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N.Y. Wages for Housework
288-B 8th. Street
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215

April 4, 1976

Dear Sisters:

This letter is long overdue. We apologise for the delay. Some recent events have made us realize even more strongly how urgent it is to clarify certain questions within the network.

1. THE MAILING LIST.

In New York, on the occasion of our grand opening, we had a discussion with women from Philadelphia, Boston, New Orleans, Toronto and Italy concerning the mailing list that was circulated after the Toronto conference. We came to the conclusion that having the mailing list is not only useless but politically absurd, for the following reasons:

- a) It assumes a stability within the WFH groups that never existed and probably will never exist. The reality is that women are continuously joining and leaving, and we don't want to be continuously forced to make "amendments" to the mailing list or panic because women who are no longer in WFH have addresses which we don't know how they are going to use.
- b) It also assumes that everybody is interchangeable and that everybody can represent a group. Being nothing but a list of names it does not say to what extent a person can or cannot speak for a group. In any case, contacts within the network should take place between groups not between individuals. This means that individuals, within the network can establish political contacts only in the name of their group, and it is up to the group to decide who is the contact person at any particular time.
- c) It is not a mailing list that creates political relations, it is our political relations that lead to a mailing list. This means that each group and each individual builds a list of names and addresses by working with certain women, having a political relation with them, not because they find their name listed on a piece of paper. The mailing list circulated is useless because 1) we get the addresses we need through the political work we do 2) addresses of women we don't know are useless because we would not communicate with them anyway UNLESS THEY ARE DESIGNED AS CONTACT PERSONS BY A GROUP.

With all this in mind we propose:

NO MORE MAILING LISTS. All we need is an address for each group. The group itself will then decide which are the women we should get in touch with, and give their address to the women who will be working /corresponding with them.

As for the mailing list that was circulated we warmly recommend that you burn it, tear it up, bury it in your garden.., but don't circulate it or give it to anybody.

Fianlly, we don't mean this as a criticism of the Toronto sisters who put out the mailing list. We in New York are as much responsible for not having brought up this question at the conference nor afterwards; and we are even more responsible for having waited so long before circulating this letter.

2) POLITICAL TRAVELLING

The unfortunate episode with Off Our Backs (OOB) (see "Report from Canada" in the last issue) has urged us to make some recommendations concerning political travelling, whether it is us who travel to other groups in the network, or people in the network and outside the network who travel to us.

a) "POLITICAL TOURISTS". Particularly in N.Y. we are continuously flooded by women who are usually disconnected from any struggle, but make a business of going around, spreading rumors, while using our houses like hotels, taking our time as if we had nothing better to do, and using any information they can get to distort what we are doing. The case of ~~Rene~~ - the author of the "report from Canada" in OOB-- is classic. *(- Celine)*

Obviously there is not much we can do to prevent women from purposefully distorting our campaign. But we suggest a lot of caution, in terms of whom we talk to, what we tell them, and who talks with them. This applies also to women who claim they are for WFH while we don't know anything about them. In all these cases we suggest:

a) That we don't give any address to any woman except those with whom we have a political relationship and we know we can trust them-- this is one further reason not to have mailing lists lying around in homes and offices where anybody can get hold of them and use in homes and offices where anybody can get hold of them and use them as they please. If a woman wants to get in touch with a group she should do so through the name and address the group itself chooses to give.

b) The same applies to documents which have not been published yet. They should circulate only internally, that is, among women in the network and among women we can trust won't rip us off and distort what we are saying, facilitated in this by the fact that the documents have not been published and nobody can check.

c) If we have doubts about a group or an individual it is useful to check up with other groups in the network who might have more contact and information about them.

3) WHEN WE TRAVEL TO OTHER GROUPS IN THE NETWORK

a) We strongly recommend that we don't go to visit any group without previously checking to see if our visit is timely. This is to avoid disappointment and waste of time on everybody's part. As our load of work is growing it is impossible to stop our activities or slow down because sisters arrive who want to discuss all kinds of questions. Sending a note a while in advance gives everybody time to plan.

b) When we travel to another group we cannot assume that we can start passing judgments on what the group is doing UNLESS WE ARE REQUIRED TO DO SO, UNLESS WE HAVE A GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF THE SITUATION WITH THE GROUP AND THE CONTEXT IN WHICH IT OPERATES AND UNLESS WE HAVE ALREADY ESTABLISHED A POLITICAL RELATION BASED ON RECIPROCAL TRUST.

We emphasize this on the basis of past experience. It is inadmissible

that often an individual who often knows little about the group to which she goes, should start passing judgments on what the group should do or not do. If we have any political disagreement with the ways a group is proceeding we should deal with them not as individuals, but as members of a group. This means that we should consult with our group and have the group decide what to do.

4) FINANCIAL EXCHANGES AMONG THE NETWORK

We are writing this in reply to the letter the Toronto WFH Committee circulated concerning the infamous story of the dishtowels.

WE ARE IN COMPLETE AGREEMENT WITH TORONTO THAT WE SHOULD SELL OUR MATERIALS TO OTHER GROUPS IN THE NETWORK AT THE LOWEST POSSIBLE COST AND WE SHOULD NOT MAKE MONEY OFF EACH OTHER.

However, in the fall it was proposed in New York that we use the dishtowels and the statue of Liberty Poster as fund-raising items because we needed urgently some money for the opening of our storefront. This meant that we would not give a discount, or a very small discount, also to groups in the network.

Not everybody in the New York Committee agreed on this proposal. So we decided to bring it to the conference and see what the response would be. IN TORONTO NOBODY OBJECTED TO IT.

In any case, both the dishtowels and the posters were an "emergency operation" and meant to give us some money we very urgently needed. They were never meant to be a model for our long term financial relationships with the network. As it turned out, the money we made on the dishtowels was zilch, while the time we spent producing them was incredible. Luckily Chicago is now producing them with more efficient methods and at a lower cost; we are more than happy to have been driven out of the business.

We are saying all this to make it clear that the wisdom of our proceedings might be questioned, but we refused being accused of trying to rip off our sisters.

5) WFH ARTICLES

When WFH articles appear in the press we should buy enough copies for the other groups. It is difficult to make good copies out of xeroxed copies and we are discovering how important it is to have a good press kit to send around to radio, t.v. stations, etc. If you cannot buy enough copies of the originals don't make xeroxes but print them so that they can be reproduced.

6) NEWS

- a) The WFH symbol is being copyrighted by the Chicago collective in the name of the International Feminist Collective.
- b) The New York WFHC has written a reply to the OOB "report" that should be printed in the coming issue. We are also writing a reply to an article that appeared in Quest "Wages For Housework: Subsidizing Capitalism?" a most dishonest distortion of our perspective, an incredible rip off and a true piece of fascist "feminism"(like: "..women are reactionary because they teach their children that leisure is better than work"....)

c) The NYWFH Committee is preparing a WFH handbook with articles on health, housing, sexuality, women in prison, children, daycare, social services and social work, old age. Half of the articles have already been written. If you have any suggestions, relevant materials, news clippings ...send it. We hope to finish it as soon as possible.

MUCH LOVE AND POWER

NEW YORK WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK COMMITTEE

April 5, 1976

New York WFH Committee
288-8th. Street
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215

Dear Sisters:

Here finally are some of the materials we preparing for the conference on WFH and welfare. "Some" because we are also preparing a set of leaflets/fact sheets on specific issues (health, old age, housing etc). that will be available at the conference and a poster.

We hope that as many women as possible will be able to come from the network. Not only because having you at the conference is a power for us and can be extremely useful for your organizing too. But also because it is a long time since we have not been together. (We still don't know when our next conference will be), consequently the conference is also a good opportunity to discuss where we are going, the problems we are meeting and better coordinate our future activities. Unfortunately, we cannot pay for transportations, since our budget is already very low. We will provide for food and accomodations.

But even if you are not able to come, there is a lot you can do in relation to the conference.

Here is an outline of activities you can organize whether or not you come to the conference and an outline with the structure of the conference and organizational letter which is long overdue. We are sorry we could not send you all the materials earlier, but as you know time and energies are always more limited than our aspirations....

We hope to see you soon in N.Y. Let us know as soon as possible if you are coming and what kind of contribution you would make to the conference

love.....

New York Committee

HOW TO USE THE CONFERENCE TO ORGANIZE IN YOUR CITY.

Even if few women outside NY will be able to attend the conference it is obviously a power to all women across the country that this conference takes place. Consequently, it is extremely important that we use all the resources we have in the network to publicize the conference in every possible way. For every group this in itself will be a way of developing new contacts and activities.

- Several things can be done before and or after the conference:
- 1) distribute conference materials(flier, fold - up poster) at welfare offices, daycare centers, community organizations and community colleges, senior citizens centers, women's centers as well as among all ~~the~~ individual contacts that each group has. This can be done both by leafleting and mailing.
- 2) Organize public meetings on WFH and welfare, announcing the conference or the outcome of the conference -- developing the connection between the struggle for welfare and our campaign, discussing the organisational proposals that might have come out of the conference.
- 3) Send the conference materials to local women's centers, feminist bookstores. In N.Y. we are preparing a special press release/open letter to the women's Movement which will be sent to the major feminist journals across the country. It would be good if you could help us mailing this open letter and the conference materials to local feminist journals we might not know of--or, you could send us their address and we will do it.
- 4) Post announcement for the conference on bulletin boards of community organizations, community colleges etc. and distribute the flier at "special events".

Some of these activities can be carried on after the conference with the advantage that you will be able to speak in more concrete terms about what the conference has accomplished, what organisational proposals have emerged-- if any...

Unfortunately N.Y. will not be able to send you large quantities of the materials, to cover all the publicity outside N.Y. We hope that the groups will be able to reprint the materials at their expenses for the local publicity. We know money is tight, but you might be able to raise some money---we include a copy of a fund raising letter we are circulating to sympathetic well-to do contacts. We are sure you too can dig up some....

CONFERENCE OUTLINE

Starting 10:30 a.m.

Opening with video tapes interviews with welfare women and shots from welfare struggles-- to warm up the atmosphere, convey immediately the idea of the conference and entertain women who are waiting for the conference to start.

10:30 a.m.--General presentation by member of the New York WFH on the purpose of the conference. The key point of the presentation is that welfare is the first struggle we women have massively fought to get paid for the housework we do. Welfare is some money, for some housework, for some women. We are penalized for receiving welfare to the extent that we have not had the strength "yet" to impose that housework as such be waged i.e. we have not united to get this money independently of the conditions in which we perform this work, the amount of work we perform and the way we gain access to some money of our own. At the same time by making housework a ground of bargaining between us and the state, the welfare struggle has opened the way for all of us to demand WFH.

II. Panel with members of the network focusing on:

- a) the power relations that exist among women and in particular the power relation between welfare women and social workers. How these divisions enslave us both to our work and, how the struggle we each make against our work gives power to all of us. WFH as the perspective and the struggle that allows us to see what we have in common beyond these divisions, how we can unite not on the basis of an abstract solidarity, but on the basis of our common interest.
- b) Specific situations of women on welfare (older women SSI, women with children etc.) in relation to housing, medical care etc. always trying to emphasize the basic similarity of our condition as welfare women and the condition of all women in this society who are all "unsupported" to the extent that our work is unpaid.
- c) The attack the state is waging on welfare women (the crisis, the cuts from the rolls, the policing of our children and sterilization of welfare recipients) and the attack the State is waging on all of us (lay offs, threats to cut us from unemployment insurance if we have a working spouse etc.).
- d) The need to resist--to carry further the welfare struggle--and broaden our struggle to demand WFH.
(Tentatively the speakers on the panel are: Jane Hirschmann, Inez Eskenas Baum, Beth Ingberg and Mannie Garza.

11:40 a.m. Open mike.... for every woman to respond to what has been said, and make proposals. Here we expect any woman in the network who has received info to share it with us.

At the end of the open mike it will be proposed that the afternoon be devoted to more specific organizational discussion. A social worker from the N.Y.C. group will propose that the social workers meet separately. 1) To discuss their specific relation to the welfare struggles and the WFH campaign 2) because of the power relations among social workers and clients, welfare women would not feel free to discuss all kinds of things in the presence of social workers, who tomorrow they will have to face on the other side of the desk.

Wilmette and Margaret also will propose that black women meet separately.

1:00 p.m. Lunch Break (we provide the food)

2-4p.m. Organizational Discussions

4-6 p.m. General Meeting to present proposals emerging from the discussions- What to do; what kind of problems we're likely to meet;. We hope that as many suggestions as possible will come from the women participating at the conference. At the time we in the NYC group are planning to propose a day of mobilisation at a date to be decided at the conference to have a rally--demo AGAINST THE WELFARE CUT BACKS AND FOR WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK (possibly in front of HEW or some government office).