

ELBF Document for Women's Commission
(inpreparation for National BF conference)

1 Why women are in BF; what it offers to women, organisationally and theoretically; ways in which BF could change further to accommodate women's needs

For some of us in ELBF who came to politics through the women's movement it was a real choice to join a mixed group rather than living and working politically just with women as we had done before. We made the choice because we saw that women's struggle is the class struggle and we need to be in constant contact with struggles men are involved in too so as to have a wider perspective on what is happening in the working class. And it's not just a question of having a wider perspective because eventually the struggles themselves link up e.g. Fords and Lesneys. Also most of the working class women we work with are living with men and we need to be able to relate to what is going on in their lives and not be cut off from contact with men ourselves. And some of us want to have a social life with men too and don't want to perpetuate the politics/personal enjoyment split by working only with women and only seeing men socially. Being in a mixed group has made it easier for us to find roots in the area-- for example the women we started the food co-op with we met through their husbands working with BF comrades on the Shrewsbury Campaign. We still organise separately as women in base groups and work a lot of our politics out autonomously.

What BF offers us is partly practical things: we can come into contact with ideas by reading documents written by other comrades including men, and can use them to clarify our own ideas and our understanding of class politics. BF's analysis of capitalism and class struggle is more thorough than any analysis current at present in the women's movement, and much of it is an analysis that we agree with. At the same time we can see the importance of developing our own feminist politics and one of the reasons we are in BF is because we want women's politics to become part of everyone's politics; we want to influence the kind of work men in BF do e.g. at Fords and to influence the way in which BF develops. There are some political ideas current in parts of BF which we do not agree with and which we would like to change. We think that feminism as a political perspective has a lot to offer the working class movement as a whole, because of the specific ways in which women are exploited under capitalism and therefore the way that women's struggles raise questions about the socialisation of the struggle and the unification of the class, challenge traditional divisions between workers and existing social relations and become generalised so as to give a sense of what it means to organise around every area of our lives.

Another reason we are in BF is because of the opportunity for discussion and links with comrades who are involved with base group work and inside other struggles. We have learnt a lot from other comrades' experience, especially from the Liverpool women's involvement in the Tower Hill rent strike, about how to make a consistent and sustained intervention as a political women's group. The more the base group work of other groups develops, the more useful this kind of contact could be. Here's a bit from the Lesneys notes about how far it's been useful to them being in BF - "The most useful thing has been the meeting with the Fords group, and the hospital workers' group in W. London, both to find out the struggles going on in other workplaces and to clarify our political ideas from a practical basis. Also important has been the general support and encouragement and help with leafletting."

Perhaps it's worth saying a bit about what BF doesn't offer us as women. Here's another bit from the Lesneys notes: "We haven't said we're in BF to many of the women we know at Lesneys. The whole idea of a political group is so alien to their lives. Also, we haven't put out leaflets in the name of BF, partly because there's only two of us (in the Lesneys group) in it, partly because the name is too "explosive"but also because we're not sure about putting ourselves over as an interventionist group." Within the People's Food Co-op too we have questioned the relevance of recruiting for or pushing BF as such, as an organisation rather than as a political

perspective. For male militants it may be important to define clearly our position in relation to other left groups, as women we relate less to Political people with a capital "P" and think it's more important for us to relate to political people with a small "p" whose political militancy is less self-conscious, e.g. women in Lesneys, in playgroups, on estates, and to make our ideas accessible to them. In these situations what is relevant and important to get across are the ideas and the contacts with other struggles, not the BF brand name. It's good if people join, but our aim is to strengthen existing struggles and start new ones rather than to enlarge BF. In East London this really is a possibility because there is a lot of activity we can be part of and influence by working within it, e.g. the Tower Hamlets Housing Action Group. We still need to identify ourselves as a political grouping, to explain our presence and involvement in certain situations, and to explain where our ideas are coming from - though the name Big Flame does not in itself tell anyone much about the politics. We do not find the BF newspaper in its present form a useful tool for organising, nor do we think we are in a position at present to produce a paper that would be.

Ways in which BF should change:

There are ways in which BF does not fulfil all our needs as a framework for us to develop our organisation and theory. A lot of the analytical documents within BF are written by men and perhaps some self-criticism is needed about why for example there are so few women on the Liverpool Politcom, why at the August conference so few women spoke compared with the men, why more men than women come down to London, etc. Some of the manoeuvrings and deviousness over the journal were reminiscent of the manipulations of some traditional male left politics, and aren't likely to make for the situations we need in which we can develop our ideas and work out our politics openly and collectively. It is in any case more difficult for women to be revolutionaries: we have to recognise how hard women have to struggle even to get to the point of struggling, and women have been forced to develop their struggles in untraditional ways. We have to work out new ways of thinking to understand these forms of struggle, and find new forms of organising. At the same time our individual conditioning as women makes it hard for us to be confident in putting over our perspectives in BF as a whole. This is one of the reasons why it is important for us to organise autonomously. In some ways we find it easier within E. London than nationally, because several of us in this group had a sense of our politics developing autonomously before we became part of BF, which isn't true of ~~others in other groups~~ some sisters in other groups (There are also a lot of us.) We are opposed to any organisational structures which, by concentrating responsibility in fewer hands, endorse passivity and fail to challenge hierarchies of sex and skill within groups. One of the main effects of living under capitalism is that people are passified, and we don't want to be part of an organisation which through being unnecessarily centralised perpetuates that passivity.

Other ways in which BF should change: we need more political education and development of ideas, more meetings with other base groups, and structures which reflect our needs rather than being superimposed. Women in BF working fulltime at Lesneys were critical of the amount of national activity and decision-making going on. It has ~~It~~ seemed out of proportion to the size of BF at the moment and to the actual amount of base group work and organising going on. Also as we're so small at the moment it has meant that it's usually those who aren't working and those who are least involved in base group activity who have the national contacts. This makes the usual separation between workers and intellectuals - and as more working people join BF this split will become more of a problem unless we work it out now. BF should be regarded as less of a national organisation and more of a tendency, i.e. less decision-making on national policy and more dialectical discussion from the situations we're fighting in.

Generally, we feel that it is a priority to build in the situations we're involved in, building base work, rather than building a national organisation within the framework of the traditional male white left. As women who are involved politically organising with people outside the traditional left, it is more of a priority for

us to have close links with other base groups who are involved in other struggles and develop our understandings of what is happening for women in the present situation. We find that having to write so many internal BF documents and the demands that BF makes on us nationally actually makes it harder for us to bring the women we work with into BF. You couldn't bring a woman from the food co-op into a meeting spent hassling about documents to be circulated for internal organisational needs - it's hard for working class people and for us to see how it relates to what we're fighting for.

One of the ways in which the demands of national BF are imposed over base group work is by emphasis on the "need for a national line" on certain issues. We think that it is important to develop an analysis of what is happening nationally, but this cannot be done without building up a picture of what's actually going on in the working class, inside struggles. For example, some comrades have expressed a need to agree a BF "line" on how best to intervene nationally in student struggles, without knowing enough about what's going on in the colleges, without BF having enough contacts or being in touch with what's going on on the ground. Too often an abstract analysis tends to be simply an analysis of capitalism; we also need to have an analysis of the working class, which we can only get from thorough and fully-discussed base work. A full analysis which understands how capitalism is changing and how people are relating to those changes, is very different from a "line" on how to intervene. For example, your analysis may show that different contradictions are being experienced in different situations - say in the tech colleges as opposed to the universities - and so a different form of intervention is appropriate. This does not mean that we should not try to reach general conclusions about how to organise, and some of us feel there are questions which urgently need to be cleared up - e.g. how do we understand the Irish struggle and should we be organising around Troops Out? We should try to reach decisions about how we work, but this does not mean that we do not go on working out differences, both within each group and between the different groups. Most of us feel that there should be room for disagreements within BF. We see BF as a developing political tendency, and seeing it in this light there should be room for ongoing discussion and disagreement in order to move towards a more coherent politics.

What is important in this is understanding how our analysis and our theory grow out of our practice. This is what being inside a struggle means: we are not just mechanically applying our ideas to a situation, but getting involved in it and relating to what people are experiencing. We do bring a certain analysis too, but this will develop as we learn more about what working class people are angry about, what is important to them, and what they are prepared to fight for in different situations. For example, comrades in Liverpool found that schoolkids were not concerned with organising around conditions at school, but with their own alternative youth culture - in that situation it's no good trying to push onto the kids your own ideas about how they should fight against school uniforms. There are some questions which come up continually in our practice with women at Lesneys, in the food co-op, etc., like shopping, kids, sexuality, relationships with husbands - and when we talk with other BF women about their practice we find that they have often picked up on these things but don't see them as part of their politics, they don't see them as issues from which you can build your theory. In the same way, a few years ago the economy of housework was seen as somehow too trivial to be worthy of theor. We would like to see a broadening of the perspectives of our theory within BF, and we would like to see it developing in the light of our close involvement in working class struggles, picking up what is actually going on in people's lives. As women we are more likely to do this easily, because though we are in a different position from working class women, we are oppressed in some of the same ways too; it is only by being in touch with your own needs and experience that you can recognize and relate to other people's needs. For example, some sisters feel that by not having kids they are making themselves "better revolutionaries"; we find that through having kids and being aware in our own lives of what it is like, we are more easily able to recognize the problems women are confronting with their kids, to relate to those problems and organise around them. This is why we

are against "professional revolutionaries" who see themselves as outside the struggle, for whom left politics can become a career just like any other career, and whose politics are often unrelated to their own and other people's lives. At present there are some things which we can discuss only in the framework of the womens' movement, e.g. sexuality, and we would like these to become part of our developing analysis within BF. Some men in E.London BF also feel this need and have close relations with mens' groups in ~~E.London~~ E.London and generally with the mens' movement, a network of individuals and groups in different parts of London who are not in BF.

As part of this process, we feel it is important for women from all BF groups to meet to have discussions, gathering information and building up a picture to help us analyse the class struggle of women. Some of us feel that the Woemens' Commission has not always been the best way of doing this, for a number of reasons. Some of us feel a tension between rushing off to meetings and our practice - maybe we feel this more keenly than other groups because though we are a small group of women we have quite a wide practice (Lesneys, Food ~~Co-op~~ Co-op, Womens' Self-Help Therapy Group, Sunner House mass squat, playgroup, Tower Housing Action Group, Students, etc.) Our own internal meetings are a priority. We would suggest that the Woemens' Commission meet less often - say every two months - but for a longer period of time. Rushing up the motorway for a 3-hour meeting is ridiculous. Perhaps longer meetings would also help us to have the kind of discussions we need to have - not meetings spent on mainly administrative matters or working out, for example, a "line" on the Charter, but detailed in-depth discussions related to and coming out of our practice. For example, at one meeting of the commission everyone seemed to be frustrated because there seemed to be no room for detailed discussion of things people are most concerned with - for example, there was discussion of the charter, and womens' employment, national assemblies, and the need for analysis, which was all quite vague. It might have been more relevant to have discussed the food co-op or organising in a hospital, a lot of theoretical questions would have emerged from that - e.g. in a hospital situation are you organising as women? What does it mean to be organising in a mixed situation, like around housing, where both men and women are involved?

Here are some other proposals about the womens' commission: We ~~propose~~ propose that each group sends a constant delegate at least, (to be changed every six months,) so that decisions that are made get communicated efficiently to the groups. Some of us feel that we should eventually develop towards producing a national womens' newspaper, though we are not in a position to produce it at present. We feel that the commissions should be used only for communication and discussion, not for issuing premature "lines". For example, we are opposed to the proposal that this joint document from the womens' commission should be voted on at the conference. (At the August ~~conference~~ conference we were told that the commissions would be only for communication, and that we were paranoid to think there might be any development along these lines, and now this is the proposal that has been made.) Within the womens' commission, perhaps some of the work developing our politics can be done individually and then shared around; some people are doing this work anyway. In any case, the circulation of documents should go on as this is very important. We also think that it is a priority to write some pamphlets of two types: some which we can use in our organising with working class women, which give information about womens' struggles, get across the ideas of womens' liberation, etc., and some like the food co-op of Lesneys notes which might interest women in the WLM, which attempt to relate the ideas of the movement to the ways we organise. At this stage of BF's development, when we are working out our ideas, it is a priority to write about our practice and make it accessible to other people so that the ideas and the practice can spread. We have valuable experience about making interventions in ~~women's~~ womens' struggles. There are women in the socialist womens' movement who are quite close to us politically but who are not clear about how to organise. We feel that we have a lot to offer - an alternative to trades unions/charter as a way of reaching and organising with working class women.

2. Why we work the way we do with women and perspectives for intervention, including community vs. workplace discussion

a. The double role of women

Apart from their involvement in mixed base groups, E. London BF women are involved organising both around the workplace (Lesneys) and around the community (Food Co-op, Self-help Therapy Group, Sumner House mass squat, playgroup) with women. We want to confront the problems of breaking down the separation between womens' struggles as waged labourers and as unpaid labourers in the home. The interdependence between waged and unwaged women is what provides the crucial link between community and workplace struggles. When we talk about autonomous struggles fought by women, we mean those organised struggles where women challenge capitalist definitions of their part in the production process, and in doing so challenge the wage-relations between capital and workers. We see that because women get so little out of the wage relation (i.e. half the work we do is unpaid, the other half low-paid) that we are amongst the first to be able to make demands that break through it - e.g. the unsupported mothers in the claimants' unions and the Family Allowance campaign, demanding a guaranteed independent allowance for women. In the last few years there has been an upsurge in these struggles - women at Fords refusing to be low-paid because ~~they were~~ of their sex, night cleaners organising themselves for the first time, women in Ireland fighting the British troops, the nurses refusing to be low-paid because their work is "womens" "caring" work, the women in Kirkby spending their rent money on the family, Notting Hill women starting their own playgroup and forcing the Council to pay them for looking after their own kids, thousands of women, in London in particular, leaving their husbands and occupying houses..... all these struggles are the beginnings of womens' potential power to fight against their double exploitation under capitalism.

Looking at this double exploitation historically, we can see that women have been sold the biggest productivity deal of all time. Since the Second World War, the number of married women going out to work has increased by 15%. Womens' work in the home has been rationalised and mechanised so that they now do the same amount of work - the same basic chores of cooking, cleaning, shopping, - in only a fraction of the time they used to take. Now that the wage is no longer enough to bring up a family on, women are forced to sell ~~their~~ their labour on the labour market as well, where capital treats us as a huge reserve army of labour that can be pushed in and out of work as capital requires because our "real" place is in the home. When one looks at the jobs that women do on the labour market, we see that they are mainly the same jobs that women do at home - cleaning, sewing, making toys, producing food, and, above all, "looking after" and "caring". Only now our labour has been socialised and rationalised, and is, as a consequence, hundreds of times more productive. For example, in the olden days a woman might have spent a whole afternoon making and baking a pie. Now she goes into the factory, produces perhaps a hundred pies, and on her way home from work, picks up a pie from the supermarket and pops it in the oven for her family (consumption of convenience foods has increased by 25% over the last ten years). The services and goods that women once produced for their families own consumption, they now do for a small wage. Capital finally gets its surplus when it sells us back the same goods. We've won a small wage to spend on stuff that we, ourselves, made - and capital extracts profit from yet another area of our lives.

b. Where is the power?

Some people argue that the only place women have power is in the workplace, where the wage gives her a degree of bargaining power, and where, by refusing to produce, she can hit capitalism where it hurts - and therefore they argue that the workplace is the only place where it's worth organising. We disagree with this for two reasons - Firstly, there is power in the community, as we have seen from struggles in this country and in Italy in which people have refused rent, taken housing, fixed electricity rates and bus fares, prevented school closures, etc. Actions like these threaten capitalism as

much as the average strike. This is particularly true now with the use of inflation as a weapon against the wage, the withdrawal of money from the welfare services to be redirected into propping up industry, and the intensified use of forms of social control within the community to maintain capitalist relations of production (e.g. education, the family, soft cops, the media, the use of tranquillisers.....) We have also seen, from the miners' and Imperial Typewriters strikes for example, how crucial community organisation can be in complementing and supporting industrial action. Secondly, our analysis of where we should organise is not only determined by "where the power is" in the sense of which industries would bring the economy to its knees if they ground to a halt. It is also determined by our understanding that it is important to organise at the point where the contradictions of capitalism are experienced most acutely. Against the background of the post-war boom and the welfare state, followed by a period of welfare cuts and astringency which forced more married women out to work, we can see that women are one of the sectors who are feeling the pinch at this time, and are feeling the contradictions most keenly - particularly the contradiction between the role of perfect mother and housewife as it is built up to be, and the reality of having to work outside the house as well as in it, facing soaring food prices, increased strain within the family, welfare cutbacks, intensified production both at home and at work, etc. Conditions are not the same in all areas of the country, but in London the housing crisis and the number of women working in service jobs within the community (social workers, teachers, ss, etc.) also argue for us seeing the community as well as the workplace as a situation in which autonomous struggles may develop over the next period.

The important role that women can play in community struggles, and at the same time the need for them to organise autonomously in those situations, has been highlighted by our recent experience in the squat of 60 homeless families in an empty council block called Sunner House. The women were the ones who pushed the squat into happening in the first place, because being at home all day they were the ones who felt most desperate about being in hostels or with in-laws. But once the squat happened, a mainly male committee took over the running of it. This committee does not act around issues which the women find most pressing, and we see it as a priority for the women to get together to organise these things separately and to build up the confidence to push their priorities onto the committee. They are still the source of some of the most militant politics - for example when the council served eviction notices it was the women who suggested a demonstration and occupation of council offices with their kids. We are starting to build up friendly contacts with the women, and will try to find ways of organising through which they can articulate their militancy, as opposed to a framework determined by men in which they cannot operate.

c. Unification of the class and generalising the struggle

Another reason why we organise as we do with women is our seeing ~~that~~ that a womens' struggles both in workplace and community raise important questions about the unification of the class. It's women who like blacks and immigrants will most want to get rid of job skill levels, gradings. For it's us who are on the bottom and see the way in which our bottom rung is maintained through the hierarchical division of work. Workers who have most "power" do set the pace for other workers by wage rises, etc., but they also often get isolated off from other workers and don't further the unification of the class, it's the least privileged who will force unification. "Because we are at the bottom of the labour hierarchy, we are up against opposition both from capital and working class men, including much of the time our male comrades. So, other sections of the working class will support us when we have some strength of our own, and they see it is in their interests to do so. But not on any false basis of men and women, unite and fight."

Because of womens' specific exploitation under capitalism, it is hard for them to get involved in, say, a strike, without raising a lot of other questions as well - who cooks the supper while they are on a picket line? Who looks after the kids while they go to ~~meetings~~ meetings? We learn to change our ideas about what are advanced/important struggles: womens' struggles usually raise questions

about how the working class can organise and challenge traditional divisions within the class - divisions which keep us isolated and hinder mass action. In this way they can be more generalised and more unifying than many wage struggles by male workers. It is partly our recognising how hard women have to struggle to get to the point of struggling - women have to work out some kind of collective babysitting before they can get to meetings, and need to build up some kind of confidence from the support they give one another before they can begin to organise. Much of our work with women is oriented around challenging womens' socialization - organising outings with other women, going to womens' films, trying to ~~xxx~~ build up a positive sense of things that women can do and enjoy together, and gain a bit of space outside the home to question things as they are and to realize what needs to be changed. For example, the food co-op raises questions about how women do their housework - whereas previously they always did their shopping personally for ~~xxx~~ their husband, there is now a group of women who make decisions about what to buy, and who collectively present some kind of reference point independent of the husband, questioning his fads and setting up collective norms of consumption of its own. The womens' self-help therapy group also challenges our socialization as women; in it we try to locate and express the feelings that daily life under capitalism makes us feel but usually makes us control e.g. anger. Instead of individual escape routes out of the pressures (e.g. getting drunk, yelling at the kids, tranquillisers) and instead of women blaming themselves and internalising their anger (depression, suicide) we try to find ways of recognising our ~~xxxxxx~~ feelings and externalising them into political action against the ~~xx~~ real sources of our oppression.

We see these situations in which womens' passive socialization is challenged as central to the development of the struggle - e.g. in Lesneys, the women had always moaned about the foreman behind his back, but when it came to a direct confrontation, the women would make a joke out of it, the way we handle most confrontations with ~~xx~~ men. During the wildcat strikes, when the women were doing sorting work together instead of working separate machines, the relationship changed and two women told him to fuck off and for the first time won ~~xx~~ over a confrontation with his authority. It is not a side issue that when women are involved in a strike, a lot of their ~~xxxxxx~~ marriages break up or are forced to change; challenging the sexual division of labour and the nuclear family is one of the things we want to do anyway. Nor do we see the organising of collective child care just as a means of freeing women to get on with organising a rent strike; collective childcare is an objective in itself, it is one of the things we want to fight for. So are better relationships, different education, more sexual freedom, different ways of buying and using consumer goods, etc. This is why it is important for us to be alive to contradictions people are experiencing in all these areas of their lives, to ~~x~~ pick up on things they want to change, & to draw out the revolutionary potential in the way we organise. Because of their particular situation, womens' struggles usually challenge the totality of life under capitalism in a way that male struggles do not necessarily do. The material conditions of capitalism which we want to change include, at work, not only hours, speed of work, etc., but whether you can talk to other workers and the ways in which ~~x~~ the factory allows you to relate to them; outside ~~x~~ work, it includes not just how much rent you pay and whether the walls are damp but what choice you have about how you spend your leisure, who does the washing up, the relationships kids have with parents and husbands with wives, how you do the shopping, what's on the TV, who you can fuck, etc. Several of us have kids and in our lives it is clear that what we need is not just money but community childcare that men take an equal part in, not to have to do ~~xxxxxxxx~~ housework, to be able to get out in the evening, etc. Organising around these aspects of our everyday lives is not just a background to, but is part of, the "real struggle": ~~xxxxxxxx~~ what we are fighting for basically is the end of capitalist relations of production where women are dispossessed and ignored if we refuse to take our assigned part in the production process.

All these conditions of our everyday lives, the institutions that control us outside work, the ways we consume, relate to each other, etc., all these are ultimately determined by the economic base, but nobody's going to seize state power and transform the

economic base, changing not just the ownership but the relations of production, without these social institutions and relations being challenged and transformed; ~~the function of~~ for their function is precisely to ~~xxxxxx~~ keep us down, to divide us and isolate us, to create hierarchies within the class and to prevent the development of the kind of class solidarity, confidence, and revolutionary consciousness which would make mass confrontation a possibility. Some of us feel that in any case in advanced capitalism the old Leninist model of sudden seizure of state power is no longer appropriate; some of us see revolution more in terms of prolonged struggle with the working class bit by bit reclaiming and governing all areas of work and social life. In the context of such a prolonged struggle, the conditions are created whereby sexist divisions of society can and must be challenged as part of the revolutionary process.

This is some of the perspective behind the ways we are organising with women in ~~xxxx xxxxx xxxxxx xxxxxx~~ e.g. in the food co-op. The fact of women organising together collectivising shopping and breaking down some of these divisions, gives us all a lot of confidence - that by getting together we can do better for ourselves by reclaiming some area of our lives from the capitalists, that we don't have to be passive but can take some control over our own lives. "Every struggle must be regarded in terms of the strength, awareness, solidarity and autonomy that the proletariat acquires in it, while the power of the bosses to encroach on our lives is reduced." (Lotta Continua)

d. Perspectives for the future

We expect to be organising more in the future around the areas of education, health and welfare.

As for what we're involved in already: the Lesneys group, which consists of two BF women and several other women who are or have been working at Lesneys, will continue to work around the factory under the name of Lesneys Womens' Group. The group is organising a shop stewards school for Lesney stewards and for other women who are organising in their situations in different groups in East London, e.g. Turkish women active around Equal Pay.

The food co-op group will be trying to get the food co-op to be ~~more~~ more self-running, but will continue with it, and see it as part of a developing feminist culture in the area; we want to help other food co-ops and womens groups to develop. Women in the food co-op are at present trying to stop a kids club on the estate being closed and plan to run it themselves; there may be some action when the rent freeze ends in March, also rates are going up. The Sumner House squatters are fighting eviction at the moment, we are involved building support locally (leafletting, organising a social, etc.) and making links with the women in the food co-op. Generally, we see ourselves building a strong network of women militants in East London, a network that will link womens' struggles in the workplace and outside.

3. Relationship to Womens' Movement and our position on the need for autonomous x Womens' organisation/separate meetings/base xxx groups

Several of xx us have come into BF from the Womens' Liberation Movement, and though we recognize that parts of that movement are reformist and some of us can relate only to the socialist women within the movement, x we feel it is important to maintain a close on-going relationship with that movement. Perhaps it's a good idea to describe how we ~~xxxxxx~~ have related to the womens' movement locally, and what this has meant to us. Two women who we met ~~xxx~~ through a Hackney Womens' Charter group are now working at Lesneys and are in the Lesneys group. A North London womens' group have ~~xxx~~ offered to help leaflet at Lesneys - women working there can't and it's not so good if men do it. The Lesneys group also had fruitful discussions with other groups of women doing working class jobs, e.g. Power of Women and the Red Collective, who are working in similar ways and whose experience was relevant and helpful. In the food co-op group we are working with CP women, and there's a CP feminist in the womens' self-help therapy group. We were partially involved in setting up a Battered Wives / Woemans Centre last year, and through that contact there is now a possibility of moving a number of single mothers into an empty council block recently occupied as an offshoot of the Sunner House mass squat. We have supportive relationships with other womens' groups in the area, and have generally expanded our contacts with women in the East End.

Our contacts with WLM women, both locally and with groups and individuals in different parts of London, have been very supportive in our practice and in working out ideas. The movement breaks down x sectarianism and provides room for us to relate to a whole lot of different politics. We appreciate that in other parts of the ~~xxxxxxx~~ country the womens' movement is not as strong as in London, so that other women in BF do not have the same opportunity to relate to local groups in the way that we do, but still feel that women in BF should see a dialogue with the womens' movement as a priority. We see ourselves as having something to say to other women and to learn from them. For example, the Political Economy of Women group are doing work which we're not going to do, and though we may not always agree with it, it is very useful. So is the work of Power of Women. As far as BF nationally is concerned, we see people coming to us from the womens' movement rather than from I.S. We have found that there are many groups and individuals in the movement who are interested in organising with working class women, but too often it gets presented to them that the only way of doing this is via the Trot groups, Trades Unions, Working Womens' Charter, etc. We feel x that we have a real alternative to offer in this situation, and that we should make it a priority to get our ideas and our practice over to sympathetic women in the movement who might begin to work in similar ways to us. This means taking papers on our politics to womens' conferences and trying to get them discussed. Also writing for Spare Rib, etc., and generally trying to get our ideas known by writing pamphlets about the work we do.

We also feel a need for autonomous organisation of the women in BF. We do not see this just as a way of overcoming lack of self-confidence, etc., but that we're working towards a feminist ~~xxxxxxx~~ politics. It's not just a question of exchanging information, we need to develop stronger understandings about womens' struggle as class struggle. This analysis cannot be made by any national committee, nor could any national committee be in a position to direct as to how we should intervene and organise with women. The process of developing our theory is slow; we have been aware of some kind of push from Liverpool to develop it along male lines, which is not helpful - because of the different position of women, lots of different issues arise. Only by BF women meeting separately from the men and discussing the politics of autonomy in relation to our own practice and experience organising with women, can we clarify our ideas and work out real communist demands raising the questions of wage labour x and the sexual division of labour. We ~~xxx~~ wrote a bit in the first section about how we felt the Womens' Commission meetings have not been the best situation for working out these things, and have made proposals about how they could improve.

Some of us feel that one reason they've been unsatisfactory is because not all the BF groups have women working together autonomously, or separate womens' meetings. Working all the time in mixed groups makes it hard to shake off male terms of debate - alienated discussion, unequal participation, competitiveness, etc., - and when that's going on it is hard to exchange ideas freely or develop any understandings collectively. If all the women in BF took part in separate womens' meetings or base groups, we think the Womens' Commission meetings would be much more fruitful, and this is what we would like to see. Even where women are in mixed base groups, ~~xxxx~~ there is a strong case for having separate womens' meetings, as many different questions are raised - e.g. if you're organising in hospitals or around hospitals where mainly women are involved, or they're affected in different ways from the men in that situation, you need an autonomous womens' group to discuss and assert the needs of the women. In addition to what we've already suggested about the womens' commissionx, we think having autonomous womens' assemblies, or BF womens' conferences, would be a good idea provided that they ~~xx~~ are not called too frequently, and only when they come out of a clear need of women in the BF groups.