

FC, cartella 1, 84
Enclosed is a report on the activities of
the Oberlin WFHCom. this past year. Many
in the Committee are graduating and leaving
Oberlin this May. Sylvia Gentile is going
to the L.A. WFH COM., Susie Linfield (along
with Cindy Eyster, a new member of the
group) is going to the Boston WFH Com.,
and Phoebe Jones to the Cleveland WFH Com.
Please send network materials for Oberlin
and Cleveland to the Cleveland WFH Com. at

this new address: c/o Molly Ladd-Taylor
1356 West 59th St.
Cleveland, Ohio 44102

The new phone number is: 216-651-8987.

Sisters,

On March 6, 1976, the Oberlin League for Housework group held a Public Women's Meeting, the culmination of our efforts since Suzie Fleming spoke here in the fall. Suzie's speech marked a new phase in the Oberlin WFH group's campaign for the wage in Oberlin. The phase was characterized by a change in the makeup and size of our group: new women, mostly from the college, entered the group doubling its size. In addition, Betsy and Holly (Oberlin College graduates) from the Cleveland WFH group joined us.

One of the women new to the group told us that she had compiled a list of the types and hours of housework she did in order to prove to her husband that there was a reason for her fatigue at the end of the day. He was amazed, of course, at the figures she came up with. We all decided to keep a record of the housework we did, both for our own benefit and as a way of seeing what each of us considered housework. From this initial effort arose the idea for doing a questionnaire on housework throughout all of Oberlin.

We viewed the questionnaire, to be taken door-to-door, as a political tool. It was a way to get the new members of the group involved in the campaign, use the fact of our living in a small town to our utmost advantage (instead of being dismayed by it), help alleviate the college-oriented nature and make-up of our group, make direct contact with town women, find out about the housework other women do while talking with them about what we are doing, talk with women about the campaign, and finally, advertise for the Public Women's Meeting in the spring.

In the course of distribution, we discovered several shortcomings in the questionnaire project. Going door-to-door, while personal and effective, was time consuming. Although we did become known in neighborhoods (women would say they were wondering when we'd get to them) it became clear, after several weeks that the area we would be able to cover was far short of that which we had expected or hoped.

More important, however, were the serious problems imbedded within the group which, inevitably, manifested themselves in the questionnaire. We viewed the differences between our situation as students from that of the women in the town not as a positive strength (we had a little more time and a few more choices than they did), but rather as something to feel guilty about ("we're just college students. They are the real housewives"). Consequently, our questionnaire concerned itself with how much housework women are doing, instead of with putting forth the WFH perspective. We used the questionnaire as a way of finding out what the "real" housewives are doing, instead of as a way to bring the campaign to them.

Because we felt external to the working class, we assumed (unconsciously) that being open about our politics would be "coming on too strong", and that political clarity on our part would be manipulative. Although we recognized the need for leadership, we feared that any distinction between the organization and the movement was elitist. The result was that we ended up talking about "pay for housewives" instead of WFH. It became impossible for us to be forthright about our politics when speaking to other women, or to develop political clarity among ourselves.*

Our isolation from women in general and from other WFH Committees increased our libertarianism. It was difficult for us to feel the power of the struggles women are making and the power of the campaign.

Thus, to a large extent, the questionnaire failed as a political tool. However, there were many positive aspects to the questionnaire project. Many women did become interested in WFH, or at least aware that a campaign is being waged. Our group gained more perspective on "where women are at", and gained experience in speaking about the perspective and the campaign, answering questions, etc.

The questionnaire was not the only means we used to advertise for the Public Women's Meeting. We made posters, passed out flyers, made up radio announcements, wrote articles, and sent out press releases to northeastern Ohio papers, and radio and T.V. stations. The fact of the Public Women's Meeting and the distribution of the questionnaire gave the Cleveland and Oberlin groups the chance to get the press to come to us. When Beth Ingber (our guest speaker at the Public Women's Meeting!) arrived in Cleveland on Friday morning, she was interviewed by the Cleveland Plain Dealer, one of Ohio's largest papers. This interview was prominently printed and is enclosed. The response to the coverage was overwhelming. Not only did women from Cleveland make the hour's drive to Oberlin to attend the Public Meeting after having read about it in the Plain Dealer that morning, but the phone of the CLWFH Committee (consisting of two up till now) did not stop ringing all day. Women were calling to see how they could get involved and the media was calling to get in on the act. The fact of the Public Meeting in Oberlin and the exposure of the WFH campaign in the press has given the CLWFH group visibility, contacts, and power. Since the meeting, they have been on radio and television several times!

Later on Friday (before Beth spoke at Oberlin College about women in Algeria - really about WFH - to a small, but appreciating, audience), Beth was interviewed by a woman from the Lorain Journal, a local paper. The article was printed several days after the meeting. But responses to it are still coming

in. (this article is also enclosed).

At 2:00 pm, Saturday, March 6, about 35 women met at the Oberlin Community Center. Betsy Lewis, from the Cleveland and Oberlin WFH groups, introduced the speakers: Sylvia Gentile, a college student and member of the Oberlin WFH group, who gave a report on the results of the questionnaire; Rita Holtz, a married woman and mother from the town and a member of the Oberlin WFH group for about a year, who talked about why she wants WFH; and Beth Ingber, from L.A. who talked more generally about WFH and the campaign in other cities. The response was tremendous! It became clear from the active and enthusiastic discussion which followed the speeches that most of the women from the town and Cleveland were ready to move on the campaign. They wanted to get involved in aspects of planning, organizing and participating in activities in Oberlin and Cleveland. The college women who were present saw the meaning WFH had to women in different situations and were overwhelmed by their response. They, too, wanted to stay in contact with us.

The Public Meeting was the push we needed to deal with the problems which had plagued us for months. Before she left, Beth talked to our group about ourselves, the structure of the group, the way we function, and the relationship of the WFH organization to the movement. Her talk raised many vitally important questions, provoked much discussion among ourselves, and was immeasurably helpful in our attempts to deal with our problems (libertarianism, lack of political clarity, and political differences within the group).

But it was the power and enthusiasm of the women who came to the Public Meeting which pushed us out of our libertarianism and political sloppiness. Listening to Beth speak at the Meeting, we realized that it was precisely because she was forthright in her politics, precisely because our demand is revolutionary, precisely because she was speaking about WFH and not "pay for housewives", that the women were so enthusiastic. In subsequent meetings with women with whom we made contact through the Public Meeting and media coverage, we realized that women were looking to us for political clarity and coherent action: "What are you doing? What's the structure of the organization? Who can I go to with my questions? How do I get involved?" and, again and again, "What are you doing?" Because these women want WFH, and in their own lives are constantly struggling for more time, money, and power, they view the power we can offer them not as an imposition from without, as we had feared, but as their own strength. These women pushed us out of our isolation, and made it possible for us to begin to deal with the lack of political clarity and feelings of externality which had so hampered the group.

Part of the change in our group has involved a high degree of division of labor. We have designated certain women as public speakers. In addition, we have created committees and appointed committee heads to work on the various activities we have planned. One committee is involved in the organizing and arranging of Coffee Klatsches. Many of the women with whom we made contact through the Public Meeting are arranging formal and informal discussions with their friends in which one of two of us from the WFH group participates. Because many of these women live quite a distance from Oberlin and Cleveland and can't take the time, or don't have the desire, to come to open meetings, these discussions are a good way to get them involved in the campaign while spreading the word.

Another committee is involved in the publication of a pamphlet on the Public Women's Meeting—a report on its conception and a transcription of the speeches. This pamphlet we plan to use in a similar manner as Women Speak Out, both a document and something to be distributed.

Lastly, a committee to arrange a street event has been set up. The street event we plan to be a mobile unit which can be picked up and taken to the many cities throughout Ohio in which women who have written to us live while, at the same time, combining the many varied interests and skills that women bring to the campaign. It is important, now that people are aware of us, to remain visible. As part of the effort to maintain the presence we have created in the Cleveland area and stay in the open, we plan to take to the streets!

Oberlin Women for Hour Work Committee

* This and the paragraph above were written in the context of extreme self-criticism. The extent of the problem is exaggerated to make the political point.