

Chicago, Illinois
July 31, 1975

FB, volume 2, 12

Dear Sisters:

We in Chicago felt it necessary to voice our opinions on the current controversy stemming from actions taken at the Montreal conference and subsequent correspondence. We do this in the hope of clarifying our own position and of expediting a resolution to such discussion, so that the upcoming conference can be devoted to the business of organizing our international campaign. The most serious result of this controversy has been allegations of authoritarianism lodged against certain individual leaders. We feel these charges must be examined and responded to by each branch of the network. These charges appear to stem from the actions taken by individuals at the public meeting prior to the Montreal conference, the expulsion of Toronto Group I, and, finally, Silvia Federici's letter of May 17, 1975. We will deal with each of these in turn.

Public Meeting. Members of the Montreal Group have accused certain persons of attempting to "exercise control" of the public meeting. The events of the evening refute that charge. Judy and Silvia, as a result of their experience, perceived mistakes in the way the meeting was organized, and attempted to present them to the Montreal women. By continuing with the meeting, rather than refusing to participate or attempting to cancel the meeting entirely, the leaders demonstrated their commitment to allowing women in the movement to learn from their mistakes. The motion made by Frances regarding men was her prerogative and it was--appropriately--decided upon by the meeting as a whole, not by any "leaders." Any woman could have raised such a motion and we must all be prepared to accept and deal with such unanticipated actions. Subsequently Montreal has recognized that the other criticisms of the meeting were correct, and they have changed their views of the autonomy question (See letter of July 4, pp. 1-2). So we do not feel that it is necessary to go into them here.

Expulsion of Toronto Group I. Those of us from Chicago who attended the Montreal conference came away with questions similar to those voiced by the Montreal Group, in their first statement (See pp. 4-5). However, subsequent discussion and clarification provided by Ruth Hall's paper has served to convince us that the action was necessary and appropriate. First, we believe that the Toronto Group II, who were most intimately connected with TGI, were justified and qualified to raise the political differences they saw and to direct these problems to the attention of the conference for action. The network recognized irreconcilable political differences between TGI and the international perspective, which the expulsion expressed. It must be remembered that this was the expulsion, or rejection, of political ideas, not individuals. Any of the women expelled are welcome back if and when they embrace the international perspective. In terms of leadership, the procedure used (the vote on expulsion) to end the paralyzing dissension that had developed was necessary. For one of the basic necessities of leadership is to recognize when enough energy has been expended and to take action so that the group may go on to do its important work.

Silvia Federici's letter. We received the Montreal answer to Silvia's letter first, and therefore we anticipated a scathing personal attack. Instead, we received a discussion of the issues. We believe that to be symptomatic of the way this controversy has proceeded: much has been taken personally rather than politically. Allowing this to continue is more harmful than constructive, and is indicative that even the most politically advanced women suffer from the feelings of isolation and self-defensiveness that have been thrust upon us by capital. Only by dealing with each other on the common ground of politics can we overcome this.

Silvia makes clear in her letter one of the major problems of the Montreal conference: the different expectations. The leadership did not cut off discussion for fear of dissension, but rather sought to channel the discussion in the direction they felt it was supposed to go, i.e. organizing the campaign, not explaining the perspective.

Montreal seems to have locked on to the word "sure." This word possesses no magical qualities. It is neither a yardstick for loyalty nor a sinister trap for the unwary. We in Chicago are "unsure" of many of the finer points of theory and we will no doubt be "unsure" of countless other points as the campaign progresses. There is no shame in our lack of knowledge. Rather, we recognize that while not all of us within our own group possess equivalent political insight--and, as our numbers increase, the disparity in understanding will grow correspondingly--we also recognize that a major function of the leadership is precisely to clarify and teach. But they cannot do this if we do not admit that we do not understand. If we refuse to communicate, if we become defensive and strike out at those who wish to help us, we can only hinder our own cause. We are committed to the necessity of the demand for the wage, both as an end in itself and as a means to obtaining the power necessary for revolution. We recognize that this struggle must be international. Commitment to the realization of both these goals is essential to membership in the movement. We also believe in facilitating the constant growth of our understanding of both of these goals, as well as improvement in our organizational skills. We trust that our current leaders and all who devolve into that position will aid us in achieving these goals, as all sisters will aid in gaining the power we need. Nevertheless, we cannot postpone action until such time as all have reached the same level of political understanding, because that time will never come.

Our Views on Leadership

We agree with the definition and purpose of leadership as outlined in Ruth Hall's paper (See pp. 10-11). We do not think that women are stupid. It is not necessary to set up a rigid structure for us to recognize our leaders. The titles President, Chairperson, etc., are not necessary for us to know who is best at clarifying and leading. Such rigid structures are for those who fear power. We have no fear of power; we demand it. Our leaders do not lead us in the sense that they order us to work for them and against ourselves. Rather, they are the best able to speak for all of us, and any power they gain will be because we have gained that power. We can determine who is the most politically developed and articulate among us, and will follow them. We also recognize this as the best way for encouraging new leadership to grow. We are also capable of recognizing when leaders have ceased to function and will stop following them. This process does not allow us to rely on a recognized elite but forces us, rather, to develop our capabilities. It is up to us to listen, analyze, and criticize our leaders. We must voice our opinions and our disagreements. We must at all times be prepared to assume leadership roles. This is the opposite of authoritarianism.

* * * * *

We hope these few words have conveyed our position on this controversy. And we hope that we and our sisters will have the strength to trust each other and to go forward with the movement. We call for all to attempt to allay our personal fears, and to analyze our political positions. WE MUST DEMAND THE WAGE!

--Chicago Wages for Housework

Note: Please welcome to the network/add to your mailing lists:
Tonya Rohatyn
2031 West Farragut
Chicago, Illinois 60625/USA
(312) 561-9275

Bulletin: Conference will be first weekend in October; details and agenda contributions to follow soon. Branches which have not sent agenda thoughts yet are urged to do so toute suite.

Please duplicate for the Committee
- CWft

