

NATIONAL WOMENS CONFERENCE

A meeting to plan the next womens national conference was held in Birmingham on June 3rd. There were women from the S.E., London, Mid Midlands, S.W., N.E., and N.W. regions plus Ellen Malos and Carolee Gerwin who were elected from the Manchester Conference to help in planning the next conference. Val Hart and Leonora Lloyd who had also been elected from the last conference both sent apologies (two B'ham members were present instead of Val Hart). We had papers on the organisation and structure of the conference from Carolee Gerwin, Leonora Lloyd and the Manchester group. It was agreed to hold the next conference in London as Bristol could not manage it - the agreed date is now Nov. 3rd/4th/5th.

We spent a lot of time discussing the structure of the conference. We felt it was important to give all women a chance to air their views, to discuss theory and to plan specific actions. We felt the need for a conference that would stress co-operation and our joint strength rather than the conflicts and divisions between us.

Organisation of the Conference.

1. We agreed that accomodation should be provided in a hall for women as there was a lot of disappointment about the way in which we were all split up at Manchester - it was also felt to be very important to cut the costs down as much as possible. Women with children and heterosexual couples could be housed in private homes if this was required. We stressed the importance of providing all the facilities together so that we would waste as little time and energy as possible in travelling.
2. The creche will be organised along the lines agreed at Manchester (included with this account). One woman in London will take responsibility for it and will look for men who are committed to the idea to run it - possibly from Men's Liberation or Gay Liberation groups. It was suggested that local creches should be organised so that women would not have to take their children to London.
3. We agreed that we should charge one fee to cover everything - registration, accomodation and the social. This fee will depend on what we have to pay for the rooms hired in London. No-one will be admitted to the Conference without a numbered ticket. Arrangements will be made for pre-registration and we hope that everyone who possibly can will take advantage of this - the Manchester group pointed out that they hardly got into the meetings at all because of the time spent on registration and accomodation over the weekend. For this reason also we agreed that local groups should help with jobs over the week-end. We hope that the local groups will make arrangements about covering the costs of women who cannot afford the conference fee so that there will be no need to turn anyone away at the door - we felt it would be easier for local groups across the country to pool money in this way rather than trying to organise it nationally.
4. No men will be admitted to the conference or the social as agreed at Manchester - but we will welcome their help with the creche.
5. Publicity for the conference should be dealt with at both a regional and a local level.

Structure and Content of the Conference.

We spent some time talking about why we wanted a conference and what we hoped to get out of it. We agreed that the main purposes were - a) discussion and the sharing of ideas - b) to enable us to join together and organise on a wider scale on issues that we thought needed it - c) communications between groups - d) to strengthen our feelings of sisterhood and solidarity. With these aims in mind we suggest the following agenda:

Friday evening: Registration and films.

Saturday - 9.30 - 10.30 : Full session on the agenda for the week-end and to take decisions about press coverage and the media.

10.30 - 12.30 : Workshops centering around Selma James paper 'Women, The Unions and Work - or what is to be done.' It was agreed at Manchester that this paper and the six demands presented in it should be fully discussed at the next conference. We would like to suggest that each workshop should cover the whole subject and taking into account the suggestions made by regions should consider in their discussions the following questions:

1. Whether the W.L. movement should make demands.
2. What is the position of W.L. on

- a) Capitalism
- b) Sexism

and within that on work, the family and children. We realise that we are raising enormous problems here but we felt that it should be specifically stated that there were the kind of problems that we needed to tackle together at the Conference.

2.00 - 4.00 : Full session on the areas we have been covering in workshops - whether we want to pose new demands for the women's movement?

4.30 - 6.30 : Workshops on the problems of organising women around participation issues. We wanted to move from discussion of a possible re-structuring of demands to a session on ways in which we are working with women now at the local level bearing in mind questions of both theory and strategy. The suggested workshops were:

1. Contraception and Abortion
2. Child Care
3. Unsupported mothers
4. Claimants unions
5. Fakenham
6. Women in the media
7. Literature collective
8. Women's collectives
9. Education.

We wanted these workshops to be useful both for specific planning of co-ordinated activities and to begin to make some assessments as to what effects we are having in the different area.

6.30 onwards - films

9.00 social.

Sunday

9.30 - 12.30 Session on Radical Feminism as agreed at Manchester. It was suggested that there should be a paper on this and that we should use it to start discussion in workshops.

2.00 - 4.30 Full session on 'The State of the movement' and the organisation of the next Conference. We hope that this session would be used to discuss the various possible methods of organising inter/nationally and regionally and for everyone to get some idea as to how regional organisation is working.

The question of Chairwoman was gone into at length. We felt that there should be three at all times and that the planning group should provide three for the opening session. Others would be nominated from the floor and agreed upon at this session. We would like groups to be thinking about who they would like. We agreed to three microphones - one stationary and two floating so that everyone can get access. The overall responsibility for the conference would rest with the women appointed at Manchester and the planning group delegated by the regions. The organisational work will be done by the London groups.

Catherine Hall
Birmingham Women's Liberation
Group