

CHICAGO WOMEN'S LIBERATION UNION
852 W. BELMONT, CHICAGO, ILL. 60657

Dear Lauren -

I hope this packet of information is of interest to you. Please send us \$1.00 to cover costs of printing, postage, etc. - sent

If you would like continual information on CWLU activities, I would suggest you subscribe to WOMANKIND. - card placed in drawer

Good luck with your project.

Uriam Rothstein
for National Outreach
Committee

**CHICAGO WOMEN'S LIBERATION UNION
852 W. BELMONT, CHICAGO, ILL. 60657**

Dear Sister,

Enclosed is a packet of materials about the Chicago Women's Liberation Union which was developed as a way to begin communication with sisters in various parts of the country. We hope to establish regular communication with women sharing similar ideas in order to exchange program and organizational ideas. Women from CWLU would like to travel to various parts of the country and exchange experiences.

From the fragmented and sporadic contact some of us have had with other cities it seems clear that many of us are doing similar work but don't know about each other. In some places new organizations are being formed while in others individual women feel isolated and alone. Yet, if the women's movement is to realize its potential as a social force, we need each other--we need to begin to create links among groups.

As you may know, the Chicago Women's Liberation Union is a citywide organization based on agreement with political principles defining a tolerant, yet strongly feminist and anti-capitalist approach. CWLU is an independent radical women's organization and NOT part of any national sects. In CWLU there are about 350 dues paying members organized into chapters (for political reference) and work groups (liberation school; Womankind newspaper; local community centers; abortion counseling; organizing projects on employment, health and rape; graphics collective; a legal clinic, and the women's liberation rock band). Through these we reach out to a broader group of women in the City. (note: if you are interested in more information about any of the projects, let us know.) We have survived and continued political activity in this general form for the past three years.

We are eager to hear about your work and hope that the enclosed material will provide some sense of the movement in Chicago. Additional copies of the packet are available for \$1.00.

In Sisterhood,

National Outreach Work Group
Chicago Women's Liberation Union

(312) 348-4300

Lesbianism and Socialist Feminism

A position paper of the Chicago Women's
Liberation Union.
Written by the Gay Women's Group of the
CWLU and adopted by the CWLU at its
annual membership conference,
November, 1972.



Women's liberation and gay liberation have a lot in common. Both were born out of an awareness that women and male and female homosexuals are discriminated against in jobs, in schools, and by law, and are oppressed by a culture with strict sex role expectations. But to understand how women's oppression and gay people's oppression are related to each other, and to discover the relationship of lesbianism to the women's movement, we need a deeper understanding of the structure and functioning of our society. In this paper we want to examine these questions from our perspective as socialist-feminists.

There are two major trends in the women's movement today, which are most frequently called radical feminism and socialist feminism. Neither of the two are complete ideologies, but they do emphasize different aspects of women's oppression.

We'll look first at the radical feminists, in order to give a background for the rest of the paper. The radical feminists view male supremacy as the basis for women's oppression. This is seen as not only the first form of social oppression historically, but also the primary oppression, or basis of all other forms of exploitation (like racism and imperialism)*. The institutions of society are seen as only the tools of the oppressor, male supremacy. This analysis is shared by all radical feminists, and it leads them to emphasize the psychological aspects of women's oppression, although different groups may interpret the basic ideology somewhat differently.

* Saying that sexism is the primary oppression leads to the conclusion that destroying sexism will automatically also destroy the structures that came later: racism, capitalism, and imperialism. This would be true if history was like a set of children's blocks, where removing the bottom one makes the whole pile fall down. But history is more complex and evolutionary, with each stage evolving from the one before it. Even if women's subjugation was historically the first instance of one group taking power over another, that doesn't tell us much about how we fight it today. Slavery came before the industrial revolution, but the abolition of slavery didn't bring with it freedom for industrial workers.

differently. For example, the more "extreme" groups tend to view individual men as the enemy, while the moderate radical feminists view the male role as the enemy. The moderates work for the elimination of sex roles, which leads them to view gay liberation as an ally, since homosexuality is seen as a blow against sex roles. The extremists are even clearer in their position. Since men are the enemy, they support a completely separatist movement not only as a tactic for the present, but as a vision of the future. Lesbianism is seen as a political choice that is necessary and central to the struggle against male supremacy. While this brief summary does not do justice to the ideology of radical feminism, it does indicate the importance of lesbianism in that ideology.



Socialist feminism emphasizes the important role of institutions in maintaining sexism, and the relationship between the economic system of capitalism and women's oppression. Women's position in society is determined by a combination of our roles in the family and in the labor force, or the productive sector. The liberation of women must involve changes in both of these areas. One of the most complete analyses is that of Juliet Mitchell in Woman's Estate; we describe it below. Because of its emphasis on institutions and on the complexity of society, socialist feminism does not describe a simple relationship between the oppression of the male homosexual, the lesbian and women in general. In fact, possibly because of this complexity, socialist feminism has been

slow to discuss gay issues. As socialist feminists we see the need for beginning such a discussion, so that we can understand the relationship between lesbianism and socialist feminism.

This paper is primarily an analysis of lesbian oppression, although it also contains the beginnings of a strategy for a lesbian movement. We do not deal with other aspects of gay relationships here, such as our feelings about lesbian love and pleasure we have found in our relationships with other women.

BACKGROUND ON SOCIALIST FEMINISM

In this section we describe briefly the outline of socialist feminism given by Juliet Mitchell in her book, Woman's Estate, and in her pamphlet "The Longest Revolution".

In Woman's Estate, Mitchell outlines a way to identify and sort out the different parts of women's social role (p. 100). The key parts of this role are production, reproduction, socialization of children and sexuality. The last three are in the context of the family. In fact, the family is the place where these three functions are supposed to be connected. A woman, who clearly has a unique role in reproduction also has the task of raising children. Woman is seen as child-rearer as well as child-bearer. The dominant ideology of our culture also still proclaims the family to be the only "proper" place for sexuality and reproduction, even with the "sexual revolution". The family holds together woman's three main functions in society and so defines "woman's place".

The first sector of society is production, or how society is organized economically. This sector provides the economic framework that the family fits into, and ties together the other aspects of woman's role. It is the sector of society from which women are effectively excluded, because women's "real" work is at home. Many women work outside the home, but the ideology of the family attempts, and often succeeds in making women identify with their role as unpaid workers in the home rather than as paid workers outside it.

It is important to recognize these different parts of women's roles because each of them can change at its own pace. Changes in society can result from changes in any one of them or in a combination of them. If we struggle against women's oppression in one area and ignore the others, we may make immediate change in women's position in that area. But society will be able to compensate in other areas, leaving women in no better overall position than before. Therefore we must determine the weakest link in women's roles and examine how it relates to the rest of society, so that gains we make in these weak areas won't be swallowed up by the others.

We also realize that there are limitations to Juliet Mitchell's ideas. She gives us an analysis of women's oppression in most aspects, but she neglects some other roles women play (such as consumers under capitalism). She also does not give us a strategy for how to change that oppression. (For an extended discussion of strategy, see the paper "Socialist Feminism: A Strategy for the Women's Movement," a position paper of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union.)

Even so, this analysis gives us a framework for understanding society and the place of lesbian oppression in that society. Because this paper is about the relationship of lesbianism to women's roles, changes in those roles for women in general are not discussed. For example, increasing availability of birth control and abortion, the rising divorce rate, and new attitudes towards sex and marriage are changing somewhat both the ideas and the facts about women's roles in production, reproduction, sexuality and as socializers of children. While recognizing these changes, this paper will discuss the relationship of lesbianism to the dominant ideology of women's role, which this society's institutions still reinforce pretty much unchanged. We shall look at each part separately in order to see how the oppression of the lesbian is connected to that of other women, and to see how the struggles for gay liberation and women's liberation relate.



PRODUCTION

We begin our examination of lesbian oppression by looking at the lesbian's position in the labor force. That position is essentially the same as that of other women in regard to type of work and pay scales. Many married American women do not work out of economic necessity, but most lesbians do not have a choice about working. Lesbians, like other women who partially or totally support themselves and their families, have to work outside the home except in certain circumstances (such as independent wealth or marriage). Most lesbians work for pay because of the exclusion from the family and the economic advantage of having a husband.

Many lesbians are married, however, and their position in the labor force is more like that of married heterosexual women than like that of non-married (lesbians, single, divorced, widowed) women. Some women married young, not realizing they were lesbians until later. Other suppressed their feelings, thinking their lesbian feelings would disappear in the face of heterosexual experience. When the realization of their lesbianism finally came, many married lesbians chose to get a divorce, although others (especially those with children) chose to remain married (not necessarily telling their husbands the true situation).

For any lesbian the fear of being "found out" and the danger of being fired makes it more difficult to find a job, keep it, and relate to her fellow workers than it would be for heterosexual women.

The restrictions on women in the labor force are supposed to be due to a woman's "physical weaknesses," especially in connection with her reproductive role. There are also social forces that prevent women from taking the same productive role as men. Such social coercion acts on the lesbian as on other women. In fact, the status of the lesbian (and in some ways that of male homosexuals) demonstrates the importance of social weakness as compared to physical weakness. By physical weakness, we mean the idea that women are actually physically incapable of

performing the same tasks as men; by social weakness we mean that social forces rather than physical incapability prevent women from taking the same productive role as men. The lesbian, since she doesn't necessarily play the same reproductive role as most heterosexual women, is still treated as if she had the "physical weaknesses" of pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, etc. And so her oppression on the job must be due to social weaknesses or expectations. We can conclude that it is the ideology of the reproductive role and of the physical status of women, not the reality of women's lives which is the cause of women's oppression in this area. Social rather than physical factors determine women's status in the labor force.

REPRODUCTION AND SOCIALIZATION

The other side of woman's minor role in the labor force (in the ideology of women's work, although in fact it's not minor) is her central role in the family. The combination of sexuality, reproduction and socialization make up that role, but each has a separate relationship to the lesbian. Mitchell, in discussing reproduction, says: "As long as reproduction remained a natural phenomenon, of course, women were effectively doomed to social exploitation. In any sense, they were not 'masters' of a large part of their lives. They had no choice as to whether or how often to give birth to children (apart from precarious means of contraception and repeated dangerous abortions); their existence was essentially subject to biological processes outside their control" (p. 107). This has changed quite a bit lately for many women, with birth control and abortion becoming more available. But these methods are not always reliable and are still not available to everyone, so control over reproduction is still an issue for most heterosexual women. Yet many lesbians have been able to choose whether to have children and so have control over the reproductive aspects of their lives. Lesbian mothers are usually women who had heterosexual relationships (usually marriage) early in life which resulted in children, or women who chose deliberately to have children and to raise them with the lesbian lover, and sought out a brief heterosexual relationship for this purpose only.

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The lesbian's very existence demonstrates the division between sexuality and reproduction. Mitchell goes on to say that "the fact of overwhelming importance is that easily available contraception threatens to dissociate sexual from reproductive experience -- which all contemporary ideology tried to make inseparable, as the raison d'etre of the family." (p. 108) The threat of lesbianism, like contraception, is in showing that sexual experience doesn't have to result in child bearing and rearing.



The relationship of lesbians to women's role as socializers of children also points out inconsistencies in the idea of "woman's place." Most lesbians, except married lesbians, do not raise children in the context of the nuclear family. Either they do not have children, or they raise them alone, with a lesbian lover, or in a group situation. Changes in the family and living arrangements are becoming more common for women in general, also showing alternatives to the traditional nuclear family.

Institutions of socialization (schools, for example) exclude or degrade gay people. Although there are many gay people working as teachers, nurses, and so on, they usually must be dishonest about their sexuality for fear of being fired.

Among children and the adults who take care of them, popular images of gay people are used as negative role models. "Boys" and "girls" are called tomboys and "effeminate" boys are called sissies. Both of these expressions call up the image of "masculine" lesbians and "effeminate" male homosexuals.* Some of this imagery comes from gay adults, but since they are unable to be open and honest about it, they reinforce the negative attitudes among children towards gay people.

SEXUALITY

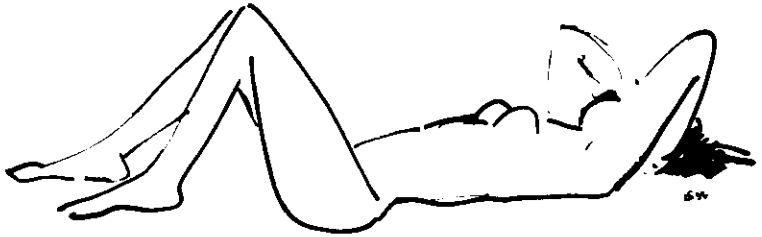
Finally we turn to sexuality, where it would seem we would find the focus of lesbian oppression. Once again, the lesbian faces some of the same type of exploitation as straight women. Though usually outside of heterosexual relationships, she still has the female status of sexual object. She too is seen as the potential property of men.

Lesbianism can also shed some light on the tension that exists between the ideas of love and marriage. As Mitchell notes, "The two have been officially harmonized, but the tension between them has never been abolished. There is a formal contradiction between the voluntary contractual character of "Marriage" and the spontaneous uncontrollable character of "love"--the passion that is celebrated precisely for its involuntary force." (p. 114)

She goes on to state that "obviously the main breach in the traditional value-pattern has, so far, been the increase in premarital sexual experience. This is now virtually legitimized in contemporary society. But its implications are explosive for the ideological conception of marriage that dominated this society;

* Concerning these words: it is interesting that tomboy has a much more restricted meaning, both among children and adults, than sissy. Tomboy only means a young girl with boyish mannerisms. It is not used for adult women or even teenagers, who are more likely to be labeled "dykes." Sissy, however, is used among children to mean coward. In this sense it is applied to girls as well. Among adults, sissy means effeminate male homosexual.

that it is an exclusive and permanent bond." What Mitchell fails to consider is that marriage is not only exclusive and permanent, but heterosexual. In order to fulfill its child-bearing and rearing functions, the present "model" family has to be limited to heterosexual relationships. The main breach with this has been homosexuality.



Marriage is still held up as the ideal place for sexuality (pre-marital sex is pre-marital, with marriage the ultimate goal). The nature of both heterosexual and homosexual relationships is affected by this. Marriage is an exclusive and permanent contract and, as the model for human relationships, condemns any variations (homosexuality, heterosexual "affairs etc.). Since homosexual relationships are outside the marriage contract and not socially or legally recognized, they are often forced to be the things society condemns - "undependable", "promiscuous". It's very difficult for homosexual relationships to survive in society, and both homosexual and heterosexual relationships suffer from the restrictions of marriage. The implications of lesbianism for our society's idea of marriage are more explosive even than those of premarital sex because such relationships have demonstrated the gap between spontaneous love and the legalized contract.

SUMMARY OF THEORY

Lesbian oppression is necessary for the continuance of the present structure of society. The lesbian provides a threefold threat to the family. Her sexuality shows that love and marriage are not necessary complements, and that sexuality can not be subsumed under a voluntary permanent contract, marriage.

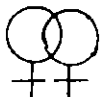
Further, by her unwillingness to become the property of a male she undermines the exclusiveness (and naturally the heterosexuality) of the marriage contract. By her ability to opt out of traditional child rearing patterns she shows that socialization is not necessarily tied to the nuclear family, and that women are not born to be mothers. By her opportunity to choose her reproductive role, she weakens the foundation of the family ideology and demonstrates the divisions within it. Because of the nature of her relationship to the family structure, she also threatens to expose the social coercion necessary for determining women's position in the labor force. In order for this society to continue functioning in the same way, the lesbian must be oppressed since admission of her existence as a natural phenomena, as an alternative, would expose the contradictions between the ideology of women's role and the reality of women's lives.



Finally we wish to look at the relationship between the oppression of male homosexuals, lesbians, and other women. A quick review shows that the situation is quite different, as reflected in the treatment of the two gay groups by society. The male homosexual is aggressively attacked, while the lesbian is more likely to be ignored. This is partly due to the higher status given to men. Male homosexuals are an affront to this status by trying to act like lower status women and therefore are subject to abuse.

But lesbians are "uppity women" whose actions are unimportant and are treated as isolated cases when it is necessary to be aware of them at all. On a deeper level this ignoring of lesbianism is actually important to the ideological framework of socialism. While both male homosexuality and lesbianism threaten the idea of a voluntary heterosexual marriage contract as the end-all and be-all of sexuality, it is the lesbian who exposes the distinction between women's three roles in the family. Acknowledgement of the possibility that women were not subject to reproductive forces outside their control, and that women could choose whether and when to have children would have weakened the bond between reproduction and sexuality, and the ideological basis of the family. The oppression of the lesbian is closely tied to that of heterosexual women, since society needs to oppress the lesbian in order to maintain the ideological basis for women's oppression.

Although this is but a brief introduction to a socialist-feminist analysis of lesbian oppression, we can conclude that any approach to the subject which focuses on only one aspect of that oppression is incomplete. Change in just one area is inadequate, for that particular improvement in women's condition can be offset by societal reinforcement in other areas. Our struggles must recognize the necessity of understanding the connections between the different parts of women's oppression and also how that oppression is connected to the oppression of lesbians.



TOWARDS GAY LIBERATION: HOW WOMEN'S LIBERATION CAN RELATE TO GAY ISSUES

The Chicago Women's Liberation Union operates with a three part strategy of service, education and direct action. At the present time, educational and service programs are perhaps the easiest to relate to gay oppression, and direct action struggles more difficult.

The main methods of education and outreach are the Liberation School for Women, WOMANKIND (monthly newspaper), the Speaker's Bureau, and literature. We should aim for the inclusion of discussion of gay issues wherever it's appropriate, for example, in "Women and Their Bodies" courses in Liberation School, or in speeches we give on the nature of women's oppression. There should be a reappraisal of heterosexual assumptions in more general situations, such as WOMANKIND articles. We must begin to consider what is the best approach to outreach situations and develop a good selection of outreach literature concerning lesbians.

The major service programs at the present time are the Abortion Counselling Service, the Health Project, and the Legal Clinic. Abortion counselling is clearly oriented towards heterosexual experience and cannot be evaluated on any criteria of gay consciousness. The health project is doing pregnancy testing (which also has a heterosexual bias), but it has more potential than abortion counselling to expand into areas of more concern to lesbians, such as VD testing and general gynecological exams and referrals. The legal clinic also could take lesbian rights cases.

Trying to develop a direct action strategy around gay issues is more difficult, because the situation of gay people is different from that of most other oppressed peoples. As Abbott and Love point out in Stepho Was a Right-On Woman, black activists know that there are some Afro-Americans passing for white, but the black liberation movement doesn't consider these people as its primary constituency. The gay liberation movement, on the other hand, sees as a major part of its constituency people who are passing for straight (at least part of the time). This makes it considerably harder to organize the gay movement, particularly around direct action struggles, because there are people who might feel free to attend a lesbian rap group or a gay dance, but who dare not become involved in a public demonstration for fear of being exposed, losing their job, etc. For this reason, it is crucial that struggles for gay rights should include organizations which are not identified as gay groups, such as women's liberation or civil liberties groups, so that all people can become involved in the struggle without having to declare themselves gay or straight. This does not mean that we do not support the right of lesbians to form separate groups from the predominantly straight women's liberation groups. Separate organizations have been important to the black and women's movements, and are necessary to build leadership from the constituency of the movement (black, women, gay, etc.) and to direct that movement.



Sisterhood Feels Good!



Chicago Women's Liberation Union
852 W. Belmont Ave.
Chicago Illinois 60657
(312) 348-4300

Constitution of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union

Article I. Name

The name of this organization is the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWL.U).

Article II. Principles

Section 1. The struggle for women's liberation is a revolutionary struggle.

Section 2. Women's liberation is essential to the liberation of all oppressed people.

Section 3. Women's liberation will not be achieved until all people are free.

Section 4. We will struggle for the liberation of women and against sexism in all sections of society. Included in this struggle is the struggle for the right of sexual self-determination for all people and for the liberation of all homosexuals, especially lesbians.

Section 5. We will struggle against racism, imperialism, and capitalism, and dedicate ourselves to developing a consciousness of their effect on women.

Section 6. We are dedicated to a democratic organization and understand a way to insure democracy is through full exchange of information and ideas, full political debate, and through the unity of theory and practice.

Section 7. We are committed to building a movement that embodies within it the humane values of the society for which we are fighting. To win this struggle, we must resist exploitative, manipulative, and intolerant attitudes in ourselves. We need to be supportive of each other, to have enthusiasm for change in ourselves and in society and faith that people have unending energy and ability to change.

Article III. Membership

Section 1. The CWLU is a membership organization of women in the Chicago area who adhere to the statement of political principles of the organization.

Section 2. Each member belongs to either a work group or a chapter. The staff works to help find or organize work groups and/or chapters.

Section 3. Each member will pay dues of \$15 per year in all cases possible. Members able to pledge more are urged to do so.

Section 4. Each member receives the newsletter and the newspaper, WOMANKIND.

Section 5. We envision an organization in which all women relate to the Union through chapters or committees. However, at this point in time, there are some women who are committed to the Union but who are not able to be part of an ongoing small group (chapter). These women could be at-large members who would a) pay dues of \$15 per year where possible, b) participate in the Speaker's Bureau, c) work in the office or contribute work to a committee or the newsletter. They would receive the internal newsletter and WOMANKIND and come to city-wide meetings and steering committee meetings, but not vote.

Article IV. Steering Committee

Section 1. The Steering Committee will be made up of one representative from every chapter and work group. The representatives will be selected by and responsible to their chapters and work groups. Non-voting members will be the staff and the Steering Committee co-chairs.

Article IV.

Section 2. The Steering Committee will meet at least once every month and will recommend city-wide activities which should be supported and organized by the entire organization. The Steering Committee meetings are open to any member to observe, participate in, but not to vote.

Section 3. The Steering Committee is to remain aware of and give direction to the development of the organization as a whole. All organizational decisions are made by Steering Committee. Steering Committee has ultimate responsibility for Union funds, for Speaker's Bureau, newsletter and staff.

Section 4. The Steering Committee publishes its minutes in the newsletter.

Section 5. Upon written petition of 10% of the membership as defined above, any Steering Committee decision may be taken to the chapters and work groups for a vote. The vote is tallied at the soonest possible Steering Committee meeting and the result is announced in the next newsletter.

Section 6. Steering Committee representatives should serve six to nine month terms under an agreed-upon rotation schedule.

Section 7. Steering Committee has responsibility for regular, critical discussions of CWLU program. Steering Committee has responsibility for policy making in those areas that affect the organization as a whole or involve cooperation among groups for a common end.

Section 8. Steering Committee shall have two co-chairs, with the following responsibility and qualifications:

- a. one of the two shall be some-one who is or has been involved in outreach work.
- b. the two co-chairs shall have varied political experience.
- c. the two co-chairs shall make sure that the staff gets paid on a regular basis.
- d. the two co-chairs shall have responsibility for
 - (1) setting up both short- and long-term agenda for Steering Committee
 - (2) getting necessary information to Steering Committee and to chapters and work groups so that good discussions can be held
 - (3) acting as spokeswomen for CWLU
 - (4) deciding on emergency meetings of Steering Committee
 - (5) visiting new groups and integrating them into the UNION.
- e. the two co-chairs shall be accountable to Steering Committee in, at least, the following ways:
 - (1) having an open agenda
 - (2) having monthly or bi-monthly reviews of chairs written into the agenda
 - (3) having "criticism-self-criticism" at the end of each meeting
- f. the term of the co-chairs shall be one year the first term, and re-evaluation shall be made at the annual conference.

Article V. Chapters and Work Groups

Section 1. Any group of five or more members can constitute themselves a chapter of CWLU. Chapters shall have a autonomy in action and policy as long as they uphold the statement of organizational principles when using the name of CWLU.

Section 2. Chapters have one steady voting representative on the Steering Committee and may send additional representatives on a rotating non-voting basis.

Section 3. Chapters participate in Speakers Bureau.

Article V.

Section 4. Chapters contribute to the financial support of the CWLU in addition to the dues of individual members.

Section 5. Chapters are to contribute to the routine maintenance work of the Union on a regular rotating basis.

Section 6. Each chapter is responsible for assuming one of the following tasks of their choosing:

- a. staff for office and centers
- b. newsletter
- c. developing literature (introductory and political education)
- d. developing alternative ways to include women new to CWLU
- e. ongoing information exchange among chapters

Section 7. Work groups have a core of five members as defined above and as many other other women as the project involves. Members are encouraged to belong to chapters.

Section 8. Work groups have one steady representative on Steering Committee who is a Union member and who serves for a term of six months.

Section 9. Representatives to the Steering Committee may not overlap with chapter representatives.

Section 10. Work groups undertaking projects to be in the name of and with organizational support of the Union present their plan to the Steering Committee for discussion. Approval of the Steering Committee allows the work group to have one voting member on Steering Committee and to use the newsletter for the project.

Section 11. Work groups are expected to serve the Speaker's Bureau as resource people on specific topics related to their work. Members have the option to participate in the Speaker's Bureau for general introductory talks.

Section 12. Work groups have no group dues responsibility.

Section 13. Work groups are expected to urge their members and other women to participate in citywide functions such as demonstrations and benefits.

Section 14. Work groups are not required to contribute to the routine maintenance work of the Union.

Section 15. The CWLU shall focus its program on a) institutional struggles, b) extending present constituency, c) making internal structure more responsive to the needs of women who want to join the organization.

Section 16. The organization newspaper, WOMANKIND, shall be evaluated by Steering Committee monthly. Each member shall be responsible for selling five copies of it per month or ten subscriptions per year. Each member shall receive a subscription to WOMANKIND.

Section 17. There shall be some special work groups responsible to Steering Committee:

- a. An organizing committee which shall work with office staff to integrate new women into the CWLU.
- b. A national outreach group which will coordinate and plan national communication, regional conferences, and national outreach literature.

Article VI. Meetings and Conferences

Section 1. There shall be an annual membership conference to discuss CWLU program and structure which shall be planned by Steering Committee or a subcommittee thereof.

Section 2. There shall be two program meetings each year aside from the conference to discuss program.

Section 3. There shall be monthly city-wide meetings which shall serve as outreach meetings (in conjunction with the Connecting Link) and as internal education meetings.

Article VII. Staff

Section 1. There shall be four paid staff for the CWLU. When necessary staff shall obtain childcare allowance as well as salary.

Section 2. Staff members are responsible to Steering Committee and attend Steering Committee meetings on a non-voting basis. They shall not simultaneously be delegates to Steering Committee. They shall be chosen by Steering Committee to serve as staff for one year.

Section 3. Staff shall be selected from among the membership of the CWLU. They shall be selected on a rotating basis so that not all staff are chosen at the same time.

Section 4. Staff shall be responsible for maintaining the office and shall set up a work rotation so that each staff member works with the others on a regular basis. They shall be collectively responsible for maintenance of the newsletter and communication between office and work groups, chapters and Steering Committee.

Section 5. Each staff member shall have primary responsibility for one of the following areas: a) Speaker's Bureau, b) National Outreach, c) Organizing, d) Fundraising.

Section 6. Staff shall have responsibility for preparing a yearly budget in conjunction with the Steering Committee. Staff shall maintain financial records for the CWLU, including records of dues paid, pledges, etc.

W O M E N



NEED INFORMATION ON LEGAL, MEDICAL, HELP ?

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CHICAGO WOMEN'S LIBERATION UNION

852 W. BELMONT

LIBERATION SCHOOL FOR WOMEN



SPRING 1973

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, people are taught only the skills they need to know in order to do their jobs. Education is used simply to create citizens who will be useful to those in power. People are not taught to understand how the entire society operates or how society could be changed.

For most women, this means that education only fits us for such roles as housewife and mother, follower and listener, secretary and unskilled worker, sex object and emotional comforter. We are taught only the skills and information necessary for us to serve men. Women are almost never given the information which would allow us to control our own lives, change society or become independent. We rarely learn the history of struggles in the past for women's rights. We are almost never taught how a corporation functions, what inflation is, why America is at war, how a car works or about our own bodies. This lack of knowledge not only makes women feel inferior but keeps us passive and dependent upon males for guidance.

The LIBERATION SCHOOL FOR WOMEN is a step toward challenging women's oppression. Through this school we learn about ourselves, our histories, our roles in society, our strengths and our intellectual capabilities.

The Liberation School is a project of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, 852 W. Belmont, Chicago, Ill., 60657, (348-4300). Classes meet weekly for six to eight weeks, and are open to any woman who registers and who gives 4.00 per class, if possible. To register in advance for a class, mail your name, address and phone number with the classes you wish to take to Liberation School at the address above. You may also register at our orientation, where you can learn about the Union, meet and talk with convenors and other women taking classes. Entertainment too!!



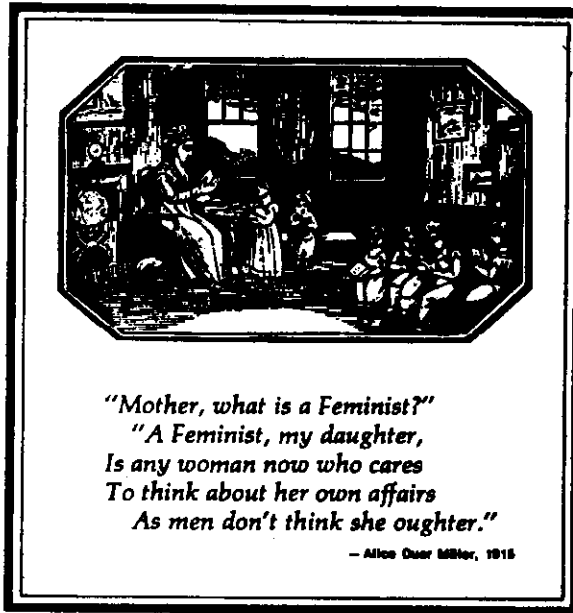
**ORIENTATION
FEB. 19, MONDAY
7-9 pm**

**2nd UNITARIAN
CHURCH
656 W. BARRY**

INTRODUCTORY READINGS

This course consists of reading and talking about our feeling, experiences, and ideas as women. We will discuss our relationships, our bodies, our work, and our sexuality as it has been defined as well as our questions about these pre-determined roles. We hope to offer support to women who are entering the women's movement as well as the resources available to enable them to make their own choices about such a commitment.

Mary Gaddis-935-2885



READINGS IN FEMINISM

We will be discussing De Beauvoir's The Second Sex and Herschberger's Adam's Rib with emphasis on their analyses of modern woman's life. Comparison readings from other sources will also be used. People should, if possible, read De Beauvoir beforehand. This class will meet at the Sister Center, United Church of Rogers Park, 1545 W. Morse, on Tuesday evenings. The convenors are: Jan Hay, 764-5009 and Kathy Wilcox 338-0542.



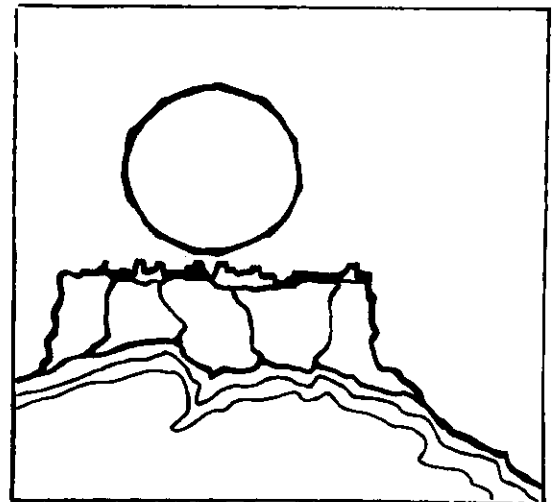
PRESCHOOLERS

A look at how children are shaped at home, preschool, and day care; what their and our needs are, and how to meet them; and how to deal with differences between our values and those of others. We will look at assumptions of traditional theories and of the women's movement. This class will meet Mondays evenings on the south side. Contact convenors for location. Faye Giesel, 375-6352, Caroline Jenkins, 734-7617, or Robin Kauffman, 288-2934 (evenings).

WOMEN IN JUDAISM

In Judaism, as in all patriarchal cultures, women have never been full-fledged participants. The purpose of this course is to explore just what has been the role of women as defined in Judaism, historically, religiously and culturally, to the end of determining whether there are any positive models for us as Jewish women to look to today, or whether we must develop these. This class will meet Weds. evenings at Barry Church. Convenors:

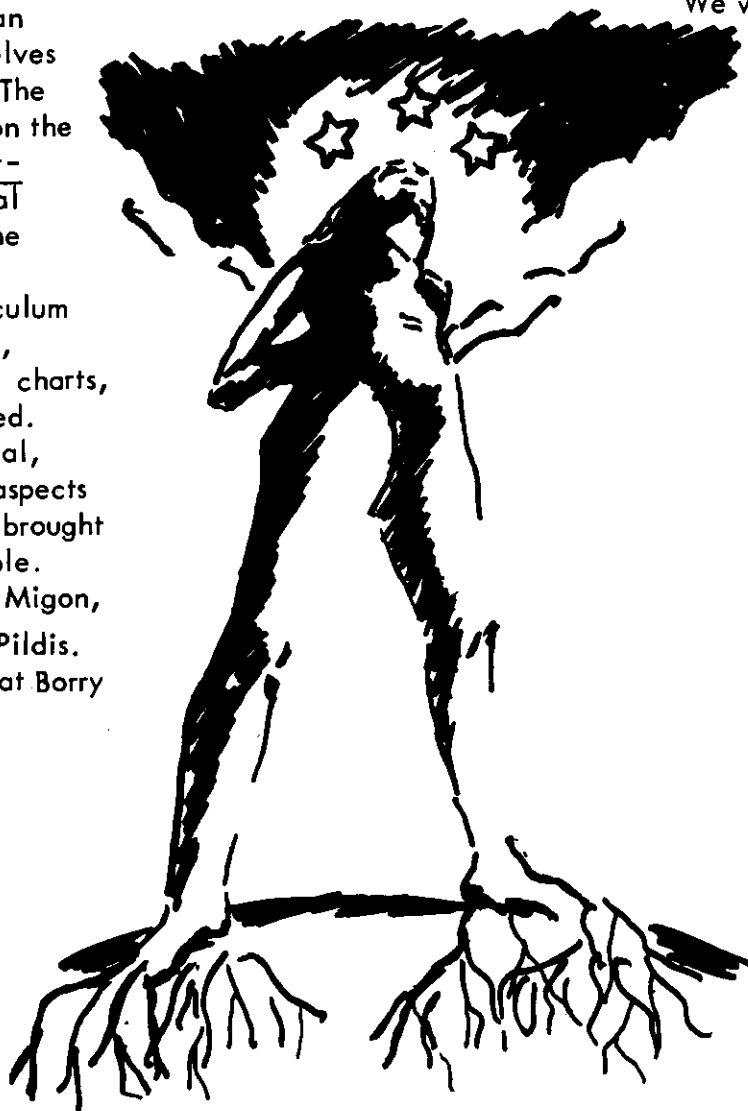
Maralee Gordon-929-4883
Tryna Goldsmith-947-0204



Women And Their Bodies

The purpose of this course is to enable us, as women, to gain greater control over our lives through understanding "our bodies and our selves"; and to help women learn as much as possible about their physical beings and how we do and can function within ourselves and as social beings. The course will be based on the book Our Bodies, Our-Selves, and additional material brought by the convenor. Technical apparatus such as speculum used in vaginal exams, types of birth control, charts, etc., will be exhibited. Physical, psychological, technical and social aspects of each topic will be brought out as much as possible.

Convenor: Alexandra Migon, 281-5799 and Judy Pildis. This class will meet at Barry Church.



Politics of Sanity

This course will analyze the mental health structures of our society and how they are oppressive to people, particularly women. We want to study what determines what is "healthy", what causes people to have difficulty functioning, and the treatment of people in mental institutions. Readings will include Women and Madness by Chesler, Manufacture of Madness by Szosz, and various articles. Women should have a strong commitment to the movement, and an interest in psychology and power relations. The purpose of the course is to develop material on mental health for the women's movement, and people should be prepared to commit themselves to helping research and write article(s). To register, you must call one of the convenors: Kim Krsukop-525-2050 or Karen Petzing - 327-1307 and 275-4350. This class will meet Wednesdays at Barry Church.

Food Consciousness

This course is about diet and change. Women are looking for alternatives to the chemically treated, often non-nutritive, food being served up in American grocery stores and restaurants. We will examine good nutrition, looking at diets in other countries with special emphasis on alternative sources of protein. One night we will talk about food under capitalism and learn about government regulations in this country and chemicals allowed in our foods. We hope to spend some evenings eating good, healthy food we've prepared and explore the possibilities of collective buying (food co-ops) that can extend beyond the school session. The first class will meet Wednesday at Barry Church. Convenors: Jeri Riddle, 864-5192 and Eunice Formilant 248-9339.

NO MORE



Karate

A class for developing confidence and control of your body as well as an opportunity to develop a feeling of solidarity with other women.

TIME: Mondays and Wednesdays 7:30-9.00 p.m.

PLACE: Alternatives, 5866 N. Broadway

Convenor: Lynda Antman, 274-4016

Prepared Childbirth

In this course we will introduce the Lamaze method and practice relaxation, body building and breathing technique. We will discuss the history of childbirth, home and hospital deliveries, progressive advances in maternal care, and general baby care. Nonpregnant women are invited to attend. For time and location contact the convenors: North Side, Pat Duffy, 472-9474 and South Side, Pat McGauley. 737-4050

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

This is a study group for women in the CWLU who are familiar with Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and interested in considering its application to our work. The class will meet Monday evenings at Barry Church. Convenors: Stephenie Michele, 549-5858 and Thetis Cromie, 947-8953.



GODESSES AND AMAZONS the history we never hear

This course discusses ancient matriarchal societies and feminine godhead, and how later mythology and the modern state reinterpreted those. Slide shows will be included. The class will meet Thursday evenings at Barry Church. Convenors: Linda Sweeney, 549-3741 and Susie Rosenberg, 472-1543.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Basic techniques of photography, including film developing and printing, types of film, uses of light, composition, cropping, what makes a good picture, elimination of the camera mystique. Bring camera, preferably 35 mm. Time and place to be decided (far north side). Contact convenor, Barbara Van Cleve, 328-7219.



HISTORY OF THE CHICAGO WOMEN'S LIBERATION UNION

The purpose of this course is to help women just getting active in the CWLU to get to know the organization and talk about events like the founding Palatine conference and the April, 1971, membership conference, and what the implications of these events have been for us. The course is intended for women who have some commitment to the CWLU and need a group to find their way around in, and as a place where people can get a political orientation toward the Union. People should contact the convenors beforehand: Eva Thorpe, Chris Riddiough, 528-3626, Betsy Vasquez, 338-2858, or Judy Sayad, 935-1123. The class will be held in two places: at the CWLU office at 852 W. Belmont on Tuesday evenings, and at the Evanston Women's Center on Wednesday evenings.

AUTO MECHANICS FOR VOLKSWAGONS

This class will tentatively be held in the spring, beginning sometime in April. Contact Rue Wallace, 728-2089, at that time for information. There is a waiting list for this class. If you are interested in convening a course in mechanics for women, contact Rue, or call Barbara Peart at 935-9628 or Sarah Edeiken at 935-9138.

SELF DEFENSE AT THE WORK PLACE

"Self Defense at the Work Place" will be a series of three classes and three panels dealing with how to conduct a fight for your rights at work. Topics will include day-to-day issues, negotiations, and government intervention. Panelists will include women with direct experience to share.

Conveners: Corol R. 275-1481 Ditzza, 649-9575 and Lyda C. 472-5014. This course will begin the first week in March, on Sunday afternons. Contact the convenors for location and further details.



WOMANKIND WORKSHOP

This two-day workshop, given by the WOMANKIND work group, emphasizes practical skills in doing lay-out for leaflets, posters, and similar things used in work projects. Some basic information about printing processes will be included, as well as experience in design and lay-out. This workshop would be most useful for women involved in on-going projects. DATES: Sunday, March 4 and 11. TIME: 1-5 p.m. Limited to 15 PLACE: CWLU Office, 852 W. Belmont Contacts: Emily Osborn, 477-9771 and Margaret Schmid, 561-5115 (evenings).

MARXISM STUDY GROUP



A study group for women interested in developing and convening an introductory Marxism course to be offered on a regular basis through the L. S. beginning in the summer, '73, session. The first half of the study group will concentrate on developing a syllabus and selecting readings for the proposed course; then we will discuss possible supplementary courses and the role of convenors. This class will meet at Barry Church. Convenors: Susie Rosenberg, 472-1543 and Betsy . Either Mon. or Wed. eves.



C.W.L.U.
852 W. Belmont
Chicago, Ill. 60657

CHINA FORUM

What is happening in People's China today?
What kind of life do women have there?
Betsy Vasquez of the CWLU, who just spent four weeks in China as a member of a women's delegation, will discuss what she learned in China, emphasizing the situation of women. Her talk, accompanied by slides, will take place Sunday, March 18, 7:30 p.m. at Second Unitarian Church, 656 W. Barry. Everyone welcome.



WOMEN AND IMPERIALISM STUDY GROUP

In this study group we will explore various aspects of imperialism such as imperialist wars, internal welfare, missionary activity, and how they affect women and family structure. In addition, we will examine the role of women in anti-imperialist struggles. We hope to compile a bibliography of material on women and imperialism and to work toward compilation of our collective research efforts. Contact convenors: Sarah Edeiken, 935-9138 and Carole Collins.

THE CHICAGO WOMENS LIBERATION UNION.....

its program, history and political outlook

by Vivian Rothstein
Naomi Weisstein

The womens liberation movement in Chicago is in very good shape. This is surprising, since in many places it appears to be in critical condition. As an organization (the Chicago Womens Liberation Union) we have learned certain things from our work in Chicago and have ideas about why we have been relatively successful. We think it is important for women around the country to begin to understand what has or has not happened to our movement in different places so we can figure out how to make it strong, stable and lasting. In what follows we will try to characterize the Chicago Womens Union and discuss its health, its illness and its recent history.

The CWLU can be characterized in the following five ways:

- 1) The Womens Union is a radical, citywide, womens liberation organization which is more than merely an umbrella of various projects. The Union has its own decision making mechanisms, its own staff, a defined membership, a broad but definite politics, and a developing program.
- 2) Sectarianism in Chicago is not heavy.
- 3) There are a large number of serious, committed, nearly full-time organizers who see womens organizing as their highest priority.
- 4) There are a number of ongoing programs which have developed over the last three years which are reaching large numbers of previously inactive women.
- 5) The movement is not university-based; there is a surprising amount of diversity in the life situations of women in the Chicago womens movement.

Consider some of these in more detail:

1) The CWLU -- The Chicago Womens Liberation Union is an explicitly radical, anti-capitalist, feminist, city-wide organization committed to building an autonomous, multi-issue womens liberation movement. There are from 40-50 highly committed women who form the core of our organization, about 150 women who are somewhat active on a regular basis in Union program, and 350 dues paying members. Leadership abilities -- by which we mean a lack of intimidation and an assertiveness about what needs to be done, and a commitment and responsibility toward doing it -- have been developing throughout the CWLU membership. In particular, a large number of women participate or have participated in the steering committee -- the decision making body of the Union.

The CWLU organizational structure has enabled us to survive slack periods when work seems futile and morale is low; it has enabled us to feel that our work has cumulative effect, and it has enabled us to broaden our constituencies in ways that single-issue, university-based groups, and small-group federations could not have. We feel that the Union is probably the single most important reason why the Chicago womens movement is in good shape, and that the other reasons below, in some ways follow from and/or depend on the existence and activity of this structure.

For instance,

2) There are a number of ongoing programs in Chicago right now, most of which have strong ties to CWLU. What this means is that effort on any one program is seen in most cases as cumulating; that is, as adding to the development of the Union and therefore, to the development of womens liberation in Chicago. This means that we have something of a common political history and experience to draw on. Ongoing programs include:

The LIBERATION SCHOOL FOR WOMEN which has three six-week sessions a year of about 20 classes each. Enrollment reached 200 this summer and included many women who had never been politically active before taking a class. The classes include womens studies, political study, health, skills and extension courses located in communities around the city. The breadth of course in the Liberation School reflects our vision of how we are to make the revolution and what world we want to see; that is, we must begin to build for ourselves and for all women what we want to see in a revolutionary society, as well as provide the opportunity for women to learn what we must know if we are to win that society. In addition, the School provides a relatively painless way for previously inactive women to become active in womens liberation. They don't have to leave their husbands to matriculate. (Sometimes it appears to women that that is just about what they have to do to join womens liberation.)

WOMANKIND, a montly newspaper directed to women who are not in womens liberation. Its aim is to concern itself with a variety of news which will interest different groups of women. Although the staff is CWLU-based, it is explicitly not an internal organ of the womens movement.

WOMEN DARE -- Direct Action for Rights in Employment -- a work project composed of CWLU activists and working women who joined because they were fed up with working conditions for women. The group is working to develop direct action campaigns around work-related issues. Its first focus was to pressure the city government to equalize the pay between male and female janitors who work at City Hall. DARE's activities also included testifying at City Council budget hearings, demonstrating outside City Hall, and running classes on womens economic oppression.

The LEGAL CLINIC which involves women law students, para-legal workers and lawyers in providing information and a referral service to women with a variety of legal problems. The clinic meets regularly one evening a week and maintains a file of low cost legal services and female lawyers. The clinic serves women who are not reached by other womens liberation activities and is an important avenue of involvement for women in the legal profession.

A WOMENS GRAPHICS COLLECTIVE produces womens posters and greeting cards and provides a context in which women who see graphic art as the center of their lives can function and create. It is self-supporting and has a catalogue of over 15 graphics available.

The CHICAGO WOMENS LIBERATION ROCK BAND has been performing now for over two years. The band wants to liberate rock from the sexist evil which pervades it; to produce beautiful music; to celebrate with its sisters and to make real the vision of womens liberation; and eventually, to reach every 14 year old girl in the city of Chicago and in the country with its vision, its music and its politics (assuming that every 14 year old person in this country lists to rock). There is a sister band in New Haven. The two bands are in constant communication, and recently produced a record album together, MOUNTAIN MOVING DAY. The band feels, especially through its collective efforts with New Haven, that they are involved in the process of creating a revolutionary womens culture.

The RAPE PROJECT maintains a rape hot line which offers information and support for rape victims. Located on the far north side of Chicago, the project has spent time researching the medical and legal rights of rape victims and hopes to apply political pressure to remove the burden of guilt from the victim and place it on the sexist attitudes and institutions in our society.

3) The Chicago Womens Liberation Union is, by and large, not sectarian. With the exception of the standard Socialist Workers' Party versus autonomous womens movement fight (described in more detail below) denunciation of our sisters has been kept to a fairly inaudible mumb.e The revealed-truth dividers that have come up elsewhere -- straight/gay, male-identified/female-identified, feminist/socialist -- have come up in Chicago but they have not led to any serious splits in our organization. This is not to say that we have a uniform movement by any means. What it does meanis that we have a

tolerant and moderate movement. We have gays, straights, celibates, women who are more male-identified and those who are more female-identified; women who consider themselves feminist-socialists and those who consider themselves socialist-feminists. We expect next year that a new division will arise; the year after, another. We also expect that these divisions will not have to lead to splits any more than our current divisions do.* In other words, we live with all of us, not only because we have to if we are to survive, but because we believe in building a pluralist movement which understands that differences are inevitable and desirable. The work women do, and the diversity of skills and imagination that they bring to this work is more important than whether they (or we) have the "correct" political analysis and/or life-style.

We can think of two main reasons why we have avoided extreme sectarianism. The first has to do with CWLU. It was founded in the midst of a sectarian storm, and it is possible that its initial response to that sectarianism laid the groundwork for handling later forms. Second, we think that our lack of sectarianism has also to do with the fact that the Chicago women's movement, although having started early, was never in the vanguard in terms of ideas, situations, or life-styles. In particular, the politics of women active in CWLU have remained fairly consistent since it began. There have been no theoretical breakthroughs from Chicago; we didn't figure out very early about sexism, about violence towards women, about nuclear families, and so forth, until very late. But when these breakthroughs finally arrived in Chicago, they did not do so in the form of ultimatums.

As we have remarked, many of the characteristics discussed above follow from the presence of CWLU. We have provided structures and programs -- like the Liberation School and DARE -- which are medium range things, in the sense that one doesn't have to have impossible revolutionary credentials to participate. None of this means that we hide our politics; but all of it means that we are able to keep broadening, rather than narrowing, our base since the criteria for participation allows for entrance, development and choice. Finally, our understanding that people are at different places and that that fact adds to, rather than subtracts from, our movement, has helped us suppress our own individual sectarianism.

Since, as we have pointed out, we think that the presence of the Womens Union is the most important factor in the relative health of the Chicago womens liberation movement, we would like to describe its history. It started at a time when the organized mixed white left had just hit the fan (i.e. the collapse of SDS and SSOCC -- Southern Student Organizing Committee -- as relevant political organizations.). We felt that the womens movement in Chicago was in danger of being destroyed in the wake of factional convulsions. We also felt very strongly that we needed an autonomous womens movement that would work towards its idea of the revolution. In fact, even if the mixed white left hadn't started to go crazy at that particular time, we still needed an organization for these reasons:

* This is not to say that all women who are active in womens liberation in Chicago are members of CWLU. There are other independent groupings with which we have different relationships with varying degrees of mutual respect.

- 1) Access to the womens movement was pretty exclusive. It was very hard for new women to find womens liberation activities and become part of them. It was necessary to know a friend who knew a friend who was in a rap group in order to find out what was planned. With this kind of limited visibility we knew that we could never build a very large, diverse or strong movement.
- 2) Leadership was developing in the womens movement which was responsible to no one, or perhaps only to a small group. We wanted to have some way to develop democratic leadership -- that is leadership and spokeswomen who were part of a larger womens movement whom we could talk with, criticize, etc. In essence, we needed a democratic structure so that active women could have some say over womens liberation program, strategy, direction, etc.
- 3) There was no communication between existing womens groups, and there was little or no distribution of written articles, pamphlets, magazines.
- 4) Womens liberation was never represented politically in coalitions and mixed political events because we had no organization to represent us.
- 5) We needed program in order to build the womens movement. Because there was no centralized organization, it was very difficult, and often impossible to find women who were interested in getting new program ideas off the ground-- and there was virtually no place to discuss and criticize program ideas as well. And program, once developed, could not have a cumulative effect since communication of its success was limited.

In essence, we wanted womens liberation to become a political force with a significant base, the ability to act and organize, and with a strategy and program to win power. In order to do these things we realized that we would have to build an organization which made sense to a large number of women.

There are reasons why this particular emphasis developed in Chicago while other parts of the country focused more on the "small group" and consciousness raising as the major political thrust. It has to do with the population of Chicago and the kind of movement which the new left had built here prior to the womens movement. For one thing, Chicago has a relatively small University student population. As a result there are very few radical, counter-culture enclaves in the city. Chicago also has a relatively small left-liberal adult population. Given these conditions, radicals were left with the task of building a movement out of new local constituencies, often centering on community organizing efforts, or activities around small colleges and high schools.

The composition of the left was largely people who had experience with serious full time organizing in one movement project or another. It was out of this base of committed movement activists that womens liberation began to grow.

It is in the context of this background -- the mixed white left going crazy and the history of new left activity in Chicago -- that one can see the initiation of the CWLU. In the fall of 1969 a conference was called to organize an "independent, multi-issue, radical womens liberation organization." Our first conference turned out to be largely a debate among various sectarian groups on the left, and a defense of the right to form an independent womens organization. All politically active

women were invited. A number of political sects came to the conference intending to discourage the formation of an all-womens organization because it would be "inherently counter-revolutionary." Our response to these attacks, which was mild and fairly open, seems to have laid the basis for our response to sectarianism ever since. We were open to all women who wanted to work for an independent, radical, womens liberation movement and were eager to discuss the issues involved in anyone's politics. In other words, we wanted, and still believe in, a pluralist movement.

The outcome of the conference, besides much frustration, was a tentative set of political principles around which to build a womens organization. The principles have remained essentially unchanged since then (except for the addition of the principle on gay oppression at our 1972 conference). They are:

- The struggle for womens liberation is a revolutionary struggle. Womens liberation is essential to the liberation of all oppressed people.
- Womens liberation will not be achieved until all people are free.
- We will struggle for the liberation of women and against sexism in all sections of society. Included in this struggle is the struggle for the right of sexual self-determination for all people and for the liberation of all homosexuals, especially lesbians.
- We will struggle against racism, imperialism and capitalism and dedicate ourselves to developing a consciousness of their effect on women.
- We are dedicated to a democratic organization and understand a way to insure democracy is through full exchange of information and ideas, full political debate and through the unity of theory and practice.
- We are committed to building a movement that embodies within it the humane values of the society for which we are fighting. To win this struggle, we must resist exploitative, manipulative and intolerant attitudes in ourselves. We need to be supportive of each other, to have enthusiasm for change in ourselves and in society and faith that people have unending energy and ability to change.

After the conference a series of large meetings were held which struggled over an organizational structure and program for the Womens Union. The structure which was decided upon was a general chapter structure with a steering committee made up of one representative from every chapter and work project. Two women volunteered to be part time unpaid staff until the Union could afford to pay two women for this work (which happened the next year). CWLU now hires three part time staff workers and pays them \$60 a week each. The Union rented a small office and slowly set up the coordination center for our organization.

From the first conference to the present CWLU has gone through several important struggles and changes. All have added up to a collective attempt to more adequately define the type of organization we need by making membership definitions clearer (i.e. basing it on participation and financial support), trying to make a more democratic structure by developing new democratic forms to ensure participation and the expansion of leadership functions, and by developing outreach program.

Two particular events in the history of our organizational forms seem to have been crucial. One was a democratic speakers bureau policy and the other was a struggle with women from a Socialist Workers Party orientation, who argued for a somewhat undefined, non-structured, non-centralized organization.

The speakers bureau policy arose shortly after the CWLU was formed. It was the time when people were interested in getting a womens liberation spokeswoman on every talk show, church forum, and college campus in the country. When requests came to the Union we would at first suggest women representatives from our membership who volunteered to speak publicly. All this did, essentially, was reinforce the kind of elitism which had previously existed. By promoting women who already had the confidence in themselves as political speakers, a star system was developing. This policy was criticized, and a new speakers policy was suggested which still functions in our organization. The policy is that all women who are members should learn to speak about the womens movement. All speaking engagements are filled on a rotating basis. Each chapter has a turn to fill a request and must find a woman willing to do it. This has ensured that most women in our organization have spoken at least once about women-related issues, and it has ensured a more active, committed, self-confident membership. The speakers bureau was an example to us all of how we could develop "liberating structures." It was popular to say then in the womens movement, and still is today to some extent, that structures can only be oppressive. The speakers policy is an example of how this is not necessarily true and how, in fact, one can structure out elitism. It was the first innovation to really bring our organization into existence.

The second year of life of CWLU was composed to some extent of its defense. At that time, in different parts of the country, women who belonged to the Socialist Workers Party or who adhered to SWP politics, began to get active in different womens liberation activities. From what we understand, similar arguments were made by these women in different cities, which were essentially that most of the existing womens organizations were elitist, that all structures must be wide open to "all women," that the womens movement must focus exclusively on mass rallies and demonstrations and popular "mass issues", and that womens organizations should not try to take over the "Chicano, black or anti-war movements" but should stick to "womens issues" (i.e. abortion, day care, equal pay for equal work, etc.). Many of the criticisms of the womens movement which were raised were important, and a political struggle began. In Chicago we were able to debate these criticisms in a relatively open way and the results were very positive ones for the Union.

Through long meetings and a constant attempt to bring out the "real issues" involved, the majority position in the CWLU became that the SWP women were pressing for very nebulous, indistinct, "mass organizations" of women with little political definition and self-determination because they saw the political leadership for the womens liberation movement (and all left movements) coming from their party, the Socialist Workers Party. But for the majority of women, there was no party to which we belonged, and we were committed to building an independent womens organization with enough political sophistication and centralism to make the necessary political decisions, have the important political discussions, and

and develop the needed political strategy to build a successful womens movement. The result of the long struggle (which was a losing one for several womens organizations in other cities) was a heightened seriousness about the CWLU among a large number of women, the tightening of membership requirements (including participation in program, dues, as well as public speaking), heightened responsibilities for the steering committee, and a new energy and commitment to developing outreach program.

Of course there are many problems with our organizational structure. We have by no means overcome all traces of elitism, intimidation and cliquishness. Our structure never functions in as democratic a fashion as we always hope. Our chapters are often changing and representatives are often not responsible and consistent. And programmatically we have many of the problems common to womens liberation throughout the country -- we have developed virtually no "struggle oriented" programs which are designed to gain power over institutions which oppress women. Nevertheless we have a forum in which to constantly discuss, argue and debate these problems. We have an ongoing communication network to keep us all in touch and informed. We have a permanent womens liberation presence in the city of Chicago. And our organization continues to learn from its mistakes and to grow.

*Since this article was written, important changes have taken place in the Womens Union. Most notable is the growing consensus about the need for direct action program in the womens movement. This position is reflected in the Socialist Feminism paper which was written by a chapter of CWLU and adopted by the membership. Also, a sense of the importance of the Chicago experience has caused the Union to try to systematically spread information and contact womens groups through a National Outreach effort.