

Sonia Johnson

Excommunicated Mormon cheered, hailed

By SHIRLEE IDEEN

Blue jean clad, Sonia Johnson strode into Metropolitan Airport after an all night flight from Seattle to Chicago to Detroit.

Wouldn't it have been easier to fly directly from Seattle to Copenhagen for the UN International Women's Decade meeting she was headed for?

Sure, but the Republican Platform Committee last week knocked the Equal Rights Amendment out of their 1980 platform, and when you take a swipe at the ERA, you hurt Sonia Johnson where she lives.

She came to the area to participate in a demonstration for ERA by Women in Communications, YWCA, Business and Professional Women's Association, and a number of other concerned women's groups.

"It's my main thing now," she says. "Speaking for ERA wherever it's taking me is my full time work."

Six months ago, Sonia Johnson told Newsweek magazine that she is Mormon down to her toes. She says she still is.

But on Dec. 5, 1979, the Church of the Latter Day Saints, in which her family has held membership for five generations, excommunicated her for her outspoken stand on the ERA.

"The Mormon hierarchy said a church member individually could support ERA but to mount a drive such as 'Mormons for ERA' which Sonia Johnson did, could not be tolerated."

"He wasn't granted tenure at his university and had a mid-life kind of crisis. He found a younger, more beautiful woman."

Regrets? She answers straightforwardly: "I'm not a good regretter. Of the children she says, two are

battling adolescence, the 6-year-old is "thinking it over" and the 17-year-old eldest son is trying hard to figure out who he is.

Mrs. Johnson knows who she is. And she doesn't hesitate to say it.

"I'm a radical. I'm angry and I'm determined. We are what we are, and you do what your integrity demands."

Mrs. Johnson lives with her four children in Sterling, Va., southwest of Washington, D.C. For 20 years she taught university English on a part-time basis. She only has time for her children and the ERA now.

IN COPENHAGEN she will be part of the Forum, the non-governmental adjunct meetings taking place concurrently with those sponsored by the United Nations.

She will be part of a panel on equality and religion and will lead a workshop on equality. Fellow panelists will be concerned women from France, Hungary and India.

Institutions in general are on Mrs. Johnson's bad list right now.

It doesn't make any difference whether it's government, religion or the Republican Party she tells you "they're all patriarchal."

"There's no real equality. Women are on the fringes in religion and in all areas. Our society thinks of men as more God-like and as meant to rule."

If you're Sonia Johnson in July 1980, the world couldn't be in worst shape.

"Half the world's population are the life-givers and nurturers and have so much to give and are not allowed to," she says, frustrated. "Women care more about human life than men. They've been involved in life in perpetuating it. The men need to listen to us and to deal with hunger and human needs."

"I'M SO ANGRY with the Republican Party," she says. "I was brought up to believe it was the only party, that Democrats were evil. You couldn't catch me voting Republican now. There is an anti-life, hate humans stance."

And of Ronald Reagan their standard bearer, the former English teachers adds: "I wouldn't even

trust Reagan to be head of the English Department."

Mrs. Johnson says she was always

a "really good Mormon woman."

"I truly believed that someone needed to be home with those children all the time and that someone need someone, but it doesn't have to be me all the time."

Part of her current despair is that her own children feel so dispirited about the future. "They feel like grownups are going to blow us all up," she says. "And they wonder if there will be jobs."

When she's tired, and she often is, she says all that's happened "just doesn't sink in."

"I just feel as Mormon as I ever was and like what I am, a Virginia housewife."

UNTIL about three years ago, Sonia Johnson knew almost nothing about the ERA. She and her family lived overseas in Nigeria where her husband had a government contract.

"Becoming a feminist is a whole reorganization of the pattern," she says. "It's like an individual revolution and it was sudden for me, though I must have been gathering data all my life subconsciously."

"Mormonism is so profoundly patriarchal. I was always putting pieces of data into my mental file. Finally, when the church started on the ERA, it all burst out."

Mrs. Johnson recounts that at a church meeting one night, someone spoke against ERA as she sat and listened.

"Suddenly it all came together. I had like a minor nervous breakdown right in the meeting. I was overwhelmed, actually physically pained," she recalls. "My friends told me later I was shaking my head back and forth and loudly saying 'No, no, no.'"

Up to that time, Sonia Johnson thought all the male supremacy and patriarchy was God's will.

"I thought God was sexist," she says. "But I went home that night and gave it to God. I closed myself into a room over the garage and I screamed and yelled."

"TO MAKE US (women) so giving, so rich so willing and then to put us in this little box . . . I had

always been respectful before that night. But that night I yelled at God for an hour and told him I'd fight him."

By the time Mrs. Johnson stifled her screams and completed her argument with God, she found she felt calm, good.

"I was all by myself and when I was done, it was quiet, nothing happened. The most important thing I ever learned occurred when I found I wasn't zapped."

"I knew God wasn't against me and part of my old boys' club."

Mrs. Johnson contends that women all over the world are rising and it's the patriarchy that's dying, but admits it may take a long time.

Of Khomainsi "When he brought back the veil, women marched in the streets under threat of their very lives, some were stoned, shot and beaten up, but they marched. It was an eloquent, message to those who were afraid," she says.

MORMONS aspire to great national power in this country, she believes. Church is now most only once each week so that members can participate and run for office at every level.

"Joseph Smith (Mormon founder) is supposed to have said that the Constitution of the U.S. would someday hang by a thread and the Mormon Church would save it. It's their justification for fighting ERA," she says.

"They see themselves as saviors."

At the ERA rally in the Kern block, Mrs. Johnson spoke along with Helen Milliken, wife of the governor, Millie Jeffrey, labor and feminist leader, Erma Henderson, president of the Detroit Common Council, and others.

While they receive applause, she is cheered, hailed, adored.

"If Republicans don't understand basic human rights, how can we trust them to understand anything important?" she asks.

"Give me liberty or give me death. We need heroes to cry out to us again."

And the way they cheered, it seemed they had found one hero already.



'Give me liberty or give me death,' Sonia Johnson told a pro-ERA audience at the Kern block on Sunday.

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With this authoritative guide you will know what likes wet soil, dry soil and which exposure is best. Professionals covet this source of information.

People in a picture help establish comparison heights which is good.

Our annual growers are striving toward developing varieties which can be ground indoors in the winter with good coloring. Specialists have found that many annuals grown in the summer garden can be rooted from cuttings and continued indoors, some varieties fare better than others. Annuals like air conditioning and we must remember that their flowering show will be limited in time like they are outdoors.

Was begonias lend themselves to indoor culture. The single flowered varieties are best for this purpose. Don't

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For another week we will have more ideas on how to get further dividends from your annuals by bringing them indoors.

2 students at convention

Farmington Association for Educational Enrichment members gave two passes to the opening of the GOP convention to two of the gifted and talented students the group supports.

The pass recipients were Peter Goetz, a student at North Farmington High School, and Jane Kernicky, a re-

cent graduate of the school.

While Miss Kernicky was a student in high school, she edited the school newspaper. She has completed one year of college at Oakland Community College and will enter Kalamazoo College this fall.

Call him doctor

Andrew J. Colman received his doctor of osteopathy degree from the College of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery in Des Moines, Iowa. He will serve an internship at Botsford General Hos-

pital in Farmington Hills. Colman is a graduate of Michigan State University and the son of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Colman of Farmington Hills.

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