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Letter: Vicki Wengro-Betty Newcomb, February 1974

Vicki L. Wengrow

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Duval. Being a chairman of ...
February, 1974 Asking Exemption from the Revised Chapter Structural Plan
NATIONAL NOW BY-LAWS -- Our letter to them

Betty Newcomb, Chairperson, National By-Laws Committee,

I am writing to you on behalf of NOW, Jacksonville, concerning the revised Structural Plan. We are told in Judith's (Lonquist) explanation that the changes are meant to give chapters more flexibility and to ensure democratic principles. For us, they will do just the opposite. And we really need to know if there is any way we can get around implementing this plan to the letter--especially the provisions for secret ballot election of officers, including Task Force Coordinators.

As the enclosed correspondence between me and Wilma Scott Heide indicates, NOW Jacksonville, initially formed and was accepted as a chapter with a somewhat unorthodox modus operandi. We didn't want one person to be spokesperson for all, so we chose a number of persons to speak for us. This was acceptable to NOW, so long as we chose one person on paper, to enable continuity and easier communication with national NOW.

From our beginnings, in 1970, the Women's Movement in Jacksonville has been one unit, all feminists united. We have regularly scheduled Action Planning Meetings that any feminist can get input into (which is "democratic"); our "interest groups" very much correspond to NOW national Task Forces, and individual NOW members volunteer to receive the helpful materials NOW sends on the subjects. We make decisions together, sometimes as NOW; sometimes as the Jacksonville Women's Movement; sometimes as radical feminists; sometimes as Options, Inc. (our women's center), depending on which we think would be most effective. Concerning NOW, we make a special effort not to use NOW's name when we think our people want to do things that might compromise NOW's name and tax exempt status. Also, on issues NOW wants special attention given to, we make a special point of giving NOW the credit and publicity.

The important thing is that this way of functioning works for us. We thought perhaps the new structure was created for chapters having problems with individual personalities "unofficially" dominating chapter decision-making because of insufficient structure. Thus far we have been able to deal with this problem too, in ways that work for us.

We also feel (I've been instructed by our Action Planning Meeting to tell you) that secret ballots, hierarchal elections--while we can understand their advantages for efficiency--may permanently compromise the groups that use them. Secrecy, rigidity and hierarchy are characteristics of the conventional male values the Women's Movement, we feel, is trying to overcome, not copy. For NOW Jacksonville, adopting the structural plan, exactly as it is written, would be very destructive. We have never separated out NOW members for honors, only for convenience; we don't think it a good thing to reward people for having \$10 or for being the kind of person who joins a revolution by paying a fee. If we begin to separate out NOW members for formal election, we will seriously jeopardize the unity we now have. And, as you well know, such unity is a very tenuous thing, so, so difficult to maintain.

We don't want to play games with our sisters by saying we're conforming to the new structural plan and not really doing it. Nor do we want to be forced to no longer be a NOW chapter. Even our participants who aren't NOW members feel it's important that part of what we are be a NOW chapter. Is there any way we can adapt the structural plan to our structure? Can we, somehow, be grandmothers in because we are now functioning in a way that seems more effective for us?

(3)

I also enclose a part of the Jacksonville Women's Movement packet that we give to persons newly coming to the Women's Movement. Can we use this or adapt a portion of it as by-laws? We subscribe to the purposes of NOW. We want to stay united with NOW, but not have to give so very much energy to by-laws, elections, and related time-consuming activities that we feel would detract from the work we want to do in building new ways of structuring and behaving. Please give us some direction on this.

Yours in struggle, Vicki W., APM Representative