

2nd Meeting on Strategies for the Women's Movement: Minutes

Music Room, Britannia

January 11, 1981.

Introduction:

Helen & Daphne had drafted and circulated an agenda. It was decided to eliminate the first item on summation of the previous meeting, as a written summary and full minutes are available. Helen chaired the meeting; Drena took minutes.

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Diana gave a brief explanation of the BCFW: What it is and how it operates. She said she would play "Devil's Advocate" in defending BCFW to draw out the main areas of difference people might have with the organisation. She touched 4 areas in her talk: accountability, leadership, communication and outreach.

An example of the accountability (credibility) of BCFW was how constructive it was in centralising the debate around Rape Relief, and carrying it out in a good spirit at the recent convention, where previous discussions had not achieved this.

On leadership, despite the paranoia that centralisation would allow power-tripping, the real problem is the opposite: the organisation doesn't play the role it could in promoting action or in being a communication network.

Outreach would not be such a big problem if members were more clear & conscious of "what BCFW is", and thus could be more active in reaching new women. Member groups are not limited by their involvement in BCFW from acting. In fact, they are encouraged to do so in defending the policy of the organisation. Problem is not many member groups are "activist" themselves. The question remains: how to relate to women who don't identify themselves as feminists.

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The chair summed up the main questions we're concerned with: how we establish unity; how we struggle over differences and resolve them; leadership and accountability. Nancy raised that the main problems are leadership and strategy and we should focus on these in our discussion; there was general agreement to this.

Prabda: wants to identify with an organisation; feels we need to be more defined.

Ellen: thinks BCFW is our "united front", for the women's movement as a whole.

Sarah: wants to promote unity on two fronts: among socialist/feminists (BCFW) to build a mass movement of women so disagrees with Nancy's proposal and would add how to struggle to unity.

? are people talking about a strategy for the women's movement, or a strategy to overthrow capitalism?

Rosalie: I'm concerned about how we can act in an organised and powerful way, in the face of an organised and powerful state: both the "left" and the women's movement.

Ellen: Why do we want to build a women's movement, except to overthrow the system.

Prabda: to fight capitalism we must unite with men; to have a strategy for the women's movement we don't need that, but need to build a political women's organisation (refers to Feminist party based in Toronto).

Dorothy: How do we turn what we have into a women's movement, rather than a women's community?

Drena: There is a danger of collapsing two different things into one thing, and trying to build organisational structures which can unite the greatest number of women around their specific demands on the one hand, while building political organisation for socialism on the other. One is a "mass" organisation and one isn't.

Sarah: Those of us who aren't prepared to belong to political groups need an organisation; we need to recognise there are "hierarchies of consciousness" within the women's movement.

Cristine: Think that women's mass organisations cannot restrict membership to those who have a high understanding of the political basis of women's oppression: this arrogant and elitist. How do women achieve this higher consciousness in the first place?

Marion: The forms of organisation we choose must be determined by the tasks we set ourselves.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

After a break, the chair again tried to sum up the discussion. It seems people want to be able to mobilise a large number of women broadly on a wide number of issues; BCFW doesn't meet this need, because it has a relatively high basis of unity (the Policy Handbook) which contains a socialist/feminist political analysis. As well it isn't able to act in an organised way, giving centralised leadership or mobilising its member groups quickly around developments.

Prabda: My concern is to form a political organisation; not to lower the basis of unity to include more women -- although want an "active" one.

Rosalie: Want to discuss fairly broad political and ideological questions; what can achieve this?

? : Are we going to deal with the question of facilitating a broad united front against women's oppression or a socialist/feminist party?

Ellen: This group shouldn't form into any type of organisation -- it should be a kind of "open forum".

CHILDCARE: It was decided to collect money at the end of each meeting to help those who had to pay for child-care.

OTHER BUSINESS: Announcements on Daphne Williams' deportation; the S. African wine boycott and the Women vs. Imperialism series. Also IWD and a WWU Forum in April on VDTs; CBRT rally and Soviet woman.

EVALUATION: There wasn't time for a complete evaluation of the meeting. Drena Maggie and Helen will summarise the minutes and prepare an agenda for the next meeting to be held February 8th at 7:30 in the same place.

It was decided to advertise through the BCFW mailing list and Kinesis to reach more women.