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Letter: Vicki Wengrow to Ministerial Alliance Members

Vicki L. Wengrow

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November 22, 1972

Ministerial Alliance Members
% Chaplain Ronald Mudd, Pres.
Methodist Hospital
1640 Jefferson
Jacksonville, Florida

Dear Persons:

Now, while HOW is putting pressure on Alliance ministers to back off from their ethical position on ERA, it seems the best time to give my personal thanks to Ministerial Alliance members for their support of ERA.

The last decade has seen a refusal to endorse traditional organized religion by so many, especially by the new generation, on the grounds that religion is not "relevant"; because clergypersons did not seem to be taking the lead in humanizing American institutions. Too often, it has seemed that churches, in fact, have been final havens for bigotry. And, frankly, I have participated in my share of bigotry on the reverse side. I did not trust the positive response I got from Ministerial Alliance members when I spoke to them on Human Rights. I approached you to support the ERA, to be honest, with a mixture of hope and cynicism. I really didn't think you would stand strong on a moral-ethical issue if it was controversial. I did not give you the credit you deserve as Judeo-Christian persons.

To an extent, the vocalness of the opposition to our mutual ERA stand shows how very deep and internalized is the oppression of American women. I know it is part of your professional competence to deal with and understand people's fears. But I have a particular perspective and experience I can share with you as a person especially aware of the consciousness of women (all of whom I look upon as my sisters--whether they think they are or not).

Women have rarely benefitted from change in society, even when that change was supposed to mean progress. The objections to the ERA have been answered by such impressive resource institutions as the U.S. Labor Department and the Florida Human Relations Commission. But opponents don't believe them. In a real sense, the "manhaters" of our society are the opponents of ERA and of so-called "women's lib." For, their objections to ERA are always rooted, not in what ERA could do for them, but in what might be done to them if they ask for something for themselves. They cannot believe that the men who have power will interpret ERA to extend any human legal protections women now have to men; they're convinced it is in the nature of men to take what little security and status women now have. They're convinced men will make them pay for the new possibilities of freedom in some outlandish way--either by sharing bathrooms or being drafted or some such possible punishment.

And their fears are not unfounded in recent history. Suffrage for women took a 50 year struggle, has not resulted in a great deal of participation of women in the political system, but has resulted in a good deal of ridicule--an intelligent remark by a woman can still, as often as not, be denigrated by a, "Ho-ho, we should never have given women the vote!" And the first important compromise for civil rights for black Americans is mostly at the expense of female citizens. Whatever my own convictions on the busing issue, it is clear that it is women's

time and energy and disruption of life that must mainly be expended on difficult busing schedules and additional worry about the health and safety of the children.

While many women's objection to equal rights for women and men --for people-- is firmly rooted in their historical experience that men will diminish the dignity and status of women before they will give them anything, I don't think that experience-fear of the past is a good enough reason to cease trying to get full citizenship for all citizens--even if some women are so vocal in the expression of their fears. Those of us who believe in the dream of a world in which there is an equal partnership of women and men are not so willing to give up on the men (or on the male oriented women). Abigail Adams wrote her husband, John Adams, that "the ladies" should not be forgotten by those drawing up the Constitution, for, she maintained, "Men would be tyrants if they could." Some of us are hoping that men would also be friends to women's well-being, if they could.

It means a great deal that you have taken this position for women as whole, dignified people and not solely as children who only need protection. I wish I could have written this sincere thanks for your support to all 200 members of the Ministerial Alliance.

Sincerely,

Vicki Wengrow

CC: Dick Petry, Pres-elect
Dr. Earl Cooper