

P.O. Box 471 Cooper Station
New York, N.Y. 10003

May 3, 1971

TO ALL ORGANIZERS AND NC MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed are two reports on the Canadian Women's Conference with the Indochinese held in Toronto and Vancouver. The Toronto report was given to the NEC by Ruth Robinett; the Vancouver report is by Ann Montague, an at-large member in Ellensburg, Washington. These reports are for the information of YSA members only.

Comradely,



Ruth Robinett
YSA Women's Liberation Director

Report on Canadian Conference with Indochinese Women: Toronto,
April 7-12; Vancouver, April 1-6

Two conferences with Indochinese women and North American women took place in Canada: the first in Vancouver April 1-6 and the second in Toronto April 7-12. Each conference was structured in two parts. The first part (Vancouver, April 1-3; Toronto, April 7-9) was organized basically as an antiwar conference. The second half (Vancouver, April 4-6; Toronto, April 10-12) was organized by those forces within the women's liberation movement that consider themselves to be "anti-imperialist". This report deals mainly with the Toronto conference. A report on the Vancouver conference is attached.

The first half of the conference was organized by Women's Strike for Peace, Voice of Women, and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. The organizers of the second half of the conference came from different ultraleft, "anti-imperialist" women's groups -- particularly from Chicago, Atlanta and New York. Indications are that the Communist Party was involved in the organization of both parts of the conference. (During the first half of the conference male Canadian CPers were serving as defense guards.) The general emphasis from the organizers of the second half of the conference was on building an anti-imperialist women's movement to combat U.S. imperialism and aid the Vietnamese revolution, but no organizational or implementational proposals were ever discussed.

The second half of the conference attendance was to be on the basis of "representation" from the Canadian and American movements-- 100 Canadians, 200 American women's liberation activists, 200 Third World women. Although the first half of the conference turned out to be open to anyone with \$5.00 to register, there was no publicity on either part of the conference and the general impression was created that only a limited number of women could attend, supposedly for security reasons.

It was never explained who was actually organizing the women's liberation half of the conference and who was making the decisions as to quotas, where delegates were chosen, etc. What was clear was that the meetings to discuss the conference and select delegates were not publicized, could be attended by invitation only, and specifically attempted to exclude YSAers or anyone from the broader women's liberation movement -- that is, anyone not specifically "anti-imperialist." An example of this was the meeting held in New York City to select the three delegates assigned to Manhattan. After discussion, it was decided that only those at the meeting were eligible for delegate status and that the delegates should be two lesbians and one Third World feminist. When Patti Iiyama, one of two Third World women there, was nominated for delegate, it was stated that she was ineligible because she was a member of a political group, the YSA. Across the country attempts were consistently made to exclude Trotskyists and other pro-mass action advocates.

Because of the bureaucratic and sectarian organization of the conference, our assessment was that it could produce no positive results. The narrowness of the forces who would be attending and the conscious exclusion of any representatives of the real women's

liberation movement or antiwar movement would prevent any real political discussion or democratic decision-making. On the basis of this assessment we did not want to take responsibility in any way for what might be decided at this conference. What we decided to do was to attend in small numbers, observe, and get out information on the United Women's Contingent and April 24th.

The first half of the conference, organized by WSP and VOW, was attended by approximately 350 people, less than one quarter young women and the rest older Women's Strike for Peace types. The conference was open to anyone with \$5.00 to register. The Indochinese delegation consisted of six women and three male interpreters from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the Provisional Revolutionary Government and the Pathet Lao. The conference schedule included three "plenary" sessions and a series of workshops with each of the Indochinese delegations. The entire conference was very tightly structured and controlled by the WSP organizers. The Indochinese were prevented from having any unstructured discussions with the women at the conference.

The "plenary" sessions consisted of presentations by the Indochinese with no questions the first night, and American women from various pacifist-type organizations relating their antiwar activities, --with no questions following-- on the second night. This latter program did include mention of April 24th several times-- both in Cora Weiss' presentation of the Spring Offensive and from several other speakers. The workshops were also very tightly controlled by the chair. In most only written questions were allowed and only factual questions were encouraged, often times others being ruled out of order.

In line with this bureaucratic atmosphere, the Indochinese women usually answered questions in only the most general and propagandistic way. It became obvious throughout the conference that their attitude toward the women's liberation movement reflected their Stalinist politics-- the glorification of motherhood continually being emphasized whenever discussing the role of women in Indochina. They did emphasize that women were equal with men, women were paid equal wages, 50% of the women were part of the fighting force, and that women participated in all functions of society.

The most positive aspect and the only encouraging development at the conference was the repeated endorsement and statements of support for April 24th demonstration. The Indochinese continually emphasized the importance of mass demonstrations for total and immediate withdrawal and pointed to April 24th as a good example. The Peace Treaty was mentioned several times by the conference women and met with criticism from the DRV delegation. They disagreed with several minor points in the treaty, such as point number eight which implies that the Vietnamese had not always respected the neutrality of Laos, and said they had signed a "peace declaration" not a treaty. Whenever referring to the peace treaty they stated that they agreed with its basic content, emphasizing that the call for total and immediate withdrawal was the most important thing. At the same time they sometimes would refer to "setting the date," particularly the DRV and PRG delegations, apparently not seeing the contradiction when raised as a mass slogan.

The manipulative way in which the conference was organized (no real discussion in the workshops or opportunity to have such) was resented by a number of the younger women there. Most of these women had been excluded from the second conference and were trying to get in. The reason the second plenary session had no discussion was because a caucus of 30 or so was going to raise questions of the organization of the conference on the floor, and the conference organizers controlled the program and the chair so that this would be impossible.

In general it was not clear what the purpose of the conference was. The workshops and plenary sessions were informational exchanges, no actions were proposed or discussed and no votes were taken. The CP and the ultralefts probably hoped to have the conference back the peace treaty in a big way, but this backfired because of the Indo-chinese objections to it. April 24th was the one antiwar action that came across clearly. We were able to distribute a lot of literature on the United Women's Contingent and generally let everyone know about the April 24th demonstration though they refused to let us put up a separate literature table. One mistake we made was not putting up a fight for a separate April 24th information table, considering the broad support April 24th had.

The second "women's liberation" conference was organized on a very narrow and exclusionary basis. Women were selected to fill one of the three categories which the conference organizers designated as representative of the "anti-imperialist" women's movement-- Third World, women's liberation or Canadian, apparently seeing no overlap between these. The conference attendance began with 400 women, approximately 150 of them Third World.

From the opening session of the second conference there was an atmosphere of general dissatisfaction with the way the conference was organized, the way delegates were chosen, and resentment of the manipulative attitude of the organizers toward the conference. The first session was handled in a very bureaucratic manner, the chair giving orders to the participants, everyone being thoroughly frisked and required to show two pieces of identification at the door (this was done every session), and marshalls ordering everyone to stay in their seats (for security reasons).

Several times during the conference attempts were made to discuss opening the conference to all who wanted to attend. Saturday morning a presentation from the gay women proposed an open, non-exclusionary conference, which the chair managed to ignore. Later on Saturday, the full body discussed opening the conference and a voice vote defeated the motion. Reasons given for a small conference were security, that the Canadian women were unable to handle a larger conference, and that it would be unfair at this point to open it up. The organizers were accused of trying to exclude people with differing political ideas, which they denied. An additional irritant to those who wanted to open the conference was the fact that women had been turned away while men (the male CP guards) had been allowed to enter.

As with the first conference, the second conference had no stated purpose or goals. Some women thought that it was to be a women's liberation conference, but discovered when they arrived that there were no workshops on women's liberation issues and that it revolved around the abstract notion of "anti-imperialism." Dissatisfaction also arose from the organization of the conference around the categories "Third World women" and "women's liberation women," suggesting that Third World women are not part of the women's liberation movement. The organization of the conference on the basis of these categories and the limiting of the number of women who could participate tended to pit various sectors of women against each other, each attempting to prove they were more oppressed than the others in order to get into the conference and to have a voice in what happened.

The Third World women voted to meet separately throughout the conference. Most of the women there were interested in building a national Black "anti-imperialist" antiwar movement, and saw this as the purpose of the conference. The majority of the Third World women were ultralefts who were hostile to the feminist movement and regarded women's liberation as a "white women's thing." This attitude just increased the divisions and tensions of the conference.

The other conference workshops with the white women were either question and answer periods, personal life accounts from the Indo-chinese, or vague confused discussions with no political direction.

A good indicator of the confusing character of the conference was the steadily dwindling size-- from 400 on Saturday to less than 250 on Sunday to less than 100 on Monday. A number of gay women left after the first session and most of the Third World women had gone by Sunday evening.

The conference was a clear reflection of the bankruptcy of the ultraleft and Stalinist forces within the women's liberation movement and their inability to present any constructive analysis or perspective for the women's liberation movement.

Report on the Vancouver Women's Conference

The following is a report by Ann Montague on the women's liberation part of the Vancouver women's conference with the Indochinese women. Montague was the only YSAer in a delegation of seven from Ellensburg, Washington.

As a result of the exclusive nature of the conference from the beginning, there were very few Trotskyists present. There were also very few representatives of the women's liberation movement at the conference. Our delegation was an exception. We arrived Saturday afternoon in Vancouver. We soon found out that there had been a discussion that morning regarding opening the workshops on Monday to non-delegates. There had been a vote of delegates 65-65 with the chairwoman breaking the tie in favor of keeping the delegate system. Our delegation felt strongly that the conference should be open and because of the closeness of the votes felt impelled to further action.

A meeting was called of those who were interested in writing a statement regarding exclusion. It was strongly voiced by the Eastern Washington delegation that we wished to call for a re-vote at the next open session, as we were never informed that policy decisions were to be made here two days before the women's liberation section of the conference.

While we were discussing this two women from the Vancouver Women's Caucus and organizers of the conference attempted at different times to dissuade us from "disrupting" and "splitting" the conference. They also threatened to call for expulsion of the "Trots" from the conference altogether. This was the first time that some of our delegation had ever heard this term, but they sensed the red-baiting and totally rejected it.

It was eventually decided that we would present a statement from our discussion of exclusion, and call for a re-vote, but our delegation wanted others to help write it so that it didn't look like simply the Eastern Washington delegation. Three Radicalesbians agreed to meet us Sunday morning to write the statement. The Radicalesbians didn't show up so we wrote the statement ourselves. Later, at the meeting one of the Radicalesbians said they had been sought out and told, "those people are all 'Trots' and are using you."

The meeting where we were going to present our statement was obviously very manipulated. We managed to get on the agenda but were continuously pushed back until it was very late. By the end the chairwoman was pitting our statement against the scheduled presentation by the Radicalesbians as time for lunch approached. Finally one of us read our statement, but we were ruled out of order by the chair. There was baiting and then a vote on the rule of the chair—the chair was not overruled. The Radicalesbians' presentation was excellent and was the first time since we had arrived that some of the tension was gone and some sisterhood developed.

Although the basic questions for the Indochinese at the workshops had been written by the "leaders of the conference", the workshops went fairly well. The Indochinese women talked about

changes in family structure, role of women in the revolutionary struggle, and strategies for the antiwar movement. They would take no position on the People's Peace Treaty, and basically they said to do whatever could reach the most people. They also defended mass demonstrations as being very effective in mobilizing antiwar sentiment. The main criticism from our delegation was that questions didn't really deal with the women's liberation movement's involvement in the war and too many questions that were asked could have been answered by reading and were more or less "set up" rather than meant for real communication.

That evening there was to be a session for criticism of the conference. At the beginning there was some criticism of the leadership but soon a woman involved with "security" came in crying. She said that she had just spoken with the Vietnamese who realized that the women's movement was not "together". (It was never clear if the Indochinese had criticized the conference or the women's liberation movement in general.) She continued saying that we had let the Vietnamese people down, and that they could not depend on us. The criticism session was then turned into one of self-flagellation with people saying that we should not blame the leadership but ourselves.

Then a woman from San Francisco State grabbed the microphone and said we shouldn't be afraid of leadership and that we needed a chairman so we could talk about a proposal for an anti-imperialist woman's conference to show the Vietnamese women that they could depend on us. The woman who had made the suggestion became the chair, and the discussion moved from whether to have the conference or not to what the conference was to be and who was to be excluded.

At this point a group of ultraleft Canadian women came in to do a guerrilla theatre on American chauvinism at the conference. Someone yelled, "they're fuckin' Trots." They were then pushed around until the chair asked for a vote on whether to let them go on with their theatre. The vote was against the guerrilla theatre, but they refused to leave so the chair and two other women started beating up on the Canadian women. Someone finally yelled "one sister is pregnant." They finally allowed the skit. At this point about one third of the women had left.

The discussion now turned into a vicious attack on Trotskyists. One woman got up and said, "The word sisterhood had been thrown around a lot, but it is a farce and reactionary. Jackie Kennedy is not my sister, she is my class enemy, and so are the 'Trots'. We have to exclude them. The DRV had to do it and we have to do it too. I don't know how, but we just have to." Someone from behind me yelled, "with M-16s." This was too much for one member of our delegation who said, "I am very naive politically, but ever since I got to this conference I have been called a "Trot" and I don't even know what it is. I am simply for an open conference. You treat them like they are "niggers" and you are the Ku Klux Klan. Who are these people, who are they?" The chair immediately said that that was a good question which would have to be dealt with, but now they had to write a solidarity statement to the Indochinese women to present in the morning. At this point our whole delegation walked out.

The next day a leaflet was passed out to conference delegates entitled, "Lets Not Let It Happen Again!", which blamed the debates and confusion at the conference on the Trotskyists. Among other things, the leaflet stated the following:

"It is their (the Trotskyists) tactic to disrupt conferences, programs, meetings, and planned actions when their politics aren't dominant. Such is the case with our conference. The delegates from Indochina are here speaking for organizations and political parties which are closely related to the international Communist Party. Therefore the Trotskyists oppose them. These include the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF). Revolutionary movements throughout the world have had to eliminate Trotskyist disrupters. This happened in North Vietnam, China, Spain and Guatemala."

The Eastern Washington delegation is now in the process of writing a statement on the conference which will be a series of criticisms basically around non-exclusion and democracy in the movement. It will be sent to all the individuals, women's liberation groups, and women's newspapers in the Northwest.

One of the most surprising things about the conference was the good attitude and fighting spirit of our delegation, regardless of the many varying political attitudes within the group. Also there is a feeling among our delegates that we should have a study group on Stalinism, what it is and how it works, because they see the question of exclusion as probably coming up again in the future. It was also felt that we learned a lot about how not to build the women's movement.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

May 7, 1971

No. 7

NEC Present: Rich, Andy, Ruthann, Carl, Mirta

NEC Excused: Frank, Laura, Cindy, Norman, Don

NC Present: Dave

NC Alt. Present: Debby W., Debbie N., Ruth, Terry, Linda, Byron

Guest: Nancy

Convened: 2:45 p.m.

Chairperson: Nancy

- Agenda:
1. National Abortion Campaign Report
 2. National Office Report
 3. Plenum Call
 4. Antiwar Report
 5. Young Socialist Movement Center Report
 6. Spring Fund Drive Report
 7. Young Socialist Organizer Report

1. National Abortion Campaign Report - Ruth

Motion: To approve the report.

Discussion: Ruthann, Terry, Dave, Ruthann, Debbie N., Linda, Debby W., Andy, Carl, Ruthann, Rich, Terry, Ruth

Motion Carried
(4 in favor, 1 opposed)

2. National Office Report - Nancy

a. Membership

Motion: To accept the following applications for membership at-large:

1. Jessica D. in Grand Rapids, Mich.
2. Tyke C. in Windham, Ohio
3. William W. in Champaign, Ill.
4. Al B. in Alamosa, Colo.
5. Earl B. in Mt. Pleasant, Mich.
6. Nancy C. in Claremont, Cal.
7. Clifton J. in Claremont, Cal.
8. Mark N. in Claremont, Cal.
9. Polly P. in Claremont, Cal.
10. Karen B. in Durham, N.H.

Motion Carried

Motion: To readmit Art G. into the YSA in the Chicago local.

Motion Carried

Motion: To readmit Andrea W. into the YSA as an at-larger in Claremont, Cal.

Motion Carried

Motion: To readmit Arnold W. into the YSA as an at-larger in Claremont, Cal.

Discussion: Linda, Nancy

Motion Carried

Motion: To constitute a local of the YSA in Portsmouth-Durham, N.H.

Motion Carried

Motion: To constitute a local of the YSA in Claremont, Cal.

Motion Carried

Motion: To constitute a local of the YSA in Edinborough, Pa.

Discussion: Linda, Andy, Carl, Rich

Motion Carried

Motion: That Columbus, Ohio be dropped as a local and constituted as an at-large area because it does not have the required number of members for local status due to transfers, etc.

Motion Carried

Motion: To transfer Glenn C. from at-large status in Florence, Ala., to the Atlanta local.

Motion Carried

Motion: To approve a leave of absence for at-larger Rosaire B. in Essex Junction, Vt., from May 1971 to Jan., 1972.

Discussion: Carl, Rich

Motion Carried

Motion: (By Rich) To proceed with the Spring Fund Drive Report and to reschedule the Antiwar, Young Socialist Movement Center and Young Socialist Organizer Reports at a later NEC.

Motion Carried

4. Spring Fund Drive Report - Terry

Motion: To approve the report.

Motion Carried

Adjourned: 4:30 p.m.

P.O. Box 471 Cooper Station
New York, New York 10003

May 25, 1971

TO ALL NC MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

In the May 7, 1971, National Executive Committee minutes, point number three, entitled Plenum Call, was inadvertently omitted. The minutes sent to the National Committee skip from point number two, the National Office Report, to a motion to reschedule three of the remaining reports for a later NEC meeting. The following correction should have been inserted directly after point number two:

3. Plenum Call - Rich

Motion: To call a plenum of the YSA in New York City for July 5, 6, 7 and 8, and that a poll of the National Committee be taken on the dates. Call enclosed.

Motion Carried

This error was noted at the May 20 NEC meeting and is recorded in the enclosed minutes.

Comradely

Frank Boehm

Frank Boehm
National Chairman

P.O. Box 471 Cooper Station
New York, New York 10003

May 11, 1971

To All NC Members and Organizers

Dear Comrades,

At the May 7th meeting of the NEC, it was decided to call for a plenum of the National Committee to be held in New York City, July 5-8, 1971.

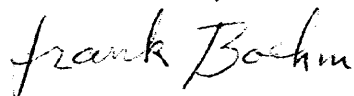
The plenum has been called for these dates for two main reasons. First, NPAC has called a national antiwar conference which will be held in New York City on the weekend of July 2-4. By holding the plenum immediately after the antiwar conference, we will be able to avoid placing an undue financial burden on comrades who otherwise would have to travel across the country an additional time during the summer months. We feel that this consideration outweighs the disadvantage of having the plenum during the week rather than over an extended weekend. This does mean, however, that comrades will have to plan their vacations, finances, etc. well in advance in order to attend both the antiwar conference and the plenum, in addition to the SWP convention and the Socialist Activists and Educational Conference in August.

Second, having the plenum begin on Monday afternoon, July 5th, will allow us at least three full days for discussion on all areas of our work. The points which will be covered at the plenum have not yet been completely finalized, but will be available shortly.

All YSA organizers who are not members of the National Committee are invited and urged to attend the plenum. It is extremely important that all organizers as well as NCers attend, in order to assure a fruitful discussion of the political developments this spring and our perspectives for the fall.

Please return the form on the following page to the National Office by May 21st.

Comradely,



Frank Boehm
National Chairman

NAME _____

_____ I will attend the YSA plenum on July 5-8, 1971, in
New York City.

_____ I will not be able to attend the plenum.

_____ I will need housing.

_____ The dates of _____ would be
much better for me.