

REPORT ON THE AGM OF THE NATIONAL ACTION COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

JUNE 14-17, OTTAWA 1991
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This report is divided into two sections: a brief summary of the major events and issues; and implications for OCUFA SW.

Conference: Friday June 14

The theme of this conference was 'Solidarity and Diversity'; it had an educational format.

Speakers on the Opening Panel were Monique Simard (CSN), Nancy Riche (CLC), Rianna Erasmus (NAC Aboriginal Women's Committee), Eunadie Johnson (National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women) and Judy Rebick (president, NAC).

Session on Women and Work

This session was not very useful; about 15 women reported on what their particular groups were doing (providing service, organizing the unorganized etc).

Session on the Constitution

This session was extremely interesting.

Part One: chaired by Doris Anderson; speakers Shelagh Day (editor of the Human Rights Reporter and first pres of LEAF) and Salome Loucas (Women Working with Immigrant Women);

Part Two: chaired by Judy Darcy (CUPE); speakers Monique Simard (CSN) and Gail Stacey Moore (Native Women's Association).

The CLC videotaped the session so that the tapes would be available for educationals.

*What was most striking about this day was the presence of the labour movement and their strong endorsement of the women's movement. In fact, many of them openly credited the women's movement and feminism for key changes in the trade union movement.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. The Constitutional Crisis

See attached resolutions which were passed by the AGM.

These resolutions represent a major breakthrough for NAC both in their substance and in their reflection of an organizational consensus on how to deal with the constitution. A very political discussion of these resolutions occurred on the floor of the convention. These positions also represent a significant alternative to what is currently being argued by both the Liberals and the NDP. It was interesting at the lobby to watch Judy Rebick debate Jean Chretien on this issue!

2. Affirmative Action

The major constitutional debate was about the proposal to designate as affirmative action positions for immigrant women of colour, women of colour, disabled women and aboriginal women. the four member-at-large positions and one of the VPs.

There was no resistance to this motion. In fact, these constituencies were quite well-represented and well-organized. It is interesting to note that two women of colour and one aboriginal woman who is disabled were elected as members-at-large. This occurred before the implementation of these new procedures.

Despite the support for this motion, it caused controversy in another way: as a result of the exclusion of two other marginalized groups who were not included -- Francophones and lesbians. Some Francophones were especially disappointed that the affirmative action resolution did not include them. They tried to move their inclusion from the floor and this was eventually defeated. Some bad feeling developed because Judy Rebick and some of the women of colour tried to argue that Francophones did not need affirmative action. Later the Francophone women returned this issue to the floor and a motion was moved to support their endeavors for an affirmative action position for next year. I was quite struck by the absence of strong Francophone and Quebecois representation and certainly supported them vigorously.

The Lesbian Caucus also discussed whether to suggest their inclusion in this motion and decided not to go this route -- a good decision given what happened with the Francophone attempt. Instead they presented an excellent 'affirming statement' (see attached) on Saturday morning asking that the conference and NAC live up to its commitment to represent lesbian concerns. As a result, the issues of lesbians were raised frequently in interventions and speeches -- a welcome change after Friday when the 'L word' was never mentioned once.

I think the only serious political mistake in the planning of this conference was that the NAC executive brought forward the affirmative action constitutional change without anticipating the legitimate concerns of lesbians and Francophones.

3. Campaigns

NAC committed itself to two campaigns: one on 'the '52% solution' and the second on violence against women. A third campaign on the future of women's work is in the planning stages (and awaiting funding). See attached handouts on the campaigns.

4. The Nac Lobby

This was an interesting experience. It is clear that the women's movement and NAC in particular is gaining credibility. Jean Chretien came with at least 20 Cabinet ministers as did Audrey McLaughlin. The Tories refused to participate; as a result more unconventional measures were taken to try to speak with them. We 'stormed' a meeting of the gun control committee which Kim Campbell was attending and marched on Parliament Hill to find Mulroney in the house. Not surprisingly, the Mounties closed the doors of the Parliament Building to keep us out. This provoked much door banging and shouts to 'let us in' and good political speech making. A fitting ending to a very political weekend.