

MARCH 23-24 1974

This is a report of what went on rather than an evaluation/interpretation of discussions although there's obviously a certain amount of pre-selection in what I wrote down.

Purpose of Conference: to discuss the 4 demands of the women's movement and to decide whether they were still relevant and central issues around which to organize.

Organisation of conference: divided into workshops. On Saturday there were: 24 hr series, equal pay, free contraception and abortion, equal education. Then a plenary session and report backs. On Sunday: various papers were discussed in the morning then in the afternoon report backs, general information exchange and voting.

Papers now in Woburn Hill:

Nottingham W.L.	Prices and economic situation
"	Why the 4 demands?
East London Big Flame	Politics of autonomy
Ruth Widmore	Reform, Reformism and revolution
Papers from 2nd women and socialism conference	
Womens Abortion and Contraception Campaign literature	
IMG women, Harrow	Notes on SPUC

General points: Because the papers weren't circulated in advance it made serious/coherent discussion of some issues difficult. On Sat there was no knowing exactly what each workshop was discussing. This meant that discussion was patchy and those who did know what was going on had an obvious advantage in pushing their points. Although there weren't the usual cries that organisations were 'taking over' the conference, this was to some extent going on, but in a more subtle way; and there was little heated theoretical disagreement between groups except over question of Trades Unions and Ireland.

Saturday am: Abortion and contraception workshop on SPUC (see pink duplicated sheet produced).

Harrow women (IMG) reported on plans for large (enormous?) SPUC demo on April 28th Hyde Park 2.0pm (the day the abortion act was passed) called 'White flower rally'. Want national ad hoc committee to form counter demo set up - and for demo to form up at 1.0 prompt in Hyde park. SOUC share their stewards with National Front; and 2 members of SPUC executive are NF members; one married to NF member. The NUS womens committee are putting anti-demo as priority at their meeting Liverpool April 1st.

SPUC in London works with Life - get a lot of kids from RC schools, churches, Catholic clubs. Life tries to be grass roots whereas SPUC national - but share members on each executive. Life claim to be "helping" young girls keep their kids when pregnant - and use them as unpaid domestic labour. To counteract propaganda, emphasis should not focus on availability of contraception/abortion as on RIGHT TO CHOOSE. General tendency at moment is for British Medical Association and Health Education Council to be pushing info on contraception - so must be part of capitalism's plan. Other argument was that we shouldn't emphasise choice as this is consumerism - we want CONTROL of our bodies and of what kind of contraception.

Saturday pm: Equal pay

This was mainly a discussion of London Trades Council Working Women's Charter (copy in Woburn Hill) which LTC passed last week. Recommended to use LTC leaflet in other LJ and TU - call convenor conferences to pass it. Although demands are not new, good that LTC doing something.

There was a lot of disagreement - both because LTC now dissolved by TUC, no one knew who produced leaflet, TC different to TUs. And a more serious but largely ignored point was whether women wanted to concentrate on TU or go directly

CONTACTS ADDRESSE for anti SPUC coord. is Sue Spilling, 54 Pinner Rd., Harrow, Mdx. tel. 01 863.2294. She'd like details of local SPUC org., relationship to RC schools, etc.

to women to work with them. And only 1 in 4 working women in TUs - apart from all one's criticisms of bureaucracy/elites/male dominated structures. This was taken up in plenary sessions but no decision until Sunday's session.

Plenary Report from 24 hr nursery groups: directly/structurally related to other 4 demands. Staff in nurseries should be well paid. question of community control - tended to lead to middle class domination.

- problem of control of facilities if funded by local authority
- what is the 'community'?

Concept of 24 hr nurseries as a demand - confusion @ does this mean 'baby factories' with kids forced to stay for 24 hours non-stop? If this is to remain a demand it must be clarified and educational/social side of nurseries for the kids to be raised.

Problem of national info network for women involved in campaign locally.

Equal education report back: 3 main areas

* Marxist analysis of base-superstructure. Families/schools reproducing labour power on day to day basis. Importance of school for capital in disciplining kids. Ideological function of sexist school books/curricula.

* to demand for equal opportunity viable. Have to break down position of

- women as housewives and workers

- sexist content of education

- barriers between home and school (women's caucus in NUT to deal with job opportunity and sexism)

- proposals from Arsenal group - press for compulsory Day Release and changing course of Further Education. Producing pamphlet: contact Arsenal Women's Group, 80 Highbury Hill N.5.

Must bear in mind that in Russia 'Womens work' is engineering and medicine.

Definitions therefore depend on material base of particular society and particular conjuncture.

Sunday: politics of Autonomy - E. London Big Flame

Nottingham womens group on prices.

ELBF etc. Autonomy asserts our needs against the bosses. Eat more, work less. When you identify as a worker not as a person you fit into needs of capitalism not yourself. Hence if you work through unions this leads to integration and acceptance of this definition of worker. Equally, disagree with wages for housework as this, be demanding wage, defines you in capitalism's terms.

Nottingham: felt 4 demands therefore not relating to womens needs now - and floating above political reality. Why no relation between working class women and Womens Liberation Movement? Hence discussion of prices/inflation and how this makes more work for women - shopping around - food takes longer. Contacted TUs and talked at branch meetings etc. started at TU rally on how women are affected by the crises. Street picket on Marks and Spencer when they put up prices. Planned to picket shops on estates, but not to get women organising unless out shopping anyway - but then they're not necessarily free to act.

Held public meeting - cross-section from National Housewives Association to Jean Jepson. 50 came to this after 3 with no one.

Better to talk to women when shopping than having formal meetings. Can point out how supermarkets aren't designed for people but profits.

If get TU support demand that they organise creche - disagreement. Felt should keep things small and not put onus on TUs but on ourselves.

Organising around prices perhaps reinforces womens traditional role. Yet Red Spot Market in West London did a lot to break down isolation / prejudices of women in tower blocks to one another and meant that they actually MET. So although can't affect prices it's analagous to consciousness, raising ~~up~~ up.

- and we musn't forget that this was what brought the women's movement together. Therefore meetings must be small and informal

Nottingham are trying to contact shop workers etc. to stop marking up prices, hoarding - difficult due to nature of shop workers position - rapid turnover, casual, low pay, little unionisation.

During Miners strike 1972, in a smallish mining village - Calverton - the

women forced shop keepers to freeze prices, extend credit etc. (However structural situation in small close knit community with small shop keepers totally dependent on locality for custom very different to urban areas with large national/multi-national chain food stores)
Crucial question for any organisation is 'what point do women relate to power structure? Once this is located, the demands should focus on this strength/capital's weakness.

For women: rent and electricity strikes. Because of high unemployment it was traditionally women who worked - providing for family. As men interned more women involved. Kids interned over 10, and they're used to force mothers to give information. What does this mean for family structure - usual relations between parents and kids, men and women?

Sunday afternoon: Plenary session

Discussion on 4 demands: (Free contraception and abortion on demand, free 24 hr nurseries, ~~and~~ equal education opportunities equal pay) (typists addition - hope that's right - and they were formulated at one of the first national Womens Liberation Conferences in 1972, I think)

Why were they chosen and what use are they now? What have they achieved; and how has that either changed the political scene; or how has that changed the relevance of demands now?

Have the demands held back the women's movement? How relevant are they to women in struggle - Derry, Tower Hill, Nottingham, etc.

There is no real perspective behind the demands - and the concept of 'equality' to men who are in a shitty situation too is not particularly revolutionary. Must try to alter demands so that they are more flexible with our NEEDS at any time.

Should socialist women organise round other issues and leave 4 demands to stand as fixed point of reference. How influential are the 4 demands? They aren't adequate for delineating areas of struggle - and shouldn't necessarily be. Need workshops on:

* Who are we making demands to? Who are our allies; who our enemies? NUS? Union? Role of women in unions?

* no analysis of changing circumstances - i.e. different strategy for campaigning for equal pay under Tory and Labour governments. There's no analysis of how women fit into capital's plans for 1974 over equal pay, contraception, nurseries etc. How far are demands laying women open to co-option/integration as reserve labour pool to push down wages; and for educated women to provide the 'human face' of capitalism in management etc.? On long term, capitalism could recoup its losses over equal pay etc.

Specific proposals:

1) That this conference supports the Working Women's Charter and will use it to get local TWs and TCs to call conferences and discussions about it, vote on it and work with it.

This motion was carried - and the attempts to have a thorough discussion of relationship to unions did not take place.

2) Recommendation that more coherent national organisation be set up. Referred to Coventry April 20th.

3) That the 4 demands be rediscussed at Edinburgh conference with the position of Women and Socialism

4) That this conference supports the Price sisters and their demand for political status, and those of other Irish prisoners. That this conf. calls for withdrawal of troops from N Ireland, and self determination for Irish people.

There was chaos after this and I left before it was decided whether to vote on the motion or not.