

MINUTES OF E.L.B.F. GENERAL MEETING. SUNDAY AUG. 18 '74.

Agenda: - Analysis of the area - continuing work on this
6 - Reports from base groups
- structure of the organisation - base groups, office, delegation.
- Leicester anti-fascist demo.

B\$F. Conference/national organisation

- Agenda for conference: Nat. structure for B\$F\$ - political basis for it
How we work out our political position/intervention
Relat. to newsletter groups and conf.
Publications - Journal/documents/national newspaper?

We started off making a list of all the material around that has information about struggles and changes in E. London.
Queen Mary's College

G.L.C. Rent Strike - H.F.A. and Housing Crisis/Women's Offensive pamphlets both go into housing struggles in E. London.
Ian McDonald's analysis of the development of the police force shows how the Met. Pol. came out of E. London riots in CI9 and dock strikes.
Dockland redevelopment reports from E.E.D.A.G.
Community Development Project probably has info. about re-development in E.L.
Town Councils borough guides give a breakdown on local industry.
Use local libraries to make bibliography of what exists.

How we direct our analysis:

Look for the forms of re-composition in the area ie. new forms of industry, new forms of housing, immigration, types of people moving out. Look for how all this breaks down community, organisation in the community, organisation at work.

Also, look at how the crisis is affecting the area, ie. run-down of the services, changes in welfare services, increase in community patch-up projects.

We didn't make decisions about this, as we decided we'd be more specific about analysing the area from talking about the activity of the base groups.

Base groups are: Food co-op group on Lincoln Estate
Women's Centre in East India Dock Road
Fords Group
Women and Work group
Playgroup
Backyard Printing Press in Roman Road
Shrewsbury 24 Defence Group.

Report backs:

Food Co-op

How it started: We started discussing the area, the housing struggles, the redevelopment of the docks, referring to the ideas of the Lotta Continua political programme Take Over The City. We wanted to establish Big Flame as a political presence in the area. This was at the time of the wages Freeze at the end of '73 and we thought a good point to start organising was around food prices as people were really angry about this at the time. We did a propaganda campaign about prices, taking leaflets down to the local market place, talking to people. Called a meeting. Wasn't much response or enthusiasm. Felt should organise more specifically on an estate.

Started working on Lincoln Estate because we'd got to know people there through the Shrewsbury 24 group and the Claimants' Union. We started by leafletting 3 times. There was no response. People got involved in the Food Co-op through personal contact. For the first 3 months we sold food on the Green. Several of the women from the estate were involved in buying and selling the food. About 20 women have been involved in running the co-op and coming to meetings. We talk in the meetings about all the problems on the estate: kids, health, bikes, prices etc. But none of this has developed into any other activity.

There's a Tenants' Committee left over from the '68 Rent-Strike. It's developed into an informal clique who run the Community Hall where they have Bingo and a Youth Club. Women in the food co-op are angry about this because its controlled by this small group of people. There's the idea of setting up a Tenants' Action Committee that would demand use of the community hall. There's particular problems on the estate like like crappy sewage system - means sewage comes up through sinks. Also, some women interested in organising looking after kids. So far the most important role of the co-op has been putting the women in touch with other things eg. the Women's centre. Some of them bring their kids and also come to the therapy group. The idea of the therapy group was that the talk in the co-op meetings was ^{not} enough to deal with people's personal problems. The therapy group is a way that people can express more deep down personal problems. It's become like a consciousness raising group.

The food co-op has also meant the beginnings of socialisation of housework, women organising their work so there's more time for other things. Also, the discussion about prices and profits attracted some women in the C.P. There's the problem of differences between the political women and the other women - different interests ie. one of the women in the C.P. is interested in starting a Chile Solidarity group.

However, food co-op group hasn't been quick enough to pick up on other struggles that involve the estate. During the recent N.A.L.G.O. strike, the dustbin men struck and there were piles of rubbish. The women got pissed off about this but didn't do anything. Would have been good to go down and confront the dustbin men.

No-shouldn't direct aggro. at dustbin men, but at council. eg. in Forest Gate women dumped all their rubbish in the middle of the street. Very effective - council picked up rubbish in 2 hours. In Toronto women got rubbish and dumped it on Town Hall steps.

This brings up the question of how the users of public services can organise to support strikes in the public services ie. hospitals, gas, transport, building workers etc. Lots of examples of this that can be learnt from and used. See the food co-op group as establishing a base group of women that will be able to organise round these things. The current crisis means more and more cut backs in public spending. Means esp. Council spending. Becomes clearer that the council is just a false democratic front that hasn't got any power to provide what's needed. Perhaps in future we have to make demands for things like playgroups directly off industry.

What about the man on Lincoln Estate, What sorts of work do they do. Is there any possibilities of them organising from the estate? This brings up the question of whether the food co-op should be just women ^(see later) people-

Women's Centre

Started up by Social workers and politico's as a women's aid centre. Difficulty of split between women who live in the house and women outside we want it as a Women's Centre. The women in the house just wanted a place to live, peace and quiet, get on with their own lives. For the first months, it hasn't got off the ground as a Women's Centre. But now it looks as if it will become a centre for other women to find places to squat, which will mean there's more space to use for the Women's Centre. At the moment, there's a playgroup and therapy group, which the women in the house come to, though these things are organised by political women outside. More local women are starting to drop in to see what's going on. Possibility of local women using it as a practical base. It definitely won't become a service centre for the Women's Liberation Movement like the Essex Road centre, because it's started off with local women using it.

Shrewsbury 24 Defence Group

One person from Big Flame is in it. It's no longer ^{round} the Shrewsbury 24 but has developed into a Building Worker's Action group. They're organising on a G.L.C. site in Juniper Street. They organised it from scratch in 6 weeks - pretty good! This means that everybody on the site is in the union and are starting to fight for things. Their perspective is ~~organise~~ - a unionise in order to organise. There's diff. political perspectives between blokes in the Action Group, but they're all revolutionaries. Some blokes are in C.P. but their politics are closer to Big Flame's. It's important for Big Flame to intervene in this because of the building workers' connexion with Lincoln Estate and Bigland Estate (Bigland is best organised estate in East End.) This group also acts as a point of reference in the area. They've been involved in the Claimants' Union, getting a Youth Centre on Lincoln Estate.

Backyard Press

Some people want the press to become a focus for struggles in the area. At the moment this can't happen 'cos it's in someone's house and they gets pissed off with people coming in and out. He's just come back from China though so he might feel better about it now. There's questions of the type of printing facilities we need, i.e. what size press, though there's plenty of printing facilities in London. Decided to leave this 'til another meeting.

Women and Work Group

How it started:

For some of us, it was through organising in the Claimants' Union and -the squatting. A lot of the women involved were having to get shitty jobs where there was no organisation. It became obvious that women need to organise outside work just as much as in the community. Also, libertarian women have always emphasised the community as the place to organise, and as a movement we know very little about women's struggle ~~in~~ against wage-labour.

We decided to go and work in Lesneys, a local factory making toy cars. The factory employs mainly women, and is well known in the area as being the most exploitative factory around. There's high labour turn-over which means that a lot of women have worked there at some time or another. Also, the factory is very advanced in its form of production and ways of exploiting women's cheap labour. The form of production is assembly line, the wages system is the collective bonus scheme (piece work). The fight for equal pay for women has been used by the management to increase productivity i.e. whenever the women demand a wage rise they get a higher bonus based on increased productivity. The women are angry about this, but the union won't do anything, the union doesn't even fight over piecework rates. Some of the shop stewards are militant, but have the usual s.s. ideology of sorting out people's problems for them with the management. One woman shop steward interested in working with us. Another definitely against us. She gave told the management that troublemakers were trying to get into the place and since that only one of us has been able to get a job there. So the question of whether we organise there or not depends on whether any more people can get in there to work.

We don't want to leaflet the place from outside like the Fords group 'cos women don't identify with 'militants' and 'politicians' in the same way as Fords workers who are used to outside politico's being involved. Also, we're not sure about working long term round Lesneys and see going to work there as more experimental, finding out about what women are up against in the factory.

We've also been involved in the Working Women's Charter, set up as a broad front by the C.P. and I.M.G. The perspective of the Charter is to unite local militant women in a broad front campaign for basic improvements for women: nurseries, equal pay, equal pensions, health facilities etc. We decided to get involved because it was a good way of getting to know local militant women and we agreed with the aims of the Charter.

However, we found we couldn't work in a broad front with the Trades Council (who are backing the Charter). Also, most of the women involved were more interested in being on committees and having meetings than getting on with the nitty gritty of being involved in struggles. One woman from the Charter is working with us in Lesneys. Our perspective at the moment is analysing women's work situation and what are the best ways to organise with local women in different workplaces. But this also means some of us working long term in a particular place. If we can't get into Lesneys we'll work somewhere else. Some people reckoned that it's more important to organise with women in the community because women don't identify with an outside workplace. But the nature of women's work is changing - more and more women being brought into labour force, being given more job and wage equality. Changes like women having to do night shift means that workplace is increasingly important place for women to organise. Also some of most important recent industrial struggles have been women: Imperial Typewriters, nurses, Fakenham and Tillotsons occupations.

Structure of base groups: (Fords was discussed at previous meeting)

Some women reckoned that in the eyes of people outside Big Flame, B&F, is just the Fords group, ~~and the B.F. women don't know what's happening in Fords half the time.~~ Why is this? How much do the women in the food co-op and Women's Centre groups make clear that they're in Big Flame? This wasn't really answered - the women in these groups don't put Big Flame at the bottom of their leaflets because other women outside Big Flame involved. They're doing theoretical work with local people, women they're working with and don't see doing this just through Big Flame. There's obviously a contradiction for the women between being involved with local women in local activities and being in a Big Flame national organisation, which has to be sorted out. We discussed whether there should be a Mile End area base group which would include the food co-op and Women's Centre.

How would this work concretely? Up til now, people living in Mile End have worked informally as an area group ie: the Lincoln Estate food co-op came out of connexions with the Claimants' Union and the building workers. The Shrewsbury 24 group also came out of these connexions. Troops Out group in this area would come out of the same connexions.

So, perhaps what is needed is that Mile End organises as a mixed area group as part of East End Big Flame. What does this mean for people in Forest Gate and Hackney? Forest Gate - lot of Ford workers living there but only meet them by working at Fords - get together at week-ends, drink, develop that in a political direction. Not many political groups active in Forest Gate like East End, except squatters movement. So not much possibility at moment of Forest Gate area group.

Hackney - number of people interested in working with Big Flame but not at point where can organise own group and don't want to join East London Big Flame until its more formally organised with more explicit politics.

Office

Possibility of place in house set up by Christian Action Group as community centre. Problem of Big Flame becoming identified with C.A.G. particularly if they put out leaflets with the same address on. We could see it as just ripping of an institution that has all the facilities we need. Decided to suss them out more, what they'll be doing in the area, make clear to them where we're at. If it looks as though we can keep a clear separation between them and us, then its worth using the place. Possibility of house on the Lincoln Estate. Decided to suss out both but make a decision soon because office is an urgent need. Meanwhile, office will stay at Tredegar Terrace. Will be cleaned out and set up on Aug. 22nd. From then on the office will be (wo)manned every Thursday.

Rota: 29th - E. 5th Sept. - S. 12th - S.

External relations

Decided to leave this until after the B.F. conference when there are definite national structures and we know what delegation we need.

Education programme and study groups

Decided to leave this to future General meeting 'cos not enough time.

Leicester Anti-Fascist demo

We should all go and encourage local militants to come with us but warn them it's going to be heavy.

I.M.G. is talking of provoking a confrontation/physical battle with the N.F. We refuse to be part of provoking aggro because this means taking on the pigs as well, and the Left on that march won't be large enough or tactically prepared to take on a battle like that without a fuck of a lot of arrears. But we should be working out with the broad left ways of smashing the fascistsie, finding out their local offices and harrassing them, being prepared for physical/armed combat with them, but more strategically than national demonstrations with the pigs on their side.

Delegates are going to I.M.G. meeting to discuss tactics. Find out I.M.G.'s intentions and then decide what we'll doie: wether we're prepared to back them up if they get into a fight.

Decided to organise our own transport, not go on I.M.G. coaches.

Big Flame National conference 25-6th August.

Proposed agenda for conference:

1st. day:

1. Discussion of 'What is Big Flame?' document as political basis for B.F.
2. Paper on present political situation - Liverpool.
3. Divide into small groups to discuss each local group's intervention and practise on the basis of our analysis of the nat./internat. situation. Discuss nat. structures we need.

2nd. day.

1. Discussion of 2-papers-eneur perspectives for national organisation
I paper from L'pool, I from W.London.
2. Basis on which groups become Big Flame. Relationship to newsletter grps.
3. Deciding on particular national structures.

Disagreements: not enough priority given to discussing specific things ie: Troops Out, National newspaper. Should organise for one person from every base group to be in each small group. Is that possible?

Liverpool intends to make specific proposals: co-ordinating committees for particular activities. Some sort of central committee to develop Big Flame's analysis of general situation. A national newspaper (not sure) E.L.B.F. don't want a central committee. Political development comes from the involvement of local groups in struggles going on, as well as general analysis. A central committee would be fixed, which would mean that the people in it would become divorced from ongoing struggles. Centralisation should develop through the class struggle.

What we need at the moment is formalising all the informal structures that exist at the moment. Work being done on Ireland, Chile, Italy and the international situation should be made the responsibility of national groups who regularly report back to local groups.

So far the theoretical journal has dealt with developing B.F.'s political position. We need better report backs from delegates. Also it's crucial to have rotating delegation to this, so that people don't become specialists in theoretical work. Should be one permanent delegate and one rotated delegate from each group. From now on, local groups should make decisions about what goes into the journal, and these should be pushed for by the delegates..

We agree with national co-ordinating committees, but these shouldn't be seen as fixed committees but should change as the class struggle develops. ie. at the moment we need co-ordinatin committees around the following: Troops Out/Ireland.

Chile.

Italy.

Fords/Car industry

Public sector/Welfare state

Anti-fascist activity.

Womens' struggles: housing, kids, women's sexuality; work.

These are the struggles we're organising around at the moment that we need co-ordination for. Th These priorities will change as struggles and our practise develops.

Relationship of local groups to co-ordinating committees:

There are some situations where co-ordinating committees can direct local initiatives. Troops Out, Chile Solidarity, Anti-Fascism. These are broad front activities where we need a clear position. But in most local struggles we have to make our own initiatives and decisions. But this should be responsible to Big Flame nationally, we need the means of keeping all groups in touch with local struggles and interventions. Perhaps this means regular reports from each base group.

~~Relationship to newsletter groups~~

Relat. between Big Flame and newsletter groups.

It was felt by most people that we want to keep up definite contacts with newsletter group, but differences must be made clear. i.e. some newsletter groups/individuals have made it clear they don't want to be responsible to national organisation but want to act completely autonomously. Big Flame sees that this leads to 'informal elites' that are difficult to challenge, bring out in the open.

National newspaper:

E.L.B.F. don't want local paper, haven't got enough people. If W. London & L'pool want nat. paper should be made clear not representative of all the groups. Danger of national paper being substitution for real involvement in struggles. W. London suggests local papers with national pages. We agree that we should contribute to Liverpool paper and criticise it more thoroughly.

Next E. L. B. F. General meeting: Friday 23rd Aug. 7p. m. Tredegar Square
To discuss 'What is Big Flame?' document