

July 28, 1975

## STATEMENT FROM LOS ANGELES RE UPCOMING CONFERENCE

Dear Sisters,

As our fall conference approaches, it becomes more urgent that we clarify the purpose of our meeting and agree on what we hope to accomplish. We would like to thank New York for opening the agenda discussion. We basically endorse their proposal and have a few comments and suggestions which we hope will help expedite our work.

But before proceeding to discuss the details of the agenda, it is necessary to articulate our position in relation to the "Montreal debate", particularly as it relates to the coming conference.

## I

We were very disturbed by the original Montreal document re the February conference and should have replied at that time. We felt, however, that Silvia's statement and Ruth's document articulated our position and that it was unnecessary for us to restate it. It seems to us inaccurate for Montreal to have characterized Silvia's response to their initial document as that of one member of the International chastising a group. On the contrary, although the document was signed only by Silvia, it represented not only our own view, but the position arrived at by the February conference. Ruth's paper also articulated our growing understanding of the expulsion of the libertarian tendency and since we were publicly associated with that document, we did not feel the need to write our own statement.

We now regret that decision as it allowed Montreal to attack Silvia as an individual and therefore to disguise their attack on the politics of the network as an attack on a particular "leader". We would like now to correct that error and make our position very clear. We will confine ourselves primarily to the most recent documents (from July 4th), however, since the earlier document has already been addressed.

To begin with, the Montreal letters contain some incredible contortions of reality. The group letter states, for example, "It is within the context of replying to these concerned questions that we objected to the intervention which was made of the Friday night public meeting and not because we were pleading for local autonomy or the presence of men. We understand your accusation, Silvia, as human error...which grows out of distrust..." We find this amazing in light of Montreal's April statement, "But we must keep in mind the central principle at stake here: the extent to which local groups are responsible for making decisions about their local meetings." Is this contradiction within Montreal's position to be taken as "human error" or does it represent a willingness to distort reality to prove a point -- that Silvia's paranoia has created the appearance of political differences?

This shifting is repeated again in respect to the question of political differences. Within the July document, Montreal tries to show on the one hand that there are no political differences, just differences in emphasis, that the problem is "distrust", a "human phenomenon", and on the other, they attempt to show that there are political differences which reveal themselves most clearly in our discussions of organizational structure. The implication is that we all agree on the wage, etc., but our disagreements are on process and authoritarianism and emerge in terms of structure.

The Montreal position then seems to shift again toward the end of the letter, however, where they indicate that there are political differences but nobody knows yet what they are. All that Montreal can articulate at this time is that they, Montreal, believe in non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian structures, in other words, that they are the good guys. But through further discussion of strategy, they believe, the underlying differences will emerge.

Montreal's discussion of "sureness" runs along the same kinds of line. Visions of authoritarianism emerge and, although Montreal assures us that some differences within the movement cannot be tolerated, they can -- although they have not indicated what those differences are aside from anti-authoritarianism. In fact, Montreal even seems to resent Silvia's attempt to piece together their point of view, to try to see its consistencies.

Here Ruth's paper is very useful. One of her points is that libertarianism is an entire system of thought where, beginning at any one point, one can arrive logically at any other; one's view of organization is connected with one's view of the international, the wage, etc.

This is why Silvia was able to make an analysis of Montreal's politics based on a "series of remarks" (and actions, we should add.) In addition, we have the experience of Toronto to draw on where we have seen "process" both as a camouflage for other political differences and, on further analysis, as an expression of those very differences. Once we understand the coherence of the libertarian view, we can draw some tentative conclusions based on Montreal's view of the network's authoritarianism and their tolerant attitude towards different ways of approaching the wage.

We have, however, other indications of deep political differences and here a few comments on Susan Wheeler's statement are in order. We don't feel that Susan's statement is worth much reply since it is primarily a slander against Silvia, implying that she is not feminist enough and that she is a dictator. Beth would like to note for the record, however, that Susan did indicate at the time of the Montreal conference that she did not like the NY button because she didn't like the picture of the cash. Her downgrading of the power of the wage was amply illustrated again by her answers at the Friday night public meeting.

In her letter to the network, Susan dances around the issue but doesn't convince us that her position has changed. She does not come out directly against the cash, but qualifies its power in a more sophisticated way. "I prefer to discuss the perspective in terms that make it clear that no one under capitalism receives a 'fair day's wage' and that we are interested in building our power to end our work, not to get paid for it, and continue doing it." She continues in that vein. In other words, Susan does not say blatantly that she doesn't want the money, but neither does she make clear that she sees the wage as a point of confrontation with capital, as a lever of power, as a point from which we can demand more. Rather its use is to make other things clear.

Susan also implies that there are those who think of the wage as a thing, Silvia presumably being among them. If Susan feels there are women in the "network who see the wage as a "thing", she should name them.

As for Silvia's identification of her ideas as the only "correct ones", we would like to indicate that Silvia's ideas as expressed in that paper represented the views of the conference. Silvia and others fought for certain views at the February conference where they were expanded and adopted. Therefore, why shouldn't Silvia speak as she did?

Kathy's statement, the last of the three, perhaps expressed more clearly what Susan seemed unwilling to admit openly -- that Montreal has a different view of the wage -- that Montreal "emphasizes the qualitative and feminist aspects" of the demand, while the rest of us, we suppose, are economist in our view. We are in fact not ashamed to say that we want the money itself, that we understand that it will give us power. This does not make us economist; we reject the category altogether. Once again, we refer to Ruth's paper which attempts to show the fallacy of dichotomizing quantitative and qualitative demands. Kathy's insinuation that we are more "economist" than Montreal goes far in exposing what was hinted at by the other two papers, that is that Montreal has a view of the wage which is fundamentally different from the Network's -- which was precisely Silvia's point to begin with which presumably exhibited Silvia's distrust!

To summarize so far, then, we have the Montreal group unwilling or unable to identify differences with the International except on points of structure\* which, they admit reflect other differences. Susan begins to identify these differences as differences with Silvia in terms of different ways to present the perspective, but does not come out directly against the Network's view of the wage, rather mounting a more sophisticated attack on it through Silvia or "certain women". Only Kathy admits that the group has a clearly different "emphasis" -- on the "qualitative and feminist" aspects as opposed, we suppose, to the "economist, unfeminist aspects" of the perspective as emphasized by the International.

This summary of the essentials points up that a fairly coherent perspective is emerging from Montreal, a libertarian one. (Once again, we refer Montreal to Ruth's paper.) This conclusion is crowned by Montreal's statement in its April document that "there are differences inherent to the perspective and which must be allowed to exist...." (emphasis added.)

This is not the Network's position. We have clearly rejected libertarianism through our actions in February and through Ruth's amplification in her document. Our view of the wage, the International, leadership, etc., are all connected. We

\*We would like to add, by the way, that, as Clare pointed out in relation to the Network's "authoritarianism", in the last months, there has been an increase in the number of women exerting leadership in the movement. Our former problem of too little leadership is beginning to be resolved through our own efforts.

consider it a political necessity to develop a clear direction and we are doing so. People who oppose the direction of our movement are free to work according to their own principles in their own organizations.

The kind of pre-conference debate and clarification which we are now engaged in should go on and we are glad that Montreal has been willing to open this discussion. But groups are not welcome to impose a full-fledged debate on a conference, pressed for time and anxious to move, which has already resolved this debate to its own satisfaction. Questions can be dealt with at any time, though preferably not at a conference where there is other work to be done. Such questions should be dealt with locally, through the mail, through pre-conference meetings, etc., though if that is not possible, time should be set aside at a conference to do so. But questions are not basic political differences on which we have already taken a stand.

As far as we are concerned, the International has already taken a stand on libertarianism and we are meeting in the fall to discuss how to organize the international campaign. From another point of view as well we question the usefulness of covering old ground. The tendency to consistently turn inward to rehash already settled questions can in fact reflect a fear or unwillingness to confront the real problem -- mobilizing large numbers of women. We have observed in other organizations that we sometimes avoid the most important and most difficult task -- which at this moment is to intensify our campaign for the wage, to internationalize it and to focus it.

Wages for housework is not all things to all people. It is a definite political perspective which we are coming to understand in its full implications. The perspective rejects libertarianism in all its forms and seeks new directions. We are looking forward to a report from our sisters at the July conference in London so that we can have some guidance from that experience as well.

## II

Re the agenda itself, in answer to Chicago's question, if we can help them with a public meeting, one should be planned for the night before the conference. We agree completely with the NY collective that the meeting should be limited to women, for the reasons given. We also support the proposal that the conference be an internal one. Space could be left if needed for a workshop of new women who feel committed to the perspective and the campaign but who have some questions, e.g. about the wage relation, the money, etc. These questions should be raised and dealt with within the local collectives, but if they do come up at the conference, it would not be productive to spend the whole group's time going over discussions we've had before.

We agree with the need for a presentation of our basic assumptions with discussion of the differences emerging in Montreal. We second the suggestion that all groups read and be clear on their position re Ruth's paper on the Montreal conference before coming to the Chicago meeting. As already indicated, while we are not interested in denying people a chance to express their views, we feel that much should be settled in these pre-conference papers and we are unwilling to devote too much conference time to areas already resolved.

In Section II, we hope the presentation and discussion of capital's plans for us will also stress the struggles women are currently waging and the ways women are subverting these plans. What is the state of the working class struggle generally? How can we better understand the responses of women and of the rest of the working class to the crisis? Reports from the London conference will be most useful here. We also need to know what are the responses of Third World women to capital's latest schemes for underdevelopment, starvation, sterilization, "civilization", etc. What does WFH mean in relation to these struggles and how do we connect with them?

We feel the proposal jumps from the very grand of capital's international plans to the specific how's of our campaign. The discussion of working class response should lead into a discussion of the kinds of focus the response suggests for our campaign. Our discussion of women's reactions should allow us to assess, not only our strength, but our potential strength and determine a direction for the next year.

A march/demonstration planned on an international scale would be such a direction. Is that kind of mobilization what we need most urgently now? Will we be powerful enough to carry it off? If not such an ambitious project, do we want to aim for an international day of local events like the Toronto May Day celebration? What will be most effective in reaching women? More women might participate in local events, but a mobilization and demonstration would show our strength and generate the publicity to reach those areas where WFH isn't known at all, put WFH on more women's tongues.

It is almost impossible to set up this part of the agenda without the Network undertaking prior discussion about a march. If we are going to take

on that kind of a mobilization, it will require an enormous amount of organizing. Our conference workshops would need to discuss media, publicity, etc., in this light. We suggest adding workshops on traveling and fundraising anyway, but especially if we want to have a march. Perhaps it's time to consider full-time staff people.

The mobilization brings up another problem which we are going to have to deal with sooner or later -- the question of our relationship to other organizations. How do we approach other groups if at all? Who should we approach and under what conditions?

Especially if we are considering a march, we are envisioning no small organizational effort. Detailed proposals must be made and acted upon at the fall meeting and it is essential that this discussion begin before the conference. We encourage groups to circulate concrete proposals before the fall or at least some tentative answers, reflecting their own local situation, to the kinds of questions we are raising here. This will give us a chance to consider the overall situation before we reach the conference.

We are going to the conference to refine our strategy and organize our campaign. We hope all who participate have the same goal in mind.

We consider our comments and suggestions to be perfectly in tune with the New York proposal and hope that they help expand its content. We would like to thank NY once again for getting the ball rolling.

Looking forward to seeing everyone in the fall.

Love and Power,

Los Angeles WFH