

NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE FOR  
CIVIL RIGHTS

July 31, 1963

Dear Friend:

The Steering Committee, appointed by your chairmen and Mrs. Peterson after the White House meeting on July 9, held its first meeting on July 24 in Washington. The membership list is enclosed.

You will remember that the committee was to be made up of leaders and representatives of women's organizations. The organizations selected were the numerically large ones, to be as inclusive as possible. We recognized the importance of including in our consultations certain individuals whose significance to the Civil Rights program was not related to membership or office in a predominantly women's group. They are listed, therefore, as consultants. The total number of members and consultants seemed to provide good representation of different points of view without being too large for frank and free discussion.

The actions of the Steering Committee seemed to fall into three categories; acceptance of principles of organization; specific recommendations to related organizations; matters of staffing and finance.

1. Principles of Organization

- a. The National Women's Committee for Civil Rights is made up of individuals and organizations which want to be identified as helping to achieve civil rights for all Americans. Since the degree of participation and of commitment of different groups differs widely, the term "related organizations" was considered a better term than "member organizations." Some associations have complicated procedures for determining official membership and want to be "related" even before they can complete a long process of becoming members of anything. Relationship is in no sense limited to those attending the July 9 meeting.
- b. Members of the Steering Committee are acting as individuals who may or may not be in a position to speak authoritatively for their organizations. Their recommendations to related organizations do not obligate their own organizations.
- c. The functions of the Steering Committee are:

- (1) To remind related organizations of the urgency of action to provide civil rights. There are doubtless radical differences of opinion between groups related to the National Women's Committee about means to be employed to achieve civil rights. Some organizations are constitutionally prohibited from advocating any legislation; some may do so. Some are for demon-



strations; some are opposed. Each organization will use its own techniques, but all who are willing to accept responsibility for any part of the program for civil rights are needed in this mobilization of women for civil rights.

- (2) To provide a clearinghouse for experiences and materials.
- (3) To call to the attention of related organizations, those points of tension which cooperative action by women might help to resolve. For example, we heard in Washington of theaters which had desegregated without violence, but with the withdrawal of virtually all white patronage. This threatens the very existence of the theaters. Suppose all the women, specially white women, in all the organizations in such communities should decide to protect theater owners from such drastic economic pressure. Together they could build up that attendance by going themselves, encouraging their neighbors to go, and thus achieve true integration.
- (4) To provide information on matters on which organizations may choose to act. For example, the Steering Committee requested the distribution of detailed information on the civil rights legislation so that proponents and opponents could have accurate factual information on the details of the bill itself and on its congressional status. You will receive this soon. Some related organizations will want to circulate this material widely. Others may not use it at all. Each will decide for itself, but all will be challenged to realize the urgency of consideration by citizens of this immediately important legislation which should have the judgment of the Congress on the merits of the case as soon as possible.

## 2. Requests to Related Organizations

### a. Exchange of Information

- (1) It was voted: "That we request each organization related to the National Women's Committee for Civil Rights ask its local groups, through proper channels, to cooperate with other women's groups in their communities in working toward the achievement of full civil rights for all citizens of our country."
- (2) It is hoped that reports of action by the several organizations (at any level, local, state, or national) will be sent to the National Women's Committee, together with such printed or mimeographed material as might be distributed to other organizations.

It is planned to prepare and distribute a digest of these reports and a bibliography of available materials (together with their price) and this will be transmitted to all related organizations. Inquiries and orders for material can be made directly from one organization to another, but a central file will be maintained in the office of the National Committee.



b. Take A Hand

It was suggested that in places where schools are to be desegregated for the first time next fall the related organizations encourage white women to "TAKE A HAND" by literally taking the hands of Negro mothers and children as they enter the school building.

Such a demonstration of good will would support the efforts of School Boards and Administrators as they undertake to observe the law in places where it is unpopular with the white community, and it could give moral support to the children and their parents who must bear the brunt of the readjustment.

- c. Many suggestions have been made about a symbol which might be worn or exhibited in windows to call attention to the concern of women for civil rights. The "Take a Hand" project suggested the symbol of clasped hands (one Negro and one white) to be used widely in connection with cooperative actions by women. It might be shown in the windows of restaurants or other public accommodations which desegregate voluntarily, if it would be helpful.

Another suggestion was the use of a five-pointed star to serve as a reminder of President Kennedy's five points for action by the women at the July 9 conference.

Please submit comments and suggestions about this question of a symbol and/or a slogan. Do you like the idea? Have you better ones to suggest?

3. Finance and Staff

For the time being, Mrs. Peterson and the staff of the Women's Bureau have been requested to provide the assistance necessary for clerical force and postage necessary to organize the work of volunteers to carry on the work of the Steering Committee. This arrangement is in line with the President's request that Mrs. Peterson should act as the liaison between the Committee and the administration.

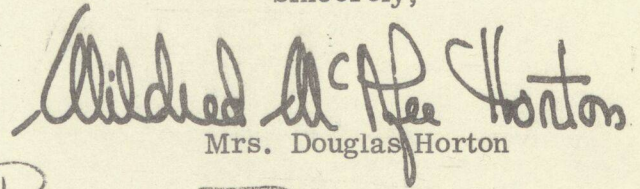
It was agreed that there would be value in establishing an office and staff privately supported. Consideration of such a development and the consequent request for and receipt of funds by the Steering Committee was entrusted to the officers. The temporary address continues to be c/o Mrs. Esther Peterson, Assistant Secretary of Labor, U. S. Department of Labor, Washington 25, D. C.

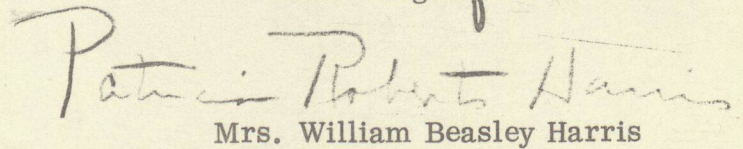
The Steering Committee met for something more than three hours and demonstrated again the zeal of women who realize how vital our program of civil rights is to the welfare of the nation. We were impressed by the diversity of gifts but the sameness of the spirit of the women who came from different backgrounds but were united in their eager-



ness to express America's moral obligation to eliminate second class citizenship. There was full awareness of the economic and political problems related to limitation of civil rights. It was quite evident, however, that the members of your Steering Committee were concerned primarily with the rightness of the cause which has brought us together.

Sincerely,

  
Mrs. Douglas Horton

  
Mrs. William Beasley Harris

CO-CHAIRMEN

Enclosure