

32, Newell Road,
Hemel Hempstead,
Hertfordshire.

10th October 1972.

OPEN LETTER TO ALL WOMEN'S LIBERATION GROUPS

Dear Comrades,

re: "National Women's Conference".

We have received a notice inviting us to attend a 'national women's conference' in London November 3rd-5th. We shall not be attending or sending any representative to this so-called 'national women's conference':

Before the women's movement can hope to advance one step towards the liberation of women, it must be clear about (a) what is the cause of women's oppression and (b) which is the enemy against whom we must fight. Without a correct understanding of and agreement upon these fundamental questions, it will naturally be totally impossible for the movement to plan activities which bring women any closer to the ending of their oppression. Yet it is well known that there is extreme confusion on these basic questions among the women in the movement.

As a result of our examination of the development of the oppression of women, we in UNL are convinced that it was the institution of private ownership of the means of social production which caused and causes the oppression of women, and that the enemy we must fight is our Imperialist bourgeois ruling class which denies us the right of participating in economic, social and political life on an equal footing with men solely in the interests (a) of maintaining its class rule and (b) of keeping up its profits. Therefore we are convinced that while the Imperialist bourgeoisie rules, there will be no liberation for women; it is only when the working class rules that women can achieve liberation. Only when the working class rules are facilities (creches, laundries, public dining-rooms) set up permanently, on a mass-scale and at prices everybody can easily afford, which free women from domestic slavery. This has been confirmed by the experience of women in every Socialist country (e.g. China, Albania, North Vietnam, North Korea, pre 1956 USSR).

Yet the majority of the women in the movement have not had the opportunity to consider these very basic questions: what is the cause of women's oppression and who is the enemy we must fight. In fact they have been discouraged from considering them at all carefully, with the result that many women still mistake the effects of their oppression for the cause, which leads them to an incorrect identification of the enemy we must fight, e.g. all men, or our biological functions, or the 'patriarchal family'. Others spread further confusion by paying lip-service to the idea that monopoly capitalism/Imperialism is our enemy, but in practice divert activity against men, our biological functions or the 'patriarchal family' etc. Activities based on such gross misunderstanding of their situation at best divert women from fighting the real enemy, at worst are of direct assistance to the bourgeoisie in promoting divisions among the working class so that they fight among themselves instead of against the bourgeoisie. Because this confusion and lack of understanding helps the bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie is anxious to perpetuate them.

For these reasons, we in UWL have been pressing throughout our participation in the movement that these theoretical tasks must be given the most urgent priority, hence our support for the WNCC which, because of the principle of equality of groups, is the only form of national organisation which can provide a forum for a thoroughgoing debate of these fundamental questions; it is only in such an organisation that the views of different groups and individuals have to be considered on their merits rather than on apparent numerical support. We say 'apparent' support deliberately, for it is only after a thoroughgoing and prolonged discussion that women will become aware for the first time of what exactly is the line that they have been 'supporting'. 'Numbers' have no meaning until a high degree of understanding of the issues being debated has been reached by all participants.

Yet this 'national women's conference' which is being called is being set up in opposition to the WNCC as a forum for all those friends of the bourgeoisie, such as the Trotskyites and the revisionists, who wish to perpetuate the existing state of confusion, rather than to bring an end to it as we are endeavouring to do in the WNCC. The Trotskyites, revisionists and feminists, whose politics are a hundred per cent bourgeois, are concerned to ensure that the women's movement never progresses beyond the stage of theoretical confusion and mistaken understanding of the cause of our oppression and of the enemy we must fight, because this confusion and mistaken understanding helps only the bourgeoisie. These people have set up this 'conference' in opposition to the WNCC in order to draw women away from the forum where proletarian - anti-bourgeois - politics have a voice, albeit only one among many. The object of this 'national women's conference', apart from that of attempting to popularise and pass off as 'revolutionary' the thoroughly petty-bourgeois, anti-men and anti-organisational theories of Selma James, is to try and set up a 'national' organisation run entirely through committees and "offices" for control of which the Trotskyites, the revisionists and the feminists will vie with each other, mobilising such numerical 'support' (of the kind based on lack of understanding) as they can muster. Whichever cliques succeeds, the effect will be to give bureaucratic control of the movement for the promotion of bourgeois politics, theoretical debate abandoned in favour of a flurry of trendy 'activities' of a kind which promote only the interests of the bourgeoisie, disintegration of national organisation as unsuccessful cliques withdraw with their followers, thorough suppression and isolation of any person or group presuming to put forward proletarian politics.

It is clear therefore that this 'national women's conference', far from advancing the cause of women's liberation, can only set it back, is intended to try and deliver the women's movement straight into the hands of the bourgeoisie, the enemy of women's liberation. For this reason we refuse to support this so-called 'conference' and we would warn any woman who is honestly concerned with fighting for liberation to have nothing to do with such a fraud.

We call upon women to fight to increase their own understanding of the cause of their oppression, of whom and how to fight. We call upon women to reject the philistine view that theoretical problems can be ignored, for we ignore these at our peril. We call upon women to give active support to the WNCC, the front on which the cause of women's liberation is being advanced.

Yours fraternally,

UNION OF WOMEN FOR LIBERATION

(Letter circulated to all known Women's Liberation groups).

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