

MINUTES OF BREAD AND ROSES MEETING: 13 December 1981 @ Britania/Music Room

PRESENT: Sara, Marcie, Helen, Maggie Z, Kay, Dara, Susan, Wendy, Sally Mickey, Fran, Marion, Adrienne, Lenna, Maggie T, Nancy, Maylynn, Jeanne, Jackie, Frances, Renee.

CHAIR: Marion MINUTES: Frances

- Agenda:
1. Introductory Rounds
  2. Against the Right report on BCFW workshop
  3. Welfare Rights Coalition work report
  4. Steering Committee
  5. Announcements.

MARION asked for direction on how to proceed with time limits on the agenda and then

FRAN there was a A/R subcommittee meeting this morning, and we discussed Thursday night's events, and want them discussed here for two reasons: 1) Bread and Roses as a group has talked about taking up racism in our work, and a discussion of what ~~g~~ happened could begin that work; 2\_ Maylynn, as a member of B&R has been isolated since the incident, we see as an error on all our parts, not to have asked what her point of view is shows an extreme lack of respect. I move that the agenda be amended to discuss Thursday's meetings and the issues from it.

KAY seconded the motion and it carried.

MARION How shall we structure the discussion?

MAGGIEZ Someone should present a summary of what happened for those who weren't there. (There were three women present at the meeting who had not been at Thursday nights' IS! meeting.

FRANCES Presented a summary from her notes of the meeting of the comments and discussion which led up to three women's walking out of the meeting.

MARION Asked for instruction on how to proceed, to discuss the meeting and have more information on it or to discuss the concerns Fran raised.

SARA I have some information to add to Frances' summary. Susan responded to Kim by saying that white men have more privilege than white women. Kim was upset. Susan continued to speak on caucases and said 'coloured women' at some point in the remarks.

MAGGIEZ I've heard some 2nd hand versions, and would find it useful to have a version to be agreed on. I don't know what Maylynn may have to say - or if she wants to speak to the issue.

MAYLYNN I feel emotional about all this, but will speak to it.

LENN A We've apssed motions ~~x~~ to fight idealism, and it is the height of idealism to analyze this event without knowing what happened.

MARION It's impossible to have this discussion in 20 minutes, I suggest the WRC report be dropped from the agenda. (This was agreed to by the committee and we proceeded with the discussion).

NANCY Is the BCFW question more pressing? (We agreed that if there was time we'd proceed with that report)

MARION We'll go until 9:15 with this discussion and then have A/R and ~~A~~Steering Committee.

MAYLYNN I was upset after the meeting when I went to the bar. I went specifically because I was angry at the meeting, I was then very upset because eventhough there were Bread and Roses women there and I feel I have alliances with you, noone came up to me, not even with criticisms, and asked me about what happened. People ended up going to someone else in the group, but no direct contact was made with me. Noone phoned me over the weekend. This shows no respect for my



politics. This is my criticism of Bread and Roses. We need to have dialogue, we learn from each other. I could have given some answers which would have been valid to the criticism raised.

I asked the question about racism because when the women's movement gets together it's important for the issue of racism to be raised - because of my own oppression as a Chinese woman, and because 80% of the world is non-white. There is a history in Canada of oppression of non-white people. We've tried to incorporate an understanding of racism in this group; our basis of unity includes recognition of the white middle-class character of the women's movement. Socialist-feminist understandings are needed to broaden the base of the women's movement. I asked the question to show people in the meeting that Bread and Roses has a position around how the women's movement will deal with the question of race, ~~with~~ which I thought would have been raised and it wasn't. I was extremely frustrated by the answers. I have less emotional response to IS! and Rape Relief, they don't reach out as B&R has said it will do.

Then, Kim and Marie who came at my coercion because I wanted them to see that socialists weren't so bad. We didn't choose to leave the meeting together. Kim was angry, thought there was not room for her in ~~shouting~~ speaking. It had nothing to do with what ~~Kim~~ Susan said, she made only minor faux pas. We walked out, then caucused sort of, I suggested we go back in and state our position and we decided we wouldn't. So we left. I went to the bar later because I wanted input from my political comrades.

MARCIE Did you have any discussion with the other women (meaning the women who stood at the front of the meeting)

MAYLYNN We left in 2 minutes. We had no idea they were going back in. Where was no discussion with them.

NANCY How did you as a group feel about being represented in the meeting by them as you were?

MAYLYNN We haven't met as a group, and haven't talked about it.

NANCY Comments. The work you were trying to do is very important. Your skillful asking of questions is exactly as one should proceed to bring forward a topic. I want to respond to your political criticism of members of the ~~in~~ this group not having direct contact with you ~~and~~ about criticism of the meeting. Exactly the time you were unavailable was the time to make contact, the time you had left the meeting. I spoke with some women on the phone over the weekend, and tried to call you because I felt this would come up at this meeting and wanted to be sure you would be here. As to the incident, I'm critical of the way it was treated then. Constructing as a racist slur was not useful, the way you had pointed out the question as not being taken up was more useful. I didn't appreciate the way the ~~press~~ proceedings were interrupted.

KAY I talked with Maylynn this morning. I am sorry particular feelings were hurt, ~~but~~ because I know Maylynn and like her. But I want to be tough, hurt feelings are inevitable in political conflict.

I was upset at the women walking out of the meeting. Whatever intervention was was probably valid, but not how it was done. I didn't know what had happened, no one else did either. It all looked petulant to me, I'm sure others thought so too. I'd have appreciated even a blow-up, it was right to attack. The meeting was destroyed by the self-appointed women who spoke, it seemed like attention seeking provocative behaviour - I ~~had~~ did ~~not~~ not expect that there was collusion between Maylynn's group and those other women. There has been behind the back nattering, and it's good we're not doing that now. Other people of colour seemed to have been overlooked, 2 women who spoke up were ignored. Racism should have been talked about, and maybe could have gotten back to discussion. What happened makes you feel betrayed and mistrustful, but it's inevitable that cliques and sub-groups formed especially likely bullshit would fly in the immediate time of the event.



- MARION Offered from the chair the guidance that we should address the issue of racism and not just what had happened at the meeting.
- SARA I think it's really rotten people didn't speak to you. That happened to me in the RWL. I don't feel that people don't respect you politically, but that they may disagree with the process.
- Fear - a lot of guilt came out in that meeting and fear may have blocked women from speaking to you. Didn't see Susan's remarks as any more racist than the remarks of others. But in the women's movement there's been a history of omission of racism, a failure of taking up questions outside the women's community. So I don't think there was, given this history, any organic way for a woman of colour to be on that panel. So the links between issues were not made, and not taken up, perhaps would be appended only if taken up at all. I don't want to speak for you, but feel that the response to the incident was a culmination of anger for the women from the Third World women's group. Felt and still feel that walking out of ~~kw~~ a meeting is not the way to deal with something racist, heterosexist, etc.. We need to have mechanisms for people to deal with anger in meetings. Part of my frustration was that it wasn't clear what was happening until you walked out, I felt Kim had been heckling, and only then did I see the anger. Should be a way to 'rise on a point of privilege' no other mechanisms to deal with anger. I felt pissed off at group of white women who tried to represent your experience, and with Lee's self-criticism on there not being a woman ~~nm~~ of ~~km~~ colour on the panel. What we need is to help build a mass movement of women of colour, not tokenism which would either change every debate into one on racism, for which we don't have time enough, or it would falsely represent the reality of the women's movement which is not multi-racial. This ~~skunk~~ could now lead to a discussion on racism and women's movement lead by women of colour.
- NANCY There are two incidents that need to be responded to, the experience Maylynn had in the bar, and what happened at the meeting. Some of us don't know what happened.
- MAGGIEZ Also some don't have information on what the white women did, because the summary of what happened stopped before that part of the meeting.
- MAYLYNN I'd prefer not to talk about the bar, I was hurt, but I'm OK, but about the politics in Bread and Roses and racism.
- FRAN Bread and Roses has mentioned in fleeting ways the importance of changing the composition of the women's movement, more working class, more women of colour, etc.. and we don't DO anything about it. Because of that it was hard for me to recognize what was happening in the meeting, this is a big failing--so I want to begin to be more concrete about how we are going to do what we say we want to do. I want in the new year to have a discussion ~~skunk~~ to begin with a plan about what to do. If we begin then we'll find out how to be sensitive in meetings like that. Or we should stop saying that we want to make changes.
- HELEN It's not a question of Maylynn's hurt feelings, but a question is that people were really liberal, people came to me and I continually said talk to Maylynn, but no one did. People said some really wierd things to me. Feel more sympathetic because of that to why women left the meeting. Feel strange about that too. Makes me think women see women of colour as other. If there had been a sexist incident, ~~km~~ and ~~nm~~ women left a meeting because of it, we'd have found out what happened. It's important & not to criticize to third parties.
- This meeting was an example of the kind of work ~~km~~ ~~nm~~ B&R could do around racism, but didn't. Think I addressed it positively and Sara did to. Others from B&R didn't address positively. If we'd had our shit together we could have really changed how it went. We had more people there than Dorrie.
- LENNA What's your definition of liberalism in this situation?



HELEN The racism was not Susan's remarks, but three people on the panel of which only one deals with the question of racism -- and how to incorporate women of colour into socialism. This was a political error & we should have been prepared to confront. Also think Sara's raised some positive points, we have to change our practice, we don't have a practice from which an analysis could develop.

MICKEY I wanted to give my impressions and feelings around the meeting. Feel positive because of what's happened, because of the way I'm now aware of issues Maylynn has constantly raised here. Feel positive about the white & women making an issue of racism, and critical of what they said. But was made aware of racism being made a category, not an important issue to be fought against at the same time as others. Something Kim said made me see it was not Susan's words but a problem of the whole meeting coming from white women's perspective.

MAYLYNN That was not defacto but dejure.

MICKEY When the women walked out, I felt critical because I wanted to find out what happened and also felt I'd find out at a B&R meeting, and it was too bad that others won't have that. Wanted Kim to have made an intervention. But I'm critical of B&R because if we'd had ourselves together then Maylynn and the other women would have known there was support. So maybe this is where to begin - with leadership of women of colour and support from us.

MAYLYNN There will be letters in the (alternative) press from women in third world women's group, and from those present and not at meeting.

DARA I was aggy at the meeting. Maylynn's question was a really good one, and the responses were vague and inadequate. Would have been more useful to take that up. Responses were indicative of the situation. Walking out was not fair, it denied the opportunity for something to be said. In the bar I felt that since women had walked out that they didn't want to hear what I had to say. Women who came back in to the meeting & are an indication of another side of the problem in the left, condescending paternalistic attitudes ~~adopted~~ adopted in lieu of analysis. It was destructive. The impression given was that - were here defending people who can't speak for themselves. Presumptuous to assume the right to do that, or that should do that. Should be discussed more thoroughly when we discuss racism and how to deal with it. It is a serious question, this incident shows up only one aspect of racism's operation. Don't see as useful to get bogged down. We should develop mechanisms for speaking in meetings. Everyone has responsibility for speaking in meetings - & even with less skill and more hostility people manage to speak in situation which are serious. In Response to Helen, re the failure of B&R to take leadership in the meeting - I don't see how we could have done it, we haven't done the necessary work. I'd like to see us respond, but from a position of thinking, talking and working out beforehand.

MARION There's 20 more minutes. There are six women on the first round and one on the 2nd round. The speaker's list is closed.

We have no working definition of racism. From the BCFW workshop that came really clear to me. We need to have a discussion to come to some shared understanding of racism, without a definition we cannot do the work. Also want more definition of what 'work' means. Re 3rd world women raising issues, we've not taken our own responsibility in raising issues ourselves. We have to take guidance and see ourselves as capable of leading such a discussion, not take it over. Racism is not the property of third world women, Racism is the property of all of us. We are talking about the meeting, and not about what can be learned and where we can go.

MAGGIEZ I want to speak now, I'm very agitated. What's agitating me is that we're not talking about racism. I'm trying to remember what it was like to be a woman in a group of men. Easier to identify as oppressed than oppressor. I hear about leadership, and don't hear what individuals should do about our own racism. What I want, when you spoke Sara - I don't want



to help women assume leadership, I want to know how I hold them back; what were the weird things people said to you Helen - we need to talk about them. You mentioned fear but it's not connected to anything. I feel completely emotional and irrational. It's easy to see myself as oppressed women or a Jew. But it's hard to see ~~xxx~~ what I do myself - ~~xx~~ what are the changes I need to make.

ADRIENNE Learning to listen to the women's movement more. I felt angry at the liberalism and angry at the women who walked out. Agree we're not talking about racism. We should have a session on racism, the onus should not be on women of colour. I need education around the issue. I share racist habits. Sexism worked the same way. I did have a problem with Dorrie in the meetings saying we can't speak for women of colour, which I thought she was doing - ~~xx~~ it was a contradiction. And I disagree with her. I work with immigrant women, and still need a tremendous amount of education. You said you were writing letters, send a copy to IS! newspaper too so readers of the ~~xx~~ paper get a correct view of the problem. Drena understood the white women to speak for you.

MAYLYNN At some point the analogy between sexism and racism breaks down. We have to recognize the skills we have learned in the women's movement.

JACKIE Does anyone know why Drena is not heard? She was upset and B&R should check out how she is. I find this all difficult to talk about. It is a correct criticism re the women not contacting Maylynn after the meeting. About procedures: the odds are that third world women wouldn't have walked out if Ruth had known how to chair the meeting. This knowledge is a painful acquisition, it took us three hours to get it - but had she put the woman on the speaker's list right away, it would have been resolved differently. Different kinds of anger have to be dealt with. Critical not so much of women who walked out but of the treatment of Susan, she was being heckled.

I feel defensive about this part. A number of people have said Maylynn's question did not receive sufficient answers. So I want to explain my sense of the purpose of the meeting and say again I wasn't speaking for Bread and Roses. I did not understand that the panel was on how to deal with building the women's movement, but on the intersection between the women's movement and the revolutionary left - we each had 20 minutes to speak.

When Maylynn asked the question, I wasn't ~~surprised~~ surprised at what Lee said because she's unclear about everything. I thought I gave an answer you were looking for. If you were looking for a strategic analysis - I'm not capable of doing that. The strategies for the women's movement came from women, and the strategies for the work against racism must come from women of colour (this sentence is an approximation of what I remember Jackie saying - I didn't catch it). So I looked at my presentation, I left out a token reference to the kind of women's movement I wanted. I should have integrated the question - revolutionary organizations have to deal with the experience of women, I should have made clear my position - of the right to caucuses for oppressed peoples ~~of~~ and nationalities. I should have been more specific. That debate came out of our experience with revolutionary organizations, particularly Drena and me. I don't know now how to deal with these issues ~~xxx~~ beyond using tokenism. There's a level of guilt at not being able to integrate something I don't know how to do. Helen's suggestion re practice is important. It is not right for white women to put forward an analysis which hasn't come from third world women. About the women who intervened: It was an opportunity for bored women to create some excitement in a meeting which they thought wasn't interesting. It was liberalism. We have a ~~xxx~~ debate to take up with other parts of the women's movement.

MARION There's a continuing problem about time and the speakers list. What shall we do about the Against the Right slot?

KAY Will it accomplish anything to repeat what's been said? (we then had a discussion about which agenda this report could be on and this is part of it...)



FRAN I want to see it (the A/R report) dealt with tonight.  
KAY I agree  
MAGGIET I want to continue with this discussion because we've gone so far, I'd like to hear the end of the speaker's list, and this could then all move onto a head, and a proposal.  
WENDY We can do the report in January. It would be unproductive to stop the debate now.

(There then ensued a period of some confusion while we sorted out voting - on the first proposal there were a lot of abstentions, Marion decided to reopen discussion and then

MAYLYNN I think we should continue because this is an important political discussion

and we voted again and the proposal was to postpone the A/R report. CARRIED at ~~10:40~~ 9:40-

MARCIE One of the things which has bothered me and it has come up again tonight, we say that noone else in the women's movement has addressed the question of racism. There are women who have worked in anti-racist work for years and we are ~~are~~ disrespectful and ahistorical to say that. We don't have women here from Women Against Imperialism (and a couple other groups mentioned) who have done work. (here there was some response from others and) I don't mean that women here in the room have not done anti-racist work, but when we say we're first ~~is~~ that's my objection. If we do something we should have people who've done work be on such a committee. We need to know how to do it. The kind of choices we make are affected by language - ~~is~~ anti-racist work (formulation) leads to anti-KKK, ~~is~~ the state; and work with/for third world women leads to solidarity ~~is~~ work in Central America for example. We need to discuss why chose one or the other or both, and what the differences are. Personally - I don't feel very racist. I found the women at the front of the meeting very hard to hear, I felt attacked by them. Some criticism should be made of those women. Something should be said about their approach to the left. It caused divisions and was destructive.

LENNA What happened was constructive, I agree with Mickey. Maylynn asked her question in all the right ways, from the speaker's list, etc.. and I agree with Jackie about the answers. I don't know those four women they could be terrible creatures, but they said we had to look at what happened. They said it was our reaction that ~~was~~ was racist, not Susan or Kim. I have broken up 2 meetings recently and was told that I was overreacting to jokes, making mountains out of molehills, one was because of men referring to women as chicks, and one when there were men giggling ~~is~~ about wife battering. I was told I was wrong. Lot of things happened at that meeting that would never have existed 10 years ago. Chilcare, speaker's list, better than before. Until I was 30 I never saw a woman chair a mixed meeting. We cannot predict what changes we need for women to be comfortable - we can't predetermine these things.

I wouldn't criticize the four women, they had the guts to stand up, for whatever motivation. We've worn buttons - but we haven't dealt with invisibility. It was a relief to many in the room when those women walked ~~is~~ out, because they thought they wouldn't ~~is~~ have to deal with it - without those four women it wouldn't have been dealt with. We have to find ways of dealing with these problems.

~~XXXXX~~

MARION We at the end of the speakers list for the 1st round. We've had some concrete suggestions. I want the 2nd round speakers to address in the next 10 minutes responses/and solutions.

NANCY On solutions - there are particular ways of working together - we've focussed on how practice of B&R hasn't been too hot. I want B&R to develop practical ways to work together. I wish I'd been prepared to go into the meeting around the issue of racism. Wish I'd been prepared to bring the issue to the floor. Jackie might have had time for a more circumspect response. Fran could have had more analysis when she stood up and challenged what



was happening.

DARA I wanted to clarify what I said, in response to Jackie. I meant that from the responses of Dena Jackie and Lee ~~xxxx~~ it was clear that neither group had done much work around racism - the responses reflected the priorities of the groups. On what to do now - I think set aside at least one meeting and seriously deal with the issue. I don't think we can do it with some discussion only - we need to think about ways of working with women of colour in really concrete ways. We'd learn about how to do it in concrete ways. We always ask what can we do to bring a more working class and non-white women into B&R. So we have to think about where to work to learn about the issue.

SARA I agree with the way Dara proposed inside B&R work. I also think we need some public discussion, I don't know how, but feel its pressing - it needs to be done in the left and the women's movement. We hold public meetings - so need to codify ways which will help and assist in the process of such meetings. People were defensive because of fear ~~xxxx~~ of fragmentation in the women's movement and the left. People identified with Susan not with the third ~~xxxx~~ world women.

ABRIENNE ~~xxx~~ I support educational work both internal and external. We need to be aware of what other organizations are doing around racism - critically. For example the Vancouver School Board has hired a man to do race relations'. Schools now call it multi-culturalism not racism. We're not presently able to counter these arguments. We need to find out what other people are saying.

KAY Don't agree the issue wouldn't have been dealt with if those four 'jerks' hadn't got up, they weren't speaking for all in the room. There was a black man, and an Indian man, Japanese and Iranian women. They'd have spoken up. We have to go to and find out what others are doing in areas of racism. The other night a woman from the Caribbean told me she gets pelted with rotten eggs regularly, that her kids come home from school covered in spit. They won't come here and talk or perform for us.

MAYLYNN I'm only one ~~indivixus~~ individual who has a lone perspective on this whole thing. I didn't walk out for all third world people - I feel answerable to the people who stayed in the meeting who are third world - not to the white women. I don't criticize them as much - I agree with what Mickey and Lenna said. The issue of racism has to be forced into the women's movement and the left. It is difficult to walk into a meeting and give a perspective. If you realize it will take a revolution to end racism. I don't want to keep walking out of meetings to make a political point. But I'd do it again. The people in the room, the third world people, may not have been heard if we as third world people had our shit together - We fight capitalism racism and sexism without networks. This is the beginning of a good process in the left. Re Jackie's response: Would have helped me if I'd heard that the women's movement recognized itself as white and middle class. Those words sound true but they are important to say. They are important to say because it helps to see what the perspective is, it's not racism to have a white perspective. We learned not to cry sexism all over the place with allies, and it will take a political definition of racism to evolve an understanding of how to deal with the questions.

HELEN I suggest that since the steering committee is to meet between this meeting and next meeting we could pull together suggestions.

SARA Seems to be some consensus and so would like a show of hands on what women want. I think should adopt some general guidelines.

MARION Put two questions; guidelines or referral?

HELEN How are we doing for time?

FRAN We had an A/R meeting this morning, and would like to check out a suggestion from that meeting. That the A/R subcommittee to become the committee to take up this work.

- NANCY Moves a referral to the A/R committee, whatever guidelines or whatever happens.
- MARION I want there to be guidelines.
- HELEN Because of time, I think the best thing we can do is to pass back to the A/R committee and have it come back priority on the 3 January meeting.
- THIS WAS AGREED TO.
- KX FRANCES I pointed out that only 3 of us hadn't spoken to this serious issue at this meeting - to begin to lay to rest our breast-beating about how women don't speak in our meetings - women speak when there is an important issue about which they have something to say.
- RENEE I'm writing a letter to you about this discussion - because felt didn't have voice here. I want you to know what I thought.
- JEANNE Announced meeting on the Polish question at 5 on Monday at Britannia
- LENNA TU s/c will report some things on = pay struggle. Next EPIC meeting on 12 Jan. Open to Tradeunionists.
- JACKIE A request that we take up some quick updates on the hot spots in the world so that we know more about what's happening. This would keep the group in touch with developments.
- LENNA I want to ~~xxx~~ thank Maylynn and MaggieZ for expressing their emotions, because ~~xxx~~ we're here because of emotional things and sometimes we talk like we're defending our Phdthesis.
- MARCIE The Welfare Rights Coalition Demo is on Saturday at 1pm from Granville and Davie.

Phew!