucracy have all joined to produce a dramatic increase in women's activity in the trade unions.

The leadership of that movement is indeed being forged in the major unions, the UAW, USW, AFSCME, CWA and others.

Ten years ago, the women's liberation movement had little connection and influence among trade union women. The majority of Black and white working class women saw the movement as distant from their needs. Many were hostile to "women's lib."

Today, many of the same women are talking about the need to defend the gains made by that very same movement. They owe their jobs and dignity to that movement. Ten years ago, male trade union leaders poohpooed women's concerns. Today, many of these same male bureaucrats have been forced to sound like feminists.

The July 9 ERA demonstration attracted a significant contingent of trade union women, perhaps 15-12% of the march. Many of these women attended because of--not in spite of--their male union leaders.

But the well-organized sector is not the only place where there is motion. With large numbers of women entering the work force and facing low pay and little chance for advancement, there is an increasing understanding of the need for unionization. The employer's offensive and resulting squeeze on the unions may push the trade union bureaucracy to act on the demand to organize the unorganized in coming years.

We expect to see even greater activity among working women in the next few years. We expect that women in heavy industry will lead this movement, but we also expect that unorganized women (and under-represented women like the Essex women) will also move into struggle, though most of it will be isolated and destined to fail at this point.

To predict more accurately the future of the women's movement, especially that part that we are most interested in, working women, we will examine where women are today in the key unions and cross-union formations. First, we will detail the position of women in the United Auto Workers and the United Steel Workers, two of the unions where women have been most active. Then we will look at women in more traditional unions--AFSCME, CWA, and others. We will briefly discuss the position of unorganized women, and describe two cross-union formations, CLUW and CBTU.

THE UNITED AUTO WORKERS

The United Auto Workers' (UAW) "social commitment" to women is a long standing one. Women were a vital part of the organizing drives of the 30's. In 1944, the Women's Department was established, with a limited, routinized sphere of influence. It organized and aided local women's committees, researched collective bargaining demands relevant to women, prepared legislative packages, and organized regional conferences.

The Women's Department began a process of change in the early 70's. During the expansion of the auto industry in the late 60's, many women began to get auto jobs for the first time since World War II. Today there are over 160,000 women in the union, many of them in the Big Three and key supplier plants.

When CLUW was formed in 1974, much of the initial resources and energy came from the UAW. But the formation of CLUW created many problems in the Women's Department. While the top UAW leadership endorsed CLUW, the Women's Department viewed CLUW as a threat to its power.

When Olga Madar retired as the UAW's only woman vice-president, there was a change in attitude. Madar, in all her years as vice president, had never directed the Women's Department. She was succeeded by Odessa Komer, who was more than a token woman. Unlike Madar, she wanted one of her responsibilities to be the Women's Department. Komer had varied experience in collective bargaining. Her reputation was of someone concerned with women's issues who could bring the Women's Department into line with the rest of the UAW.

In 1976 the Women's Department got active in the fight for maternity protection. With the Gilbert vs. General Electric Supreme Court decision, the UAW was pushed into action. Its energy was focused in two directions: congressional action on maternity pay (still pending) and impressive legal victories winning unemployment and SUB benefits for pregnant women.

Local Women's Committees in the UAW

For many years, the union has called for the development of local women's committees. In many locals, these committees have the status of standing committees with the same power as other committees. But with few exceptions they do no more than organize fashion shows and bake sales to raise money for the local or a favorite charity. The concern at the top over women's issues had very little affect on rank and file women.

In some rare cases, the committees have become more relevant, taking up the problems facing women in the local, preparing classes for women, and working on women's demands for local negotiations. The Local 235 (Chevy Gear and Axle, Detroit) is an example of a good local committee. They have encouraged women to write group grievances, and wrote one over a bathroom. They held a consciousness raising rally about 18 months ago. Most recently, they have been helping women to take tests to qualify for the skilled trades. The committee works with the Region 1 Women's Council, and helped to build the labor law rally. They have also tried to get the committee known in the community, and had a booth at an International Women's Day Fair and spoke at a Bakke conference.

Regional Women's Committees in the UAW

Beyond the local committees, there are regional committees, which are tightly con-

trolled by the regional directors. But because they are more influenced by the International, they tend to be more concerned with union and women's issues than the local committees. The regional committees plan conferences which take up issues of concern to UAW women-- unemployment insurance, apprenticeship programs, affirmative action and political action. Delegates to these conferences are usually selected by the local president.

Parallel to this structure is an important new development inside the union. Eighteen months ago in Detroit's Region 1, a democratically elected Women's Council was established. The Region 1 Women's Council was initiated by the bureaucracy, but it has been enthusiastically built by rank and file women.

The Region 1 Women's Council is the baby of Regional Director Steve Yokich. Yokich understood that the dramatic increase in the number of women inside the union were not reflected in their participation. He sought to organize them and build a solid base of support for himself.

At the October, 1977 founding conference, there were over 100 women. An ongoing Council was elected and committees were established. During the course of the year, the Council participated with Yokich's encouragement in several picket lines of strikes that were going on in the Region. Committees held educationals on child care, ERA, and legislative programs. Council members investigated the feasibility of setting up a child care center at the Region for working parents.

In May 1978 the Council called for a rally to support the labor law reform bill. The UAW, for all its discussion and lobbying, had never tried to mobilize the ranks on this issue. It was the women of the Region 1 Women's Council who took the initiative. The Council invited the other Detroit regions, other unions, and women's groups to participate. For the women, this was their first time organizing a demonstration, and they were very proud.

The success of the Region 1 Council has had its impact on the rest of the union. Conference participants at last year's UAW Women's Conference consistently pressured their regional directors for similar councils. The Women's Department has also noted its success. Odessa Komer directed all Regional directors to establish similar councils. In Region 1b a council was set up, but it is a far cry from Region 1's. It will meet annually.

So far, the initiative for taking women's issues up has come from the top of the union. Although rank and file women have responded, they have not gotten out of hand either. The Region 1 women, for example, have set their own limits. "After all," they argue, "let's not blow this."

But the dynamic is bound to change. The concerns of women in the plant are far from those discussed at Solidarity House. With the exception of Region 1, rank and file women are totally alienated from their union. Women in the plants are concerned with job security, harassment, sex discrimination, and basic survival. Many of the problems that face rank and file women can only be solved at the collective bargaining table. Yet the UAW's strategy in the past few years has been to move from the bargaining table to Washington, a process that moves them away from dealing with many of the gut level issues facing women in the shops.

Women In Small Shops Organized by the UAW

Within the UAW, there are great inequities between the Big 3 and the smaller parts shops where the majority of women work. The conditions in these shops are barely better than unorganized places. The experiences and needs of these women are drastically different than those in the Big 3. As we saw at Essex, these women need decent wages, health benefits, working conditions and union representation. The UAW has little to say to these women other than taking their dues. Issues such as maternity pay, affirmative action, child care, and ERA are luxuries beyond the experience and expectations of these women.

As the auto industry has streamlined itself and resorted more and more to plastics and cheap outside suppliers, these small parts shops have become more central to the auto industry. Large conglomerate corporations have been willing to fight hard to keep wages low and even bust the unions, as happened at Essex.

Yet these are the areas which have seen a great upsurge of militancy. Small strike after small strike breaks out. Many of these women have no choice but to aggressively fight back. However, most of these strikes are crushed and isolated by the unwillingness of the UAW to aggressively wage campaigns to defend these members.

In the future, we expect the importance of women's issues in the UAW to grow. Right now the initiative is coming from the International. This opens up opportunities for us, but as of yet rank and file activity is limited. Women in the secondary leadership are being mobilized, however.

The question of women's participation in the union will be a big issue in the years to come. Already, women in Region 1 are organizing for the 1980 Constitutional Convention. They want to establish a national women's council with full power to act and organize. This will clearly have national significance within the union.

The International is certain to increase its political action around women's issues as it seeks out the middle class women's movement for an alliance in its fights on Capitol Hill. Fraser spoke at the September 26 rally in Washington to demand an extension of the deadline from the Senate. The UAW will continue to mobilize rank and file women around these issues. The women's movement is central to Fraser's "liberal coalition" which is discussed in Section III of this document.

THE UNITED STEEL WORKERS

The tradition in the United Steel Workers (USW) has been quite different from the UAW. The USW has been a thoroughly male dominated union. It is only in 1978 that the USW is talking about setting up a women's department on the International level.

But the discussion is beginning. McBride is scrambling to integrate women in all levels of the union structure. This was obvious at the recent USW Convention (Sept. '78). Women were on stage, reporting from committees far out of proportion to their activity in the union. McBride made a special effort to hear from the "ladies" delegates about the Women's Department. But so far the union's interest in women has not extended to political issues as it has in the UAW. For example, the USW did not make any attempt to mobilize for the July 9 ERA march. Only one or two buses were sent, and these came from the district level. The International's support of these issues is only on paper.

There are a number of reasons for the International's new interest in women. Women began to get hired in basic steel in large numbers after the Consent Decree. Between 1970 and 1976, the percentage of women in the USW grew from 10% to 12.5%. Although the Consent Decree did not apply to women, it made the industry realize that affirmative action was eventually going to apply to women too. It is not clear exactly where women members work. Gary Works, as one example, is about 10% women, and women continue to get hired in large numbers, so the percentage will climb.

Secondly, there is the political activism that surrounds women in general today. Women are in the news, women are debated in congress, women are beginning to march and demonstrate. Other unions are getting on the stick and addressing women's problems. This has had its affect on the USW.

Finally, the rank and file women who have entered steel have begun to organize themselves. This has had a definite affect on the bureaucracy. Newly hired women found they had a long way to go--getting the job didn't make everything all right. Women found they were fired before they could get off probation. There were no facilities provided for them--as if the company did not expect to have to make permanent arrangements for them. Probationary firings, wash houses, and later pregnant women being forced on leave became issues for these women that threatened their very ability to stay in the high-paying jobs they had just won. They began to organize to seek solutions to the problems that confronted them.

All these factors have joined to make the bureaucracy more aware of its women membership and to push them to deal with women. Right now the issue is establishing an International Department of Women's Affairs. At the convention, a resolution was voted up that

directed the International Executive Board to decide whether or not to set up such a Department.

In as much as rank and file women are active and organized in the USW, it is the District 31 Women's Caucus. The Caucus is not an official body of the union. Individual locals are beginning to set up local women's committees, but none exists on the district level. Balanoff has called district women's conferences.

The District 31 women are the most developed rank and file women activists in the USW, probably in the labor movement. The Caucus has a solid core of 20 activists. Meetings consistently attract 30-40 women, although not always the same people. The Caucus has a very wide periphery because its newspaper is distributed widely throughout the district.

The District 31 women put forward resolutions to the convention calling for the union to set up an International women's department, district women's committees, local women's committees, and instructing the International to call a union-wide women's conference. Other resolutions dealt with the ERA, federally funded childcare, maternity coverage, and affirmative action (against Bakke).

The District 31 women are leagues ahead of any other women in the union. They were the district that had women elected delegates, had women who got up and spoke at the convention, were organized and political. If other districts had women delegates, you couldn't tell because they didn't speak (with one exception from District 15).

The success of the District 31 Women's Caucus has had its impact on the rest of the union. At the convention, the Caucus was very warmly received, even though in the past it has been criticized for being dual unionist, radical, and red. Other delegates approached the caucus members about setting up women's committees in their locals. Pittsburgh is on its way to doing so. Other interested locals were Sparrow's Point and one from the Iron Ore Range.

The United Steel Workers is not a liberal, socially conscious union like the UAW. But nevertheless, there is a growing concern for women's issues. Right now, all sides--McBride, Balanoff, and rank and file women themselves--are struggling to integrate women into the union and respond to their needs. In the future, the USW will probably become more serious about political issues, too. But it is partly because the International is less progressive that rank and file women are so active in the USW. In many ways, the women's work in the USW is the most advanced in the labor movement.

THE COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA

The Communications Workers of America (CWA) has over 265,000 women, accounting for more than 56% of its membership. The number of women in the union has slowly declined. Automation has meant continual cutbacks in traffic where women are concentrated. Recent affirmative action programs have further eroded the number of women in the union since these programs have resulted in more men in traffic, whereas women are still locked out of the higher paying craft jobs.

There is no special structure for women in the union. Recently the International Executive Board established an Equity Committee. This committee is to instruct locals to set up similar committees with two tasks: to fight racial and sexual discrimination in the work situation, and to see to it that women and Blacks are fairly represented in the leadership of the local. There is little leadership from the International as to what these committees should do.

Despite the overwhelming number of women in the union there is only one woman on the Executive Board. Over the next several years women leaders will probably demand more representation. Several CWA leaders are active in the leadership of CLUW.

The CWA itself recognizes that women's representation is a potential problem. It is sponsoring a women's conference this month for 500 women, the key task of which is leadership training. Clearly the leadership feels it is better to train the women than to fight them.

The CWA has taken numerous stands on women's issues, mostly on paper. A strong resolution was passed on the ERA, but resulted in little action. The leadership did very little to mobilize people to attend the ERA march. The official CWA contingent numbered only 75, although other women marched with other delegations.

The one area where the CWA has been active is in pregnancy discrimination. The CWA has taken Bell to court over many cases. Like other major unions, the CWA has shifted its emphasis from the bargaining table to the halls of Congress. Labor law reform, national health insurance, and a maternity bill are all parts of the CWA's Washington strategy.

One key concern articulated within the CWA is organizing the unorganized. Recently the CWA leadership announced it would launch an organizing drive among certain service workers in the private sector--bank tellers, nursing home employees. But plans have not gone past the drawing board.

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF STATE, COUNTY, AND MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES

The public service sector has grown rapidly since the 60's. Over five million women hold jobs in this area. AFSCME has grown from 37,000 women in 1956 to more than 300,000.

AFSCME has a reputation of being a liberal, socially conscious union. But despite its large female membership, there is only a limited attempt to address the special problems of women members. AFSCME has no special department or women's organizer. Marge Silverstine, personal assistant to AFSCME President Jerry Wurf, handles women's affairs. According to women members, this approach has meant women's issues are relegated to the back burner.

At AFSCME's national conventions there has been a strong commitment to the ERA. Last spring's convention passed a strong resolution supporting the ERA and the extension. But there was no move on the part of the national leadership to organize and support the July 9 demonstration. Several regions went ahead and encouraged their women to attend. The Pennsylvania contingent of the march had many AFSCME women. Support for the ERA beyond the national level is varied. Big urban councils have done more, while smaller, less developed councils have shied away from the issue.

There is motion on the local and council level around women's issues. In several councils there are committees on women. The committees do not have specific power and are unfortunately subject to the good will of the council president. In some states the councils have established standing women's committees with defined power. At the same time membership on the committees is appointed by the state president.

Despite the large women membership, the leadership of AFSCME is overwhelmingly male. Over the years this has created tension between the male leadership and women who have become involved in the union. Many of these women are lower level officers who have their own ambitions but who also see the male leadership as unresponsive to the female members.

Women delegates to the 1978 convention called a women's caucus meeting at the convention itself. It is unclear how far this caucus will go but it clearly reflects the tension between women coming into the union movement and entrenched male leadership.

Besides ERA, basically women want the male leadership to make room for them in the higher levels of the unions. Women at the caucus meeting resolved to maintain communication throughout the year. Spokespeople were elected and a newsletter was discussed.

The tax revolt is the key issue facing the union. The growing number of states that are passing tax cuts will result in severe cuts in public service jobs. Women will be severely affected. AFSCME was involved in the fight against Proposition 13 in California. AFSCME, like other unions, has a two-pronged strategy: collective bargaining and getting legislation from Washington. AFSCME has joined with other unions in lobbying for national health insurance, labor law reform, and energy policy.

With few exceptions, the leadership has not mobilized its women to support these issues. In Detroit, Council 77 joined with the UAW and CLUW to support the Region 1 Women's Council's labor law rally. AFSCME joined with others in Virginia to support the ERA.

The motion around women's issues gets its political underpinnings from the top, but

it is dependent on the personal whims of Jerry Wurf. There are no formal structures for women. The autonomy on the council level has allowed for more motion on this level.

OTHER UNIONS IN THE "TRADITIONAL" SECTOR

Despite the large increases of women in the work force, most women are still locked into the more traditional jobs--clerical, food service, other service jobs, and low paying blue collar jobs.

Women in the food, textile and electronics industries have born a major brunt of the employer's offensive. In electronics, women tend to be in the least organized section of the industry, those that are either unorganized, poorly organized, or facing runaway shops. Much of the electronics industry has become automated and run South or out of the country.

The story is similar in textile. Textile, once a major industry, is now one of the main victims of run-away shops and viciously anti-union employers. The two major unions representing textile workers, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the Textile Workers of America, merged in 1973. Nonetheless, the union is still experiencing a decline in its membership. The ability of this union and its members to survive depends on the outcome of the its drive in the South. For years, they have been locked into combat with JP Stevens.

The sad story continues with the food service industry, also a major victim of automation. With the introduction of the electronic price scanning system, many cashiers' jobs will be eliminated.

Teachers have also been under attack as a result of the capitalist crisis. The tax revolt has meant a cutback of teaching jobs. For those left, teaching conditions have steadily deteriorated. Recent teacher strikes have revealed that city administrations are determined to bust unions. The AFT and NEA have increased their militancy, just to defend existing jobs. Teachers in Warren, Michigan; Dayton, Ohio; Indiana and Bridgeport, Connecticut have defied court orders to protect their bargaining rights.

Hospitals, schools and other public facilities which hire large numbers of women have all experienced severe cutbacks, between cuts in social spending and the tax revolt.

Many of these unions have been involved in the fight for women's issues. It was the IUE that financed the Gilbert pregnancy disability suit against General Electric. Many of these unions were involved in the formation of CLUW and have participated in local ERA activities.

Women are a sizeable or even a majority of many of these unions, yet there is little push for specific women's programs or structures, precisely because women are not a small minority who are fighting for their right to remain in the work force and the union. These are not the unions whose women members had to fight their way into their jobs.

Involvement in women's issues is there but the dynamic and needs are different from the first group of unions discussed. For the women in these unions their key concern is defending their jobs. We can expect an increase in militancy since this area is under heavy attack, and the women, having less, have less to lose. There will be an increased cry from the rank and file for stronger, more democratic unions, and for more women in union office.

UNORGANIZED WOMEN

The vast majority--84%--of working women are unorganized. The labor movement has made little attempt to bring these women into the union movement. Until very recently, George Meany's attitude was that it was fine that only 20% of working people were unionized.

Only a small number of women in clerical jobs are organized. Despite the large increase in clerical jobs, union membership in this area has not reflected growth. Lately there have been a record number of union elections among office workers in both public and private industry. There have also been a record number of unions involved in them. According to White Collar Report, there have been over 2,000 separate elections involving

clerical workers in the private sector between 1972 and 1976. The unions won elections representing 35,000 workers. Looking ahead, there is no doubt that clericals will be a focus of any campaigns to organize the unorganized. But it will not be easy. Despite the successes, there have been dozens and dozens of organizing drives that have become isolated and smashed.

Frequently, jurisdictional disputes kill organizing drives. Several unions fight to organize one group of workers, and the company wins. Many hospital organizing drives have gone down in defeat as AFSCME, SEIU, UAW, 1199 and others slug it out for their piece of the action.

In other cases, unions like the UAW and the IBT organize women who are not in the mainstream of the union's sphere of influence. The workers believe that a union like the UAW will mean increased clout against their employer. But in reality, these women end up getting little representation because they are not in the Big 3 or in other major areas. Many of the units end up decertifying because of lack of representation.

The recent changing political scene might make possible an upsurge in organizing drives. With the increase in right-wing activities, the labor movement's survival rests on its ability to organize the vast ranks of unorganized workers in this country. This will not happen immediately, but as the crisis in the unions deepens, the bureaucracy will be pushed into action.

THE COALITION OF BLACK TRADE UNIONISTS

The Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) is a voluntary organization of Black trade unionists similar to CLUW. Its aims are to promote Black leadership within the individual unions and fight for programs that forward the needs of Black union members.

Recently the CBTU has also become involved in the struggle to ratify the ERA. At the last national convention, workshops stressed the importance of ERA to Black women. "All women," it was argued, "including Black women, have made enormous progress in the last few years. It is our job to maintain that progress and the ERA is key to that."

The CBTU had a sizeable contingent at the July 9 march. The campaign for the ERA has managed to bring key elements of the Black community into the struggle for women's rights. Black women have begun to develop a consciousness of women's liberation which will then be reflected back in the Black movement.

THE COALITION OF TRADE UNION WOMEN

At present, the Coalition of Trade Union Women has 6000 members. It has relegated itself to being a genteel pressure group with little impact on the trade unions. Last year, George Meany finally gave CLUW his blessing. CLUW has moved from its early stormy activist days to a lobbying group with some active chapters. Chapters have little autonomy. The membership includes very few rank and file women.

In some cases, the chapters have tried to begin anew. New Jersey CLUW recently had a conference on health and safety for women workers. In Detroit CLUW mobilized part of its members for the UAW Region 1 Women's Council's labor law rally.

As the women's movement grows and its links with the labor movement develop, CLUW may become revitalized. We have had little contact since we withdrew in December 1975. Branches should investigate the potential of CLUW chapters for becoming activist organizations.

7. THE ORGANIZED WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Since the victory on abortion in 1973, we have seen a dramatic decline in activity around women's issues. While I.S. women were positioning themselves in industry and beginning to raise the ideas of women's liberation with our co-workers, there was little independent activity for us to bring trade union women to. (The one exception to this was

CLUW, which attracted 3,200 women at its founding convention, but later suffocated rank and file activity.)

But even with such a dearth of activity, a variety of women's organizations continued to grow. Ms. Magazine was founded. NOW grew slowly but steadily. Women politicians organized themselves into the National Women's Political Caucus and capitalized on feminist sentiment during their election campaigns. The more conservative wing of the ERA movement organized ERAmerica.

Today, as women are drawn into activity in their effort to halt the attack on women's gains, these organizations are taking on a new vitality. In this section, we will analyze those women's organizations that we expect to have some relationship to over the next year.

THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN

After the July 9 ERA march, the Women's Commission initiated a discussion about and investigation of the National Organization for Women (NOW). That investigation is still going on. After the NOW Convention, the Women's Commission will publish an addendum to this document with a final proposal for our relationship to NOW.

One of the most significant things about NOW is that its membership has almost doubled in the last 18 months. In 1967, NOW had about 4-5000 members. Over a ten year period, it grew steadily to 55,000 in April 1977 when its national Convention was held. A year later, in April 1978, the organization had 88,000 members, most of whom joined after being drawn into activity around International Women's Year. NOW also grew phenomenally after the July 9 ERA march, so a good guess is that its membership approaches 100,000 today. Of course, only a small fraction of this membership is active. You cannot get the NOW Times without joining the organization, so there is a huge paper membership. Thirty to forty percent of the membership is male.

The point is that women are attracted to NOW as they are drawn into struggle. NOW is the most visible women's organization in the country today, so women who are ready for activity look to NOW.

NOW has a myriad of problems. It is a white, middle class organization. It has always paid more attention to the professional women and the housewife than it has to working class women. But the basic political problem with NOW is that it is tied to an electoral strategy. The organization believes that the road to women's equality is through the Democratic Party. They believe that the ERA has not been passed because of the votes of a handful of politicians. They do not see the need to build an activist women's movement that can demand ratification of the ERA and go on to win on the issues that really touch women's lives.

In 1977, NOW declared a "state of emergency" on the ERA. NOW's strategy on the ERA is three-fold: 1) electoral--working to get politicians elected who promise to vote for the ERA, and working to unseat politicians who have voted against it, 2) lobbying and letter-writing, and 3) a boycott of convention centers in unratified states. Although the boycott has been successful (the 15 unratified states have lost \$250 million in convention and travel business and many organizations, including many unions have pledged to support the boycott) not a single additional state has ratified the ERA since the boycott began. NOW's strategy has been a dismal failure.

The resolution for the July 9 march came from the New Jersey chapter of NOW (one where the SWP is very active), and was submitted to NOW's Executive Board. The leadership reluctantly endorsed it. Among other things, this shows that the leadership is subject to pressure from the rank and file. The NOW leadership did only minimal work to build the march.

Recently, NOW's leadership has moved to tighten up its organization. Priorities are more firmly set by the national officers. Even though most chapters have a do-your-own-thing attitude, there is definitely pressure to move away from this.

The NOW leadership is very intolerant of political differences. To disagree with the leadership is to be disloyal to NOW. Local officers cannot defend their politics, so they move to freeze opposition out. The SWP has been severely red-baited. It's impossible to say how much support the SWP has in NOW (according to them, the rank and file support their ideas and they have recruited out of NOW), but they have been the target of a well-orchestrated campaign to drive them out.

NOW's political strategy has become increasingly legislative since the last Convention. Recently, they moved their national office to Washington, D.C. (from New York) to be closer to Congress.

One of the positive aspects of this is that the NOW leadership has begun to work very closely with the trade union leadership. Their political strategy is the same. Recently, there was a trade-off where NOW worked for labor law reform and the unions helped to build the ERA march. The labor movement looks to links with the women's movement as a way of gaining additional clout in Congress, as well as a way of taking on the right-wing. This new comraderie will open up many opportunities for us.

THE RADICAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

A radical feminist milieu is also growing again. Some of it is new; some of it is hold-overs from the movement of the 60's. The growth of these small, independent, usually single-function groups is a good sign for the women's movement. The movement of the 60's was also very diverse; only abortion became a nation-wide issue. The development of these bookstores, health and abortion clinics, women's centers, and women's newspapers will enable many different women to get involved in activity which touches their lives, and the movement will develop a dynamic and a life of its own.

One of the comments that our branches in Pittsburgh and Los Angeles made when they began organizing around gay issues is that they were brought into contact with a wide range of small feminist groups. Likewise, when Cleveland organized a picket of a Right to Life meeting, we also began to meet new groupings of feminists.

In New York this September a radical feminist group called the Foundation for Matriarchy sponsored a forum on the future of the women's movement featuring prominent speakers from the middle class women's movement. It attracted 1,200 women.

In many of our branches, we already work inside this radical milieu. In New York, we work with the Coalition for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA), as well as a lesbian mother's group, Dykes and Tykes. In Cleveland, we work with a feminist newspaper called What She Wants. In the Bay Area, we have a contact in Union WAGE and we worked with WAGE around the Bakke issue. Now WAGE is involved in the Briggs campaigns and strike support work. We should continue our work with all these groups.

SECTION III: CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

8. THE FUTURE OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The new women's movement is still in its infancy. The activity of trade union women is still largely directed by the bureaucracy. But there is no question that this movement is beginning. The increasing activity of rank and file women is an encouraging step. This time, there is every reason to believe that these working class women will be drawn into the movement.

New links between the trade union bureaucracy and the women's movement will open up tremendous opportunities. Today, the UAW is forging these links with NOW. The growing attention to women being shown by other unions will also have its impact on the women's movement. This coalition will give the women's movement more clout. However, it will tie the women's movement more firmly to an electoral and legislative strategy.

Links between the women's movement and the labor movement are unprecedented. Previously, the labor movement paid only lip service to women's issues. Support for the ERA was a

resolution passed at union conventions, but never translated into action. The unions did their own thing--perhaps running articles on maternity benefits or the ERA in union publications, or lobbying--but they were not identified with the women's movement. The formation of CLUW was the first formal tie between women and labor. CLUW was endorsed by several major unions (excluding the AFL-CIO).

The last two years have seen a clear development of these ties. Two years ago the trade union and women's movements jointly marched in Springfield, Illinois for the ERA. This year, the Amalgamated Meatcutters initiated a demonstration for the ERA in Richmond, Virginia that attracted 3,200. Unions like the UAW, Meatcutters, and USW built and supported a march for the ERA held in Springfield this year.

The extent of trade union involvement in the July 9 march was unprecedented. Not only did local unions pass resolutions supporting the march, but many unions mobilized for it. UAW VP Komer ordered the regions to pick up the tab for its members to attend. Over 1,000 UAW women marched down Constitution Avenue. 1199 brought a large contingent. In other unions, rank and file women pressured their unions to send them to the march. Steel women, miners, shipyard builders, and others demanded that their unions sponsor buses. Dozens of other unions were represented: CWA, AFSCME, Screen Guild, teachers, etc.

For the major unions, this commitment to the ERA is not an isolated step, but part of a process. Today, the unions with their present ideology and leadership are no longer capable of winning major concessions through collective bargaining. Recent contracts have not broken new ground; they are merely extensions of past contracts, and often there are major battles over take-aways.

The key issues facing the labor movement--a shorter work week, health insurance, organizing the unorganized, safety conditions--all have been relegated to support for legislation in Washington. The UAW, historically in the forefront of pioneering new concepts, has directed all of its collective bargaining demands to Washington.

The key issue this year was the labor law reform bill. The vast amounts of money and power the anti-union right-wing forces displayed shocked the unions. The long period of labor peace has come to an end. Instead, Fraser is talking about class war.

The union movement has begun to understand the threat of the right, and they are looking for strategies to take on the right and to win in Congress. For the UAW, this means rebuilding the liberal coalition of the 60's. Fraser has called for joint action by labor's new and old allies--the unemployed, the poor, minorities, farmers, and women. Of this collection of allies, women are clearly the most politically developed movement. The UAW has already begun a process of seeking ties with NOW because of its ability to mobilize and lead thousands of women and because of a shared political strategy.

At this point it is unclear what will emerge from this liberal coalition. It is having its first meeting on October 17. Obviously, it will mean a general broadening of NOW's politics and range of activities. The attack on women will be seen increasingly as an attack on women, Blacks, unions, and working people in general. The attack on women will be seen as part of the general capitalist offensive.

All these developments are positive both for the unions and for the women's movement. It increases the likelihood that trade union women will take part in the women's movement. On the negative side, NOW will be tied more to a legislative strategy, and may be more timid to build a movement that might get out of the control of the leadership.

The first test will be the ERA. The unions will either have to put up or shut up in terms of lobbying and mobilizing the ranks to win on the ERA. The liberal unions have taken a major responsibility for ratification. For them, it is an important chance to score a victory against the right. It is also a way of consolidating a base of support among the many rank and file women who are ripe for political activity. Those labor leaders who can aggressively fight on the ERA will be very popular among the new women union members.

The ERA is the perfect issue for the union leadership. It's not a radical issue like abortion that has divided even feminists. It has very wide, broad support throughout the country. It is also a chance to consolidate both the liberal coalition and a base among rank and file women while the movement is still tightly controlled. According to one Solidarity House insider, the beauty of the July 9 march was that it showed power but the

leadership was totally in control. Not like the 1975 jobs rally. This is a big worry for the trade union leadership. They understand that once people are set in motion, it is often difficult to control their actions.

Over the next few years, the liberal unions will work on building this alliance. Many important issues will become popularized as the ERA is now. If the ERA is passed, for example, the labor leaders will be asking themselves if a July 9 could have won labor law reform. Our job will be to propose strategies that involve the masses of rank and file women hand pose a direction for victory. We will want to build on these issues, because we too understand that once people are in motion, there is tremendous potential.

Build An Independent Women's Movement

All along, our comrades have pushed hard on women's issues had have developed a reputation as aggressive fighters for women's rights. In this area we will be swimming with the stream.

But we must understand the intentions of the trade union bureaucracy. They wish to co-opt and contain the women's movement into a solid base and a force to use in their legislative strategy. As long as women "behave" themselves and stay within this framework there will be no problems. But when people begin to seriously organize and fight for their position in the unions, toes will be stepped on. At present, the struggle for women's rights closely parallels what the labor movement wants. When this comes to an end, there will be trouble down the road. Issues like affirmative action and guaranteeing women's place in the work force will bring women into conflict with their male-dominated leaderships.

While we should support and encourage every aspect of the current love affair between the labor movement and the women's movement, we must prepare people for the eventual end of the honeymoon. This means raising the issue of building an independent women's movement which trade union women can link up to.

As the UAW and other unions attempt to develop a left-wing power within the Democratic Party, they will be pushing to get more and more trade union women into political office. In this case our job is not that simple. It is a case of once again trying to encourage independent political action. We must explain to the women around us that this is not the road to women's liberation, that the Democratic Party has continually sold women out, and that true support for women's programs will come through mass action. Our success in convincing people of this will depend on our ability to present alternatives--an independent women's movement that is fighting for women's rights through mass action.

Issues

For women to win what they want from their employers and the union they will have to organize within their unions. We will see an increase in all special structures relevant to women. A key area of concern will be representation in the union leadership. Although unions have had success in organizing women, the numbers of women officers has only risen minimally during the last 20 years. As women become more involved they will become aware of how male-dominated their union leadership is. There will be demands for women officers and staffers who will be more responsive to the needs of women.

In the 60's there was a push to get Blacks into the leadership of the unions. We viewed this as progressive in that it advanced the position of Blacks in the unions and made the unions more aware of the problems of Black workers. Even though many of those elected were little different from the whites who preceded them, the change was important. Today the situation is somewhat similar for women.

Another issue that working women will want to address is organizing the unorganized. The survival of the labor movement depends on organizing the unorganized. But the present labor movement is not capable of launching a serious organizing drive. The unions are fighting each other for a piece of the pie rather than working together to expand organized labor. However, the crisis that the unions face is very real. Not immediately, but in the

next few years, this crisis may force the unions to get serious about organizing.

Many of the battles will not be easily won. We saw at Essex that the UAW was unwilling to escalate the offensive to make any attempt to win. A real winning strategy at Essex probably would have meant working with other unions that have organized in the Essex conglomerate. The UAW and other unions simply are not up to the task. Before the labor movement can seriously set out to organize, it will have to change its conception of organizing.

Meanwhile, the workers in these unorganized shops (and this includes the majority of working women) will often be among the most militant workers around today. They will face a desperate situation--and they won't have that fat paycheck to console them like auto workers and steel workers. They will be forced to fight. Most of these fights will be isolated and smashed. The rank and file movement will have to address linking up and publicizing these struggles.

9. I.S. WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES

Until now, our women's liberation work has been limited by objective circumstances. Today, there are endless opportunities for us as the women's movement develops. We are limited only by our own resources.

Today, events demand that we increase our activity around women's issues and make our women's work central to the organization. A women's movement is emerging. We do not know exactly how it will develop, but we do know that we can play a role in forcing that movement to reach out to working class women, and drawing working class women into the movement. Down the road, our trade union work can help to lead the movement.

Our most important work will continue to be building around women's issues in the unions. This remains most developed in USW District 31 and in UAW Region 1, but it is also beginning in USW District 15 and we have opportunities in the CWA in Cleveland. We can expect increased opportunities in our trade union work as the alliance between the women's movement and the trade union bureaucracy develops.

Several other branches also have excellent work going on. In New York we are active in the reproductive rights issue and will also have an exciting opportunity to work in a drive to organize New York department store workers. In Pittsburgh and Los Angeles, gay work has brought us into contact not only with lesbians, but also with an array of feminist organizations that see that the struggle for gay rights is part of a larger defensive struggle that also involves women. In several cities, we have begun to work with left groups and city-wide coalitions around women's celebrations.

Two New Priorities

We want to continue all the work we are now doing. But we also propose two additional priorities for women's work in the I.S.:

- 1) Build the movement to ratify the ERA
- 2) Support the struggles of women workers. This will include strike support work and organizing drives.

The special role that the I.S. can play today is to bring working class women into the women's liberation movement. There is no longer a stone wall of hostility on the part of working class women towards the ideas of women's liberation. Many already see themselves as part of a fight for women's rights. They have formed caucuses in their unions, they have led strikes, they have marched for the ERA. We want to capitalize on this new women's liberation consciousness among working class women in order to give the women's movement as much of a working class character as possible.

Building the Movement to Ratify the ERA

Over the next year, the ERA will be the national focus of the women's movement, just

like abortion was for the movement of the 60's. The leadership of NOW understands that there must be progress on the ERA immediately. There will be opportunities to build demonstrations. Right now, the idea of a national demonstration on International Women's Day is being floated in NOW.

In the event of a national demonstration, we would want to build it as aggressively as possible. The July 9 march changed the consciousness of the women who attended. They felt the strength of their numbers, and saw that mass action gets results when the House passed the extension ten days later. We would try to bring as many people as possible, both men and women, to any other demonstration. Obviously, we would want to build these demonstrations through our unions and community work.

We should also take every opportunity to hold local ERA demonstrations. Although we do not have branches in unratified states, most people today recognize the need for people in every state to push for ratification. This will be especially easy until the extension is passed. Gary comrades will have many opportunities to participate in demonstrations in Illinois.

In building the movement to ratify the ERA, we will have to counterpose a strategy of mass action to a strategy of lobbying and letter writing and voting for politicians who promise to fight for women. We will have to point out the past failures of this strategy, and take on the middle class and labor movement's reliance on the Democratic Party. The successful July 9 march will make this job much easier.

Struggles of Working Women

Strikes and organizing drives among women workers are nothing new. They are happening all the time. Usually, these strikes are smashed. Generally, the I.S. has not gotten involved in these struggles in small shops and traditional women's unions. We did not feel that the things we would get out of strike support work were worth the investment of resources.

Now, we are proposing that comrades seek out these strikes, organizing drives, contract disputes, and get involved. Not in every strike, not every time you pass a picket line. We will not be able to do everything. But we should choose certain strikes to get active in. The best example of this is our work in supporting the Essex strike last year. We were able to make a contribution to that strike by building solidarity for it in the Big 3, publicizing the strike through Workers' Power and our rank and file bulletins, raising money, and developing a political analysis of the strike that was published as an I.S. pamphlet.

Other strikes occurred last year that would have been good candidates for strike support work. For example, the Blue Cross strike in the Bay Area, and the Riverside nurses strike outside of Detroit.

The crisis that the unions face today eventually will lead to a new seriousness around the demand to organize the unorganized. Our work in these strikes will help us to begin to establish ties with a layer of working class women who we expect to be among the most militant in coming years. We will also gain a better understanding of the problems and consciousness of women who, although they are a majority, we have little contact with.

As often as possible, we should do this work through our unions and rank and file groups. We should suggest strike support work as possible activities in the District 31 Women's Caucus, in the UAW Region 1 Women's Council, in CCU and TDU, and other organizations that we belong to. The best way to build support is to link up with other unions, preferably other locals in the same union. We should push the official structures of the unions, like the Women's Departments and Councils to actively support organizing strikes or contract disputes like Essex. For the rank and file women around us that we are able to bring into this activity, we will be able to show graphically the position of other women supposedly 'organized' by their union, and thus point up some of the failings of the bureaucracy. We will be able to draw the lessons of the need to build a rank and file movement that can link up these struggles, since the bureaucracy is content to let them stand alone and fail.

As the women's movement develops, we should use any groups we work with to do strike support work too.

When alternatives do not exist, we should attempt strike support work as members of the I.S., but we will make more limited gains because of red-baiting. (However, I.S.ers were successful in intervening in the UAW Romeo wildcat this past summer.)

Internal Functioning

The women's commission is trying to set realistic goals with these perspectives. We are not proposing every good thing that could be done. Rather, we are prioritizing two areas where we think there will be motion, and which will help to build our work and the women's movement. Although we are not recommending that any branch drop the work it is doing, we believe a coordinated focus will be useful for the organization.

In many ways, these two priorities represent a much greater commitment of resources to women's work than we have given since our intervention in CLUW. They will require a change in conception of the priority of women's work and in the organization of our work.

The activities of the I.S. women's caucuses should flow from our work. It may be that the caucuses will meet as caucuses less often, not more. Most branches have already appointed one or two women who have overall responsibility for the women's work. Each caucus should make sure they have this kind of an arrangement--one or two coordinators or a small steering committee to be in charge of carrying out our perspectives, to call caucus meetings when needed, and to keep in touch with the women's commission.

Women's Commission

The women's commission will take the responsibility of leading on the ERA, and consulting and advising branches on the strike support work. We will also oversee other areas of women's work that branches are engaged in, and help in any way that we can. We will communicate the experiences of comrades through continued production of the I.S. Women's Newsletter, and will also use the newsletter to generalize experiences and pass along information about the development of the women's movement and other issues.

This document has begun a process of research on women's position in the unions and on the right-wing offensive. We need to continue this research, particularly on the unions, on the emerging women's movement and the forces involved in it, and on Black women, their history and their role in political developments today. As this research goes on, the Women's Commission will publish its findings in I.S. publications.

APPENDIX
FACTS ABOUT WOMEN IN THE WORK FORCE

This research was prepared by the Women's Commission while writing our women's perspectives. While not central to the document, it lays the foundations for many of the conclusions that we drew. We are including it here for anyone who is interested.

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Women's percentage of the labor force has increased steadily over the last 30 years, from 30% in 1950 to 36.6% in 1967, to 40.5% in 1976. At the same time, of course, the percentage of all women who either hold jobs or are looking for them has grown: from 41.1% of women 16 and over in 1967 to 47.3% in 1976. By contrast, men's rate fell from 80.4% to 77.5%, due mainly to the larger percentage of older people in the population.

Women without husbands (single, divorced, widowed, separated) have always tended to hold jobs. The big jump in recent years has been among wives, and even more noticeably among mothers. In 1974 nearly half of the wives in husband-wife families worked, and wives made up almost 3/5 of all women workers. (At the same time wives' earnings averaged 26% of family income.)

The percentage of mothers who work is higher than the percentage for all women. Fifty-eight percent of mothers of school-age children work. The group which has grown the most in recent years is women with pre-school children--from 25% in 1964 to 41% in 1976. Given the strong material bias toward staying home with the kids, it is clear that the economic forces (and the personal ones) pushing women into the work force are strong.

The number of families headed by women increased from 4.4 million to 7.5 million between 1960 and 1975--an increase of 70% (compared to a 20% increase for husband-wife families). Fifty-four percent of women family heads work, and one out of ten working women is a family head.

Where Women Work

The growth in women's employment has not led to a major shift in the kinds of jobs women hold. In 1976 35% of women workers were clericals. Slightly over 18% were service workers. Professional and technical workers were 16%, and 12% were "operatives"--factory workers.

The number of clerical jobs has increased more rapidly than any other job category over the last fifteen years. The number of women clericals increased from 6.3 to 11.5 million from 1959 to 1974, and clericals grew from 30 to 35% of all women workers.

These and other traditional women's occupations will continue to be the largest employers of women for the foreseeable future. The better-paying "men's" jobs in steel, auto, telephone, and trucking are not expanding as clerical and service jobs have (although the rate of expansion of clerical jobs will slow down). In all four of these categories, the trend is toward fewer workers doing more work. The relatively smaller number of opportunities will mean that women in these occupations will remain a distinct minority of working women. Women operatives increased by 1.1 million from 1959 to 1964, but their percentage of all women workers fell from 15.4% to 13.1%.

Wage Differential

The increasing proportion of women in the labor force has not improved women's status relative to men. In 1956, women working full-time, year-round made 64% as much as men. In 1964 it was 60%. By 1976 it was 59%. In 1975, more than two-fifths of women workers made less than \$7,000. More than four-fifths of men earned more than \$7,000.

Unemployment

The fact that greater numbers of women are trying to enter the labor force has meant that women's unemployment rate is up. Women are not finding jobs as fast as they need them. Women's unemployment rate actually worsened compared with men's. In 1947, women were

women were 28% of the labor force and 27% of the unemployed. In 1974 women were 39% of the labor force and 47% of the unemployed. Women had a 6.7% unemployment rate and men 4.8%

Minority Women

(The term "minority" here includes Black, Indian and Asian, but not Spanish-speaking women. Statistics are from 1976.)

Minority women have a slightly higher labor force participation rate than white women. They are 12% of all women, but 13% of women workers. Fifty percent of minority women work, compared to 47% of whites.

34% of minority families are headed by women. Almost half of these families fall below the poverty level (\$5500 for a family of four in 1975.)

Among women family heads who work full-time, year-round, 4% of white women and 15% of minority women fall below the poverty line.

More minority mothers are in the labor force than white mothers--58.1% versus 47.5% of "ever-married" mothers.

Wages

In every occupation, including the female dominated ones like clerical, men earn more money than women. Wages are also cut by "underemployment." One-third of minority women workers and one-fifth of white women workers were working part-time when they would have preferred full-time jobs.

The median wage for female heads of household in 1976 was \$156 a week.

The following are women's median wages by job categories:

Clericals	\$8128
Sales workers	\$6272
Health service workers	\$6697
Operatives	\$6649
Craft workers	\$7765

(These are year-round, full-time workers)