

Minutes Prepared by Sara Diamond (I have not included names of speakers because I knew some and not all)

Minutes of Meeting Held at Britannia Community Centre On Sunday December 7, 1980. This meeting was a continuation of the "Feminism and Vanguard Politics" workshop at the B.C. Federation of Women Convention in November of this year.

There were about 35 women present.

Meeting began with a round of women stating whether they were at the initial workshop and what their expectations were of this meeting. About half those present were at initial workshop.

This is what people stated they were interested in discussing:

- the nature of women's oppression, different political points of view towards it, strategy to fight our oppression, the possibility of study groups to discuss strategy
- which way forward for the women's movement; there was an overlap between the "women and revolution" workshop at the BCFW convention and the feminism and vanguard politics workshop
- right-wing attacks, strategies for self-defense against groups like the KKK
- how to unify the women's movement
- on what basis do we organize? how to reach more people (women)
- vanguardism amongst feminists; what the women's movement ought to be doing
- what is the women's movement, the practical application of feminism in organizing. the B.C.F.W. exists to build connections between people organizing around issues, how can it be used
- many of us have experiences of the last ten years in the women's movement, women generally asking: what we should be doing, how to move forward
- much issue-based organizing in last while, BCFW not dealing with general unity, politics, how to make a synthesis and fight on many issues
- how to work with women not in the women's movement, how to or whether there is and should be leadership within the women's movement
- the relationship between the organized left, other political issues and feminism; need to examine organizing forms in the women's movement, tendency to diminish skills
- forms of organization: what can be learned from the left, what applied from women's movement
- neither the labour bureaucracy nor feminist movement providing necessary leadership for working women in and outside the trade unions, clear at the recent CLC women's conference

- how to maintain the autonomy of the women's movement when working around issues such as nuclear power or in movements other than the women's movement (like unions)

We then voted on 6 possible topics of discussion pulled out of the round.

Susan Mullen was elected chair (consensus) at this point.

The six topics were:

- leadership within the women's movement
- leadership by the women's movement
- outreach
- right-wing attacks
- forms of organization
- alliances

We decided by majority to discuss: FORMS OF ORGANIZATION

The following views were expressed:

- (There was first a short synthesis of my presentation at the workshop, which is not in the minutes as I will be sending it to people).
- question raised as to how we know who we are, that a woman is a member of the women's movement? is a person part of it because she says she is?
- one definition: women's movement is women^{who} fight back against oppression (all such women), not women in this room exclusively, egs. Muckamuck, PSAC, abortion rights; it takes different organizational forms, don't get a card and get stamped in or out, you're part of it because you fight against women's oppression, is not the same as being a Communist, can be in women's movement without being a communist, need broadest possible definition not just women's groups, all who fight for women's rights
- self-declaration has been an important part of being a feminist in part because it was a direct response to the male left requiring a whole set of tests for membership; it was good enough for a woman to say that she was a feminist to be considered one; unlike left view that only members of groups were leftists. some women's groups, like Rape Relief now define feminists as those belonging to groups, that individuals can't declare themselves feminists
- the women's movement right now is too broad, the definition too unfocused
- words like "feminism" and "women's movement" are unclear, crave clarity, a general lack of class consciousness is a problem/ as with Rape Relief discussion can we afford a complete belief in what all women say as being true. women's movement too vague, have solidarity with more men than women around some things, there are a great deal of differences, need something written down, like the left but different content.

agree, but have opposite problem: not inclusive enough of women fighting around issues like affirmative action, equal pay for work of equal value in unions etc. they don't identify themselves with feminists because they don't know who or what we are

- there is historic definition of women's movement based on our roots, radicalization of the late 1960s and early 1970s: has taken specific organizational forms, especially collectives, has built institutions, focused on community structures. Also contributions around redefining marxism, the role of reproduction in the economy and social structure, new forms of organization; that is one legacy. Second part is broad definition of all women fighting for liberation...need to link lessons and experience of first with the second, right now not enough in touch, need community based structures, broad issues, analysis, really need to know our history, can learn from left re: some levels of organization
- need overlap feminism and left, hang onto vagueness because acquired through broadness and many different experiences need to explore forms of organization and leadership. We can draw on the left but still watch out for hierarchy.
- question of organization is a serious question, not a luxury what is going on is scary, the Klan has to be taken on, the general right-wing climate, if we remain scattered we will be smashed. If something serious happened and we needed to mobilize not confident that we could, have a sense of helplessness Need to discuss where and how to concentrate
- Need strategies: be clear about who we are, what each is prepared to do; too broad-based right now
- cynicism about the women's movement: agree with definition of all women struggling for change, will take on different forms of organization in different situations, when first became active there were meetings all the time to discuss strategy, plan struggles, discussions of politics, work around issues there are a lot of issues now to be fought. We have a history, a rich community in our past activity, if we are not in political organizations need other forms
- don't know what shared assumptions there are in room; about the strengths and weaknesses of women's movement as this seems to be a theme: definition of movement: different organizations around issues; not organized together but in small groups for accountability, small scale organizing builds effective work and trust for the long-term revolutionary struggle; major drawback that not organized together, worry of women that cannot take on organized state. issue is to draw together from strength of diversity
- have learned a lot about organization: don't have names for many ways we organize, example of one way things happen: people decide that something is important and call a meeting, then there is an impetus to go on. organize through networks. At this point have learned to validate our experiences enough to go ahead and call a meeting if something is felt to be important

= should we be card-carrying? how can we centralize effectively?
is it useful to have Women vs Nuclear Power groups or should
women join existing groups around these issues?

- accept definition of women's movement as body of women struggling
around issues, organized in collectives...need communications
network so that we can mobilize.

- need practical strategies, need to look at whether organizations
are fighting on important issues. Has been a split between
the left and feminists for real reasons, women often cannot work
in these (left) contexts. Have to explore strengths and weaknesses,
positive that moving (women's movement) into more defined structures.
We need to add leadership and organization, we can bring a lot.
Should look at formal, structured ways of providing leadership
examine where there are strengths and weaknesses. Need to
be clear about what needed now. Some examples: ability to
mobilize; quickness; phone lists...

- need to prioritize where we put our energy

- need strategizing bodies

- need to create a presence for feminists and forms of politics
which characterize our values, united fronts to produce an appearance
of strength

- the question of organizational forms is not whether or not
feminists should speak out against nukes but under what conditions
and from what base

- our organizing to date has been useful but society is changing
and we are facing growing problems, need to reevaluate

- adhocness is good but it does not deal with other important issues,
need ongoing organization for specific purposes

- there is organizing in an ongoing sense, for example the Vancouver
Women's study group, community-building and institutions

- strength of different groups is that difficult to infiltrate,
once begin to organize perceived as threat

- women's movement is like kootchgrass, roots together and strong
under the surface, shooting off in all directions above

- need to discuss the state and to refocus our organizing efforts
against the state, Lenin's What is to be Done gives some of
correct direction: state is responsible for cutbacks, attacks
on abortion rights etc. , need forms of organization which
can take on the state eventually and immediately

- many women involved for many years (ten) been through a lot
of demonstrations etc. a lot of frustration when it breaks
down and not sure what has been accomplished. Women at times
despair as realize the dimensions of the problem and don't
yet know how to take it on. When structures break down (e.g. BCFW)
it becomes up to individuals, cannot go on that way indefinitely

- the state is not everything we must fight, there are multi-nationals for example. Must be careful about borrowing from the left, for example hierarchy.
- the women's movement has existed for ten years and had an effect, on radio etc. hear words like "sexism" and ordinary people struggle over who will do the dishes. Process 2-sided: can lose the values of feminism, feminists subject to real ^{media} attack. Need a clearer presence. What's wrong with the BCFW, we shouldn't talk about it like it's buried, but figure out how to use it
- if want comprehensive organization need for political party women's movement does not fill that function.
- the small group definition has broken down: based on time when available funding, no longer the case, many of older collectives dismantled. Women disoriented because have lost institutions. Need new organizing tools for this period: united fronts, caucuses within multi or single-issue groups, to insure that women's perspectives and needs represented. Women's movement based on relying on own organization cannot lose that as we move out around other issues.
- cannot make self-definition the basis for women being seen as feminists or fighters for women's rights; will cut us off from a different process of women becoming conscious that is happening now...ultimately want women to identify as feminists but will only do so if self-defined feminists identify and support their struggle and are there working beside them, we need roots in working class communities and unions. Many women fighting now because ideas and organizing of women's movement has reached them, but they reject calling themselves feminists because of the media distortions etc.
- need mass propaganda against the KKK, around issues like abortion; agree with focusing organization against the state; need to not pull into a defensive community now but to move out to defend ourselves; need long-term campaigns, united fronts
- need structures where new women can come, problem with small group structure around issues: nowhere for many of us let alone other new women to go for discussion and action
- disagree with idea of caucuses in all groups, women have been negative about single issue organizing yet some very effective. work done on that basis, there are more choices that we have than just single-issue organizing. BCFW can take stand on nukes and support a struggle without organizing it. If BCFW is valuable we should transform it to make it more effective, only scrap it if works against women's interests.

NEXT MEETING to be organized by Daphne and Helen. Will be at 7.30 at Britannia on January 11, 1971. (Sunday)
A discussion will occur on childcare for future meetings as well as the continuation of this meeting.