

MEETING held at CRS Warehouse. 8 February 1981. Strategies

The meeting began around 8:00pm, after some delay about opening the doors.

PRESENT: Maggie T, Maureen F, Daphne M, Prabha K, Nancy J, Frances W, Janet S, Beth, Anna D, Drena, Marion P, Helen M, Sara D.

Nancy volunteered to chair the meeting. The TWU occupation of the BCMI buildings and what might be done to support them, and Announcements were discussed to the end of the agenda, and it was agreed that, because we were a little short of time, we would cut discussion to one hour.

Maggie T The agenda committee decided to focus on the question of leadership for this meeting. We picked out three people who represent different points of view on leadership (as expressed in the minutes of the last meeting), we asked them for a brief presentation for this meeting. They are Janet, Prabha and Drena.

Prabha Leadership provides political and ideological direction. For me there are three areas for discussion: 1) Are we trying to control the whole women's movement; 2) are we trying to form a socialist group; 3) are we trying to build a front of women to link workers to the women's movement? As examples I selected two groups of socialist feminists: IWDC in Toronto, and the Women's Front in Mexico City. I asked Maureen F to speak about IWDC.

Maureen F IWDC began in 1977, and kept going after that IWD. It is still going and has its own identity. After IWD '78, we went into a period of intense self-examination, from questions such as we are doing with here. We felt squeezed between two positions. 1) Women in movement for decades, with mature and developed positions, and 2) berating ourselves constantly for not drawing in new women. Some of us fell between the two groups. The result was concerning ourselves with the women's liberation movement, when we weren't the women's liberation movement, we were a 'critic' of it. It became clear through an analysis of what we did. We made a group that we made ourselves a formalized group, with a set membership, and a sense of unity. The only thing which passed was the basis of unity. We were ideologically socialist, but anti-capitalist. We were not willing to call ourselves socialists, but were willing to call ourselves anti-capitalist. This enabled, with our agreement, to put aside the larger concerns on the unity of the women's movement. It meant we could be very active and visible, and do good educational. The group is growing. It is one way to solve the problem of unity of the women's movement - then we would consolidate one current.

Prabha On the women's front in Mexico. These were identified for me as active since the early 70's. There were three groups the MLM (movement for the liberation of women), a reformist group, and other women's groups which formed a coalition around abortion. The Church actively and publicly opposed them. But the consciousness raising was successful. The group is socialist, very active and publishes a magazine with 10,000 circulation. In 1979 the MLM, the left wing and the unions formed a coalition which created unity. The National Organization of Women dropped right out. The Coalition today is made up of the PCM (Mexican CP), the PRT and MLM, with other groups. This has created a working relationship between feminists and the left. We envision an autonomous women's movement, and their function has been to make clear alliances.

Janet S I tried to answer the questions on the agenda. For the first one I first had to ask what is the women's movement? Is it fighting sexism and patriarchy or smashing the state? I see the women's movement as fighting sexism and patriarchy - in a movement stage, it is a movement, with different organizational forms and goals. There is

an emphasis on non-hierarchical ways of organization, and even with these problems, going to more rigid forms won't solve them. We tend to think that non-hierarchical ways are not successful, because we underestimate our efforts. We legitimize methods of the left, because they look better on paper. In that regard, there is a problem with the title of this group, it should be Strategies for Socialist Feminists (this refers to the announcement which read 'Strategies for the Women's Movement'). I figured I shouldn't be here because I don't want to divert the discussion. I don't define myself as a socialist feminist. I have some problems with people who people think leadership is for. I favour non-hierarchical ways to do things in groups which agree. The leadership of people who haven't consented to be led can't be organized, it comes from various sources. The Mandate comes from a group, not for people who haven't asked to be led. Accountability is based on good will and a sense of common struggle, this is not to be underestimated. I have a traditionalist way of seeing the women's movement. I object to identifying the socialist feminists with or as the women's movement.

Drena I also had problems with answering the questions. (1) More fighters are needed for women's immediate demands. Leadership needs to reach out and mobilize around immediate demands women have. Forms of organization should allow central leadership with a mandate and of course democracy. Mass organizations of women fighting, or BCFW, should allow the widest possible political debate around demands. Should be able to argue strategic difference to grow. Mass organizations should not shut out undecided women by its basis of unity. Collectives (such as IWDC and Rape Relief) may do that. ~~XX~~. Ultimately the women's movement needs communist leadership, but it doesn't come from the communist taking leadership now. They have to be involved in the struggles, in women's movement. There are good examples of IS past practice in Popo's paper. We want to take part in what we see as the most important struggles. We want to take part in and promote the widest possible debates, so that women can see that socialist revolution is what's needed for liberation. I think we need to isolate the questions for debate: 1) BCFW, is it the kind of organization we need for leadership, should it be changed, stay the same or let die. This answer will make a difference for where our energy goes. (2) Weith collectives with internal integrity (Rape Relief, CCCA, or Working Women Unite) have clear goals and forms of organization, there is then the question of accountability, how do you build unity and maintain integrity. 3) a particular concern of mine. I am disturbed by the use of the term 'the women's movement and the left'. I think they're apples and oranges, what's the left, a whole range of groups. The women's movement is a mass ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ organization, broad and undefined, containing many organizational forms. Has within it all debates around all the long term political questions. (I think Drena stopped here because her time was up).

We moved on to discussion here.

Daphne (to Janet) Do you feel different about the phrase anti-capitalist, as opposed to socialist feminist? I'd like to see 'anti-capitalist' used, because I think 'socialist feminist' is turning people away from the debates. What you said about leadership sounds abstract to me. My question for me - what's going on with BCTel. There are thousands of people on strike in BC, I'd like to see an organized way to support these strikes. How do we support these things? IWDC could go out and do that. In the direction I'd like to see to these debates.

Marion I agree with Daphne. We can't provide leadership to the women's movement, it would mean 20 more meetings each week. The question of a current and a coalition not separate. A current (that is a self-organization) participates in coalitions. Leadership means ability to respond. As an individual I could respond, but I'm frustrated, we don't have the ability to initiate, we need a feminist presence. The whole question of leadership

ship is abstract. We have to talk about tasks, 1) leadership in working with ourselves, and 2) working in coalitions. Janet's definition of the women's movement is interesting. Women at work who don't call themselves feminists would be included, I think that what we call the movement is inaccessible to a whole range of women.

Janet I agree with Daphne. I wanted to be clear. I do think people at work are fighting sexism because there is a women's movement. Socialist feminists can respond in unity; women's movement can't.

Helen The description of IWDC sounds like what I want. The question is, in terms of what's happening in Vancouver, how do we get it going?

Maureen There are differences. It was an on-going group. The alliance with labour and the Ontario Federation of Labour are different there. I see value in women who share anti-capitalist feminist framework putting together group as feminists. We can't romanticize IWDC. Frustration in being reactive, there is a problem servicing the struggle, and trying at the same time, not to lose sight of our own struggle.

Drena (to Marion) Do you think the workers movement is only the CLC or the BCFed?

Marion Of course not. It is all the independents and the unorganized too.

Drena I think that it's the same in the women's movement. People who are moving, organized and unorganized. There is an organized women's movement as there is an organized labour movement. I think it is dangerous to see 'only those in the know' as the women's movement. It is arrogant. (here are my notes verbatim - I don't know what they mean) IWDC - model here - in larger group not only socialist feminist.

(Then to Prabha) Does Working Women Unite satisfy all your needs for political work? (Prabha is not a member anymore, so Marion answered)

Marion Yes, the group functions, but it has no basis of unity. It was sporadic support for Kenworth strike, and we are doing a 1/2 day workshop on VDT's. But it doesn't meet the need for a socialist-feminist current in Vancouver. It is structureless, it doesn't have the structure to satisfy those needs.

Sara I missed the presentations. Some of what I understand about IWDC is that it was successful because it came out of an upsurge, the practice of women working together on several struggles. I don't know if that's the case in B.C. There's been the Kenworth and AUCE strikes. Maybe now going into the time when can see work to be done in relation to strikes, and anti-fascism. Maybe what will now happen is that women will pull together around struggles. We have to drop some level of sectarianism to do that. We have to agree to ~~xxxxxxx~~ support on practical basis. We need to do the practice before getting caught in a discussion of strategy. To me leadership means making leaps, showing connections between struggles, abortion and sexuality and the family. Some group has to provide leadership analysis. An organized current would parallel the left groups, people would reach to it in the same way, there would be the same attraction/repulsion, etc. Maybe would be more sensitive to the way the left has functioned.

Anna D I still don't understand how we got from leadership and strategies for BC to how to found a socialist feminist tendency, current or whatever. On the question of leadership, I am in WWU, and before that in groups looking at the question of how to get things moving for a women's revolution. There were always left organizations who would challenge women's right to define the ~~xxxxxx~~ questions of women's liberation. In WWU, a number of women attracted to the self given mandate, as soon as we got to a positive declaration of unity, we said we had an ~~xxx~~ analysis. Feminists had legitimate concerns that ~~xx~~ we could become another kind of left club. So that is why there is no articulated basis of unity. I agree with Janet that women's movement is all those who are fighting back, I don't think we should narrow it

4
selves down to getting together a socialist feminist platform. It pays to know what you can get from, say the NDP caucus, if you are a socialist feminist group. You can work out how to present your tendency's position, How do you loose the other people? We don't have too much credibility with the others, are not socialist.

Helen I think apples and oranges analysis is dangerous. It isn't a question of apples and oranges, but has become one, because of the 'vanguard' organizations are separate from the women's movement. Vanguard organizations see themselves as providing leadership in mass organizations. In my experience, that wasn't happening, it was sort of "line". What's positive about IS at the moment, is that the group is open to the women's movement. If that had happened five years ago, a lot of current problems would be here. The right is really well organized, and the women's movement and the left is fragmented. There is a need to respond, with some kind of clarity about the kinks there are and what needs to be done. I don't see any left group which can do this. For me that's necessity behind creating a clear tendency in the women's movement to respond and provide leadership. That doesn't mean we won't have troubles with other women. I feel comfortable with the term socialist feminist. But it seems like 'anti-capitalist anti-imperialist' might not exclude people, and so might use that term.

It's 9:25, some discussion ensues about how to proceed. We move on to 'where do we go from here?'

Sara I'd like to see general discussion continue, with a focus on what's actually happening in BC, a move from the macro to the reality. What's the most important work for anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist feminists to be doing. I'd like to see the next discussion with that in mind. I think the meeting should be sooner than 1 month away, and ~~with~~ with well prepared discussions. The questions of organization have to flow from the tasks. I don't, by the way, think that the left has always been destructive in the women's movement.

Daphne My proposal is similar to Sara's. I don't want to see us meet without a concrete task.

Maureen agrees with the last couple of speakers and ~~is~~ passes

Drena What I want to say is a bit off topic, about the role of our organization in this debate. I want to fight for women's liberation and for socialism. I don't find it a problem of how to unite with people on some issues. I understand with individuals, but not with a group of women coming together to do that. People's different points of view don't work out. I want to work ~~xxxxxx~~ actively around daycare in BC. The discussion in this group has often been around how to bring people together and we don't know what we want to do. For the record, our organization has gone through a big struggle to rectify our line on women, we have the correct programme, but we have never applied it. We have come to learn we have a lot to learn from the mass organizations. But we have points of view, for example, we think what Rape Relief is doing is terrific, and we say so when we have the opportunity.

Nancy To go back to Sara's suggestion, are there specific issues? How to make use of the next meeting?

Sara Can we agree on the most important work to do? 1) What's most important in terms of work, and 2) how to do it. We don't need to find one central issue, I think there's three or four, but we could agree on one focus.

1. TWU strike, CUPE
2. abortion
3. anti-fascist work.

Daphne Anti-fascist includes the others, might be easier to come to an agreement on that focus. It is also what I want to do.

Janet The more specific the better, people ~~xx~~ say 'how can we do our work?' "Work", what is it?

Frances I said something here about making a decision about the meeting giving an answer to 'where to go from here' and something while ~~xxxx~~ we're at it.

Sara We ~~we~~ need discussion about how feminists can do union work. Perhaps 2 people could work up union support, and 2 anti- work, and not only what work should be done, but some suggestions about how it could be done.

Janet Any announcement should say 'anti-capitalist' feminist, to make clear you're not addressing the entire women's movement.

Drena We need to make it most open, all women may wish to join an organization. We shouldn't be sectarian.

Maureen It is interesting that the major opposition to the formation of the IWDC was from the women in the ~~xxxx~~ organized left.

Maggie I am concerned because we are ~~f~~ running out of time. I like Sara's proposal for the next meeting is a good one. I like the idea. I want to hear other responses.

Helen Whatever we decide, one person should organize the meeting.

Nancy How can the two proposed areas be handled?

Marion and Sara - union support (Sara the question of which women to include should be taken up in the question of how to do the work).

Marion Could we begin the next meeting with a longer report on the situation?

Maureen It's just not the same there as here, not too useful.

Helen I'm involved in a group organizing a meeting about the relationship between feminism and racism now. I'm not sure what the connection would be. BCOFR. I have some ideas about what is going on and I'd be willing to do that report.

Helen and Daphne - anti-fascist work.

The next meeting is to be ~~xxx~~ held 1 March 1981, at the CRS Warehouse at 1100 14th St. Nancy Jackson will organize that meeting. The announcement of the meeting will consist of an announcement, copies of minutes from three previous meetings, and agenda being sent to the 30 or so women on the list from the first meeting. A collection was taken ~~x~~ for stamps.

Announcements. The TWU does not yet want a mass picket. Marion made several proposals about what we might do, a phone list was taken so that we could be contacted if something was needed. Sara mentioned that she and other women ~~xxxxxxx~~ had spent part of ~~the~~ the day making a video tape ~~ix~~ inside the ~~CRS~~ building. Drena announced the IWD meetings on Wednesdays at 7:30 at CRS and that the Ridge is preparing to show ~~D~~ressed to Kill, 18,19 February at ~~8~~ 7:30. Drena will be calling Rape Relief asking them to organize pickets. 11 April Working Women unite will do their $\frac{1}{2}$ day workshop on VDT's some. 14 March a feminist socialist from R USSR will be speaking at Britannia.

Drena will bring some copies of the journal Proletarian Unity to the next meeting (\$2 each) There ~~ix~~ are interviews with members of the IWDC in this issue which may be interesting given the above discussion.

These minutes are not intended to be a verbatim record of this meeting, but I hope I have reasonably presented what women said. If there are differences please make them known at the next meeting.

fw