

Report from the womens meeting of the Newsletter groups...London, 10th March

This is the notes of a discussion between women delegates from the newsletter groups. The meeting took place on the 10th March in London to discuss setting up a womens newspaper and also the possibility of a joint intervention in the Women and Socialism conference on the 24th March. These notes were taken by two women - one from West London and one from Liverpool and it wasn't decided at the meeting to circulate minutes, so we hope the initiative to write up the discussion for the newsletter isn't resented by other women. We want to stress that what we say is bound to be biased - the minutes weren't taken verbatim - and misses out parts of the discussion. Though incomplete, we hope it's useful.

Present at the meeting were women from Hackney, East London Big Flame, the West London Newsletter Group, Merseyside Big Flame, and Bristol.

Introduction

At the womens meeting during the last newsletter (N/L) conference, we began talking about identifying ourselves politically in relation to the women's movement. We discussed using the women's Libertarian Network Newsheet as a means of developing and sharing our ideas and practice. But we felt that the circulation of this was limited and not worth putting alot of effort into. Instead we felt that there was a need in the women's movement for a readable agitational paperwe called a delegate meeting to discuss this after we'd referred back to our groups.

The question of a newspaper

Hackney: we should look into using existing papers, for e.g. Peoples News Service. And there should be more in the N/L on women - but the divisions aren't just between men and women, for e.g. women squatting is also housing struggle

West London: and articles which aren't about women aren't about men.

Liverpool: there's no point in the N/L if women don't write in it

Hackney: but at the moment there's no development of women's consciousness through the N/L.

W.L.: I disagree - articles on the Red Market and Tower Hill did throw up new things and discussions on women are different now from when the N/L started.

E.L.: women's consciousness got dropped in the mixed N/L because we were making assumptions - e.g. we went recently to Nottingham and found that women there who are in the N/L seemed diffident about what they were doing - working in a women's factory, around prices and in a health group. They didn't see it as important to write about what was happening.

Hackney: This could be because there doesn't seem to be anything to write for immediately - a womens news service could fulfill this function.

W.L.: But there's lots of reasons why women don't write up the stuff they do. We found writing about the Red Market made us find out more and this was useful.

Autonomy and practice

Hackney: we must understand how much of women's autonomy has been lost through the N/L conferences - like in the last one the general discussion we were to have had got lost in the hassle over men's groups. What we're doing is more than 'autonomous women's struggle' - it's carrying over our understanding of, for example the family, into the struggles of working class women over for e.g., squatting. How you organise is important in breaking down accepted ideas about the family - e.g. sharing shopping, child minding, housework, Living collectively, as many of us do, isn't the only alternative to the family.

W.L.: Shopping together etc. could begin to break down the isolation of women - isolation being a problem of repression.

L'pool: But the woman has to go back to challenge 'her' man individually. Many women won't get involved in the hassles of other women's marriages. In Tower Hill we've talked about the problems of the nuclear family, but the family gives alot of people support and this makes it difficult to challenge in personal way.

Activity on Tower Hill involves men as well as women

E.L.: men's involvement in community struggles means they have to challenge work e.g. refusing to do overtime so they can go on demos. etc. and because of the effect overtime has on women.

Bristol: but overtime can be an escape for men away from the home.

W.L.: Maybe we should see it in terms of what we want - the relationship between free individuals - men and women seeing that they are both fighting the system but recognising different things in each other.

Hackney: But this is assuming that the family is still intact. In Milton Keynes (new town just outside north London) many families are splitting, but there's nowhere for women to go. They're demanding housing for women alone with kids. We have to try and work out what happens in families we're organising with. In the Claimants Union husbands and wives were fighting each other - but we didn't begin to resolve that - except some women threatened to beat a husband up for beating his wife.

Theory, Pamphlets, Journal.

Hackney: We have to work out how to approach problems in theoretical document

E.L. : We could take a particular issue like sexuality and really go into it.

L'pool: We could produce pamphlets on what we're doing - they would be a way of going wider than the newsletter.

W.L.: We need to generalise more, to work out analytically what we're doing and to include some of the women we are organising with in producing written stuff.

L'pool: But this shouldn't be confined to womens papers - it should happen in the papers we're producing with men as well.

E.L. : It would be good if we could produce a journal like women's Own (circ. 11mill costs 7p) We should do more writing from talking to people - transcripts of conversations with people (like the T. Hill ones) because they are much easier to read.

Newsletter

Should we make it more fully available?

W.L. : I don't think everything we write should necessarily be easily readable by everyone. We need theoretical clarity which involves a level of political understanding - its not just a question of language. There is uneven devt. and the newsletter can perform this function.

E.L. The newsletter gets out of date very quickly. We need a journal that could serve more general interests. I'm not thinking about repressed feelings of sexuality - we're not writing about this but we should because its affecting and changing us all the time. We could use a journal for this kind of thing. because it wouldn't be so transitory.

Hackney: Red Rag could be used for that.

E.L. : ...or the new theoretical journal, though the rest of the contents might be too heavy and would put off women who we'd like to read our stuff.

Hackney: Red Rag has a wide circulaⁿ which we should use.

W.L. : But we'd have to make clear certain assumptions if we wrote for Red Rag or Spare Rib. And we must make it clear where articles have come from - an introduction about the group; whose written the article - its organisation and history. We should identify the political ideas, name them if we had a name.

Hackney: Then for news we should use Peoples News Service (PNS) there's so much we must miss.

E.L. : We should really push the next N/1 conference to use PNS.

Separate Women's meetings in Newsletter groups?

- E.L. : We must keep the amount of trailing round the country at weekends down.-
We'll have to meet for a while at the conferences.
- W.L. : We could start early on Saturday - we must have an agenda - at present its
too woffly.
- L'pocl: What should we be discussing that is specific to women, that all women should
discouss? Its shitty when the separation of women and men is forced on people
at conferences.
- Hackney: We need to talka about what we've learned from the women's movemnet and what
our relationship to it is.
- E.L. : Ther's not a parallel between women going to womens meetings and men
going to mens meetings because of our history and political development
through the womens movemnet and our class position.
Ther's no point going to women's conferences unless we're a more collective
group with something coherent to say.
- Bristol : How do we do this when we're not?
- E.L. : Our understanding of the Womens Liberation Movt. in relation to revolutionary
politics does link us. But we want to find more women who agree with us.
We can be much more mystifying if we don't identify who we are and what our
history is.
- Bristol: We could produce something for the next conference explaining ourselves.

Towards the end of the discussion we both stopped taking notes properly. This
was unfortunat~~e~~ because some of the discussion was full but it was difficult
to get down.

There was a discussion about wage demands and wages for housework. Here are a few
points:

We started talking about the demand for wages for housework and whether or not
this and all demands for wages or higher wages ~~were~~ automatically good. Some of us
felt that wage demands hit the bosses but that wage demands which emphasised
the differences within the working class should be criticised. - e.g. between
women and men. But criticising this wouldn't mean attacking men but attacking the
reactionary elements which reinforce the divisions between skilled and unskilled,
men and women etc. which leads us to the demand for a Guaranteed Income. The
demand for wages for housework isn't at the level of less work and more equality.

We talked also about the need for national organisation. We decided to discuss
at the next newsletter conference, a paper East London and Hackney were produc-
ing on the women's movement and what we can learn from those exper~~iences~~ in
relation to national organisation. There was some hassle over when we should
meet at the next conferences - suggested that it should be 10. am Saturday.

The basic points which came out of the meeting

- 1) We should use PNS much more for news about women and other things to try and
circulate info. round the country.
- 2) We should write more for Red Rag and Spare Rib, trying as far as possible to
identify where the article comes from - what politics it comes from, not WHO.
- 3) Want more simple pamphlets about women and other struggles which we would find
easier to hand around generally than the N/L. Suggest that groups think of
writing brief pamphlets too. One on Tower Hill, written by all the women would
be a good start. (the women in the womens group on T.Hill and BF women in the group)
- 4) We suggest a meeting with Power of Women Collective to discuss wages for housework.
- 5) We think we should discuss joint ideas for womens conferences, with discussions
before and after. We think we should be more coherent and collective generally.
- 6) We want more discussions aroun all the things we're doing.
- 7) Suggest that perhaps N/L conferences begin with a womens session first thing
saturday. Men should not be forced into mens meeting at the same time
