



women working with immigrant women

348 College St 2nd floor Toronto, Ontario M5T1S4 922-1756

PLANNING & DISCUSSION WORKSHOP

A G E N D A

Friday, June 4, 1982

Session Chairperson - Carolyn Egan

- 1 - 2:30 P.M. - Review of the present objectives and activities of WWIW
- Discussion & Analysis of the relationship between the present objectives and activities

Presenter - Naldi Nomez

2:30 - 2:45 P.M. - BREAK

2:45 - 5.00 P.M. - Development of Policy Positions on 3 Issues:

1. WWIW's relationship to other womens/feminist organizations.

Presenter - Maria Teresa Larrain

2. WWIW's commitment to solidarity work with struggles in immigrant womens countreis of origin. How can we be most effective?

Presenter - Nomi Wall

3. WWIW's role in promoting and assisting the self-determination of immigrant women. Where should our focus be?

- the trade union movement
- unorganized women in the labour force
- women outside the labour force

Presenter - Gladys Klestorny

Saturday, June 5, 1982

Session Chairperson - Ana Bodner

10 A.M. - 12 P.M. = Review and discussion and development of WWIW policy positions related to:

1. Canadian immigration policy

Presenter Alejandra Cumsille

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2. The role & position of immigrant women workers in the Canadian labour market.

Presenter:

3. Education issues - Adult Education, E.S.L. opportunities for immigrant women, language & cultural retention programs, raising the community's awareness of the immigrant womens reality.

Presenter: Maria Antoinetta Smith

4. The mental & physical health needs of immigrant women.

Presenter: Stephania Costa

5. The social service system (UIC, FBA, Gen Welfare, Workers Compensation) and the needs of immigrant women.

Presenter:

12-12:30 P.M. BREAK

12:30 - 3P.M.

Session Chairperson - Diana Abraham

1. Review of WWIW's role as an umbrella organization

Presenter: Maria Teresa Larrain

2. Priorizing our future activities

Presenter: Ana Bodner

3. Review of WWIW's organizational structure

Presenter: Nomi Wall

Other business???????

June 4, 1982, All-Day Meeting of WWIW

From 3 p.m.

Gladys presented the Labour concerns of WWIW

Goal: In the general role of WWIW to promote and assist the self-determination of immigrant women, we ask ourselves where our focus should be - in the trade union movement;

- with unorganized women in the labour force,
- with women outside the labour force,
- in talking about economic issues.

We need to support the trade union movement and raise the attention of the organizers to the special problems facing immigrant women workers. We have been trying to do liaison work in a vacuum. We need to make a formal relationship. The problems which we know need to be worked on by the unionists. We start with dialogue but we also have to take action. It is necessary to work with other structures such as Metro Labour Council. Because we see the problems daily we have to raise them with such people. With unorganized women we need to find a way to work. Many workers do not know which union they belong to. Again we need a formal structure to work on this problem.

With women outside the labour force (including the unemployed) we must find a way to work with them. Labour forgets about you when you stop work. For example, domestics and babysitters or those who work for cash are outside. We are here to talk about this; we can't do it all by ourselves. Marcie: It is important to be linked with MLC. With all organizations we have to be clear about our position and relationship - i.e. We represent WWIW which is for the working class and women.

Naldi: We need to be careful not to align ourselves with any side of the Trade Union Movement. We must be clear that we represent immigrant labour women. We need to find ways for agencies to do direct projects with women in the workplace.

Maria Teresa: Agrees with this but thinks we should not focus only on organized - we have problems of (1) domestics and (2) Farmworkers. We need to have policies of how to work with these workers

Paulina: We have to work with organized labour and not individually. The only way to get inside a union is to go to the meetings and you need to permission to do this. We want to get to the grass-roots and help them to know how to ask questions - to make their own concerns known.

who are outside the labour force. We need to be more informed about their reality and support the workers' internal organizations. We can help with the distribution of information and other forms of education.

Ana: We need to push our own agencies to do educational work within our own agencies.

Marcie: Mutale said that the problem now is legislation in relation to the Canadian Farmworkers. Maybe we should concentrate on this.

We voted on the principle and the majority agreed and a few abstained because they were too new to our group and felt they should understand more before voting.

Solidarity work :

(Presented by Nomi.) This item is important and we have been doing it through the last year and a half. We want to clarify now, why are we doing it.

The work that immigrant women do has 2 aspects, the struggles here and the struggles of our peoples in our countries of origin. The National conference on Immigrant Women, made the links between the realities of immigrant women in our countries and immigrant women here.

IWD in 1981 saw the participation of immigrant women through Women working with Immigrant Women. The workshop was not very successful in terms of barriers that became evident, but the need for starting a dialogue was raised.

IWD in 1982, was much more successful, both in terms of content and participation. It was one of the most attended workshops of the Day. Women from Eritrea, Ireland, El Salvador, Philippines and South America spoke about the struggles of women in their countries and then immigrant women in Canada spoke about their struggles here.

Other solidarity events were the ones mentioned by Maria Teresa when she introduced the issue of women; more recent events were the pot luck supper where women from IWDC, Guatemala, El Salvador, Chile and other Canadian women met to discuss the reality of women in Guatemala and the other countries. Women from Eritrea were also present.

All this shows that there is a need of developing our solidarity in support of the struggles of women and the struggles of liberation of our people. It is not an isolated work; it fits within our work of making links with our reality in our own countries and our reality here.

Discussion :

- Diana : we are raising the consciousness of the public in general with our solidarity work. We have to discuss how can we fit the solidarity work within the overall work of the organization.

- Alejandra : understands that one of the roles of the liaison committee is to develop the solidarity work.

- Maria Teresa : the work that WWIW has developed around the issue of solidarity has been mainly initiated by the different communities who have reached us requesting our support. There is a concern in the community about this issue, the Centres should be able to respond to that concern if it starts at the community level. Ad Hoc Committees have been working on solidarity, our organization has been actively involved in them through some members.

- Ana : has the work of these ad hoc committees been successful?

- Nomi: Yes. The experience with the event of Women in Central America has been excellent. WWIW has been able to put forward our perspective, our organization will be the host of the event and the reality of immigrant women will be a key issue in the event.

- Ana : Because of the above, she thinks that solidarity work should continue and that Ad Hoc Committees should work for this purpose .

- Maria Teresa: (explaining the role of these Ad Hoc Committees) Somebody, any solidarity group approaches us because they have a specific concern, we discuss the issue with them, bring the concern to other groups that might be interested and an Ad Hoc Committee is created, to work specifically in that project. This is what happened for the event on Central America. The Ad Hoc Committee might dissolve itself after the event or can continue depending on the purpose of it and the interest generated. -

- Gladys: solidarity work has been always done by an elite. We have to brake these barriers, most of the canadian people have not been in jail for their political activities and they still do solidarity work. We have to attract more people, both canadian and immigrants from the grass root level.

- Flomena ; whose consciousness are we trying to raise? If we go to the portuguese people and talk to them about latinamerica, they will not understand.

- Stephania ; we also have to consider the fact that solidarity work becomes impossible with certain communities whose position we wouldn't support. Such is the case of many italians for example who are facists. We wouldn't be interested in doing solidarity work with them. In other words we cannot assume that all of the people that we serve are interested in developing solidarity work.

- Maria Teresa; we have to start from the reality that we are in , from the issues that concern immigrants and canadians here. If we want to raise consciousness of people who is not aware, that is what we have to do. If we want to convert the already converted, keep doing the kind of solidarity work that as Gladys said is elitist.. Starting from our reality here, discussing the role of imperialism which pushes us out of our countries of origin, and finding the similarities with canadian workers.

- Nomi : solidarity work is then a support work from the part of WWIW to the already existing committees and groups that work in this issue.

Our position : WWIW supports the struggles of our peoples for their liberation ; it also supports the specific struggles of women in our countries of origin.

The solidarity work is part of the struggles of immigrant women as we cannot separate our past from our present. Also, a victory or

a defeat for the working class in our countries of origin, will have an impact in the victory or defeat of workers in Canada.

- WWIW will not initiate the work around the solidarity issue, but will respond to it and support the work initiated by different solidarity groups and committees. However,

- WWIW because of being a women's organization, will initiate events, educationals, workshops, etc around the issue of struggles of women, both in our countries of origin and here in Canada.

- WWIW will also initiate work around issues that concern the grass root level here in Canada; issues such as education, labour, etc. Then links can be made with other realities, but in order to understand other struggles we have to raise consciousness about our own reality here.

- It is essential that we understand the link of our exploitation as part of the working class here (immigrant women who belong to the working class or who identify with it) to the struggles of our peoples. This is a basic starting point for consciousness raising.

WOMEN

Work that we have done on Women-- (Maria Teresa)

- participation on International Women's Day 1981- We did not participate too much in the general preparation of the event, but we organized a workshop on solidarity with women from southafrica, latinamerica and Central America. It was a pannel followed by an open discussion with mostly canadian women.- The workshop was evaluated as a beginning of braking barriers with canadian women. Two very distinct positions on the issue of women were defined and both parties were left with a feeling of not being understood by the other party. However, it was a very useful process as at the very least serve the purposes of movilizing immigrant women, bringing up the issue of third world women's struggles and opening the ground for furhther discussion.

- educational on immigrant women for IWDC, good discussion, good dialogue. Participated Stephania, Alejandra, Ana and Maria Teresa.

- evening with Domitila in conjunction with Oxfam, Lawg, IWDC and WWIW It was a suoses, both in terms of attendance and content. Again, there were some problems among some canadian women in understanding the position that certain (or the mayority) of third world women have around the issue of women's liberation. Some canadian women tried to apply their own pattern ~~to~~ the ways of how women's struggles should occur in our countries of origin, failing to understand the differences.

- evening with Cecilia Gomez with IWDC. Informal, very friendly, better links were created.

- picket of solidarity with women from Irwin Toys.

- participation in several conferences and workshops on women and labour, women and health, etc. In each opportunity that we have, we bring our prospective as immigrant women and third world countrie's women/

Troughout the whole year WWIW has been developing a position on women. ~~from our point of view~~. We have participated in discussions and public forums and we want to discuss now what is that position that we have been bringing forward.

In 1981 we approached IWDC scared and with many prejudices. However we realized all feminists in Canada are not Bourgeois feminists and that there is common ground where we can work together. What do we feel about the Canadian Women's movement? What are we fighting for? What are our specific demands? What is the role of Canadians in our organization?

Discussion:

→ We must examine our oppression from a class perspective. We must also incorporate sex and race into our analysis. Working class immigrant women usually do not speak english, this is an important difference from Canadian women. Socialist feminists and sole support mothers are not bourgeois feminists.

- Immigrant women have different priorities than working class ^{Canadian} women. They don't feel they belong here, and have few contacts which lead to good job opportunities. How much status do immigrant women actually have? It was suggested that segregation is no answer.

The reality of racism was brought forward. It was stated that Canadian women fear immigrant women and vice versa. Many immigrant women agree with liberation however feel that active feminists are 'crazy' women. Many don't see any similarity between themselves and working class Canadian women. The division of white and third world women at OISE was mentioned as a case in point. All third world women there went to the third world caucus. The fear becomes more pronounced as the economic crisis heightens. White women want to tell us how to do things, they are very patronizing in many cases. We feel very patronized and want to ^{be} looked at as equals.

OUR POSITION :

- Class struggle and women's liberation struggles are both equally important. We cannot postpone our struggles as women and wait for the advent of revolution to liberate us, because that will not happen unless we start to make changes today in the society.

- Our struggles as immigrant women and as Third World Women are different from Canadian women and from working class Canadian women, but there are similarities and we have to work together around those common issues.

- Usually progressive men tell us that struggles of women are anti workers, they do it just because they feel threatened, because they would have to give up certain privileges so that we could be equals. They don't want to do it and they just use the excuse of "us becoming" Canadianized and us being "feminists" as if being a feminist was a sin. Many immigrant women

work in mixed organizations with men; we have to start to fight against these kind of prejudices within our own organizations.

- WWIW believes it is essential to have an autonomous immigrant women movement within the Canadian women's movement. There are common issues in our oppression as women, but immigrant women and third world women face a particular kind of oppression and we need our political autonomy. Only by recognizing the particularity of our struggles will real unity be achieved.