

P.C. Minutes 10/18

1. Discussion of Nov. 15 Regroupment meeting. Dec-Jan issue of Changes to be devoted to regroupment. Feedback on Nov. 15 meeting generally positive; several individuals who were invited suggested others.
2. Joint issue of Changes with Solidarity: Socialist Feminist Network. SSFN's proposal to us discussed. Pared down to contributions from SSFN on Gay and Lesbian Liberation, What is Soc-Fem? IS major articles to include piece on Family by Ilene et al, and possibly something on working women or strategies for the women's movement. Discussed getting Proletarian Unity League to respond to article on Gay and Lesbian Liberation, as they are one of the only Maoist groups to have written something positive on the subject. SSFN to take 1,000 copies at 50% off.

P.C. Minutes 11/3 (Dan present)

1. Draft of brochure on I.S. from Jeremy. In favor of idea, want more political content.
2. Socialist-Feminist Conference. The Women's Retreat left a lot of confusion about the idea of a conference on Socialist-Feminism as part of the regroupment process. The Detroit Women's Caucus met, and passed the following motion as a recommendation to the PC:

"The I.S. should continue the process of researching the position of groups interested in regroupment on women's liberation and gay and lesbian liberation;

"In our travelling and discussion with others on the left, we want to explore the question of what has happened to women in the organized left, and what the independent socialist feminist movement looks like today;

"Regroupment forums should be organized around women's issues, as well as other issues of importance to the left. International Women's Day is a good occasion for such forums;

"We put on the back burner the idea of a national conference on socialist-feminism until regroupment forces have expanded. We will continue to raise the idea with forces that seem more connected to the women's movement than we are, for example R2N2, or other left groups we come into contact with through the regroupment process. We, of course, want to be involved in organizing and building such a conference."

Dan suggested that women in the IS do some travelling, as he has done, to investigate what's happening in the women's movement. Carole said she was not entirely comfortable with the motion as it doesn't set any specific tasks, danger that nothing will be pursued.

Elissa has since raised the idea of a national conference on strategies for the women's movement with individuals in R2N2, with a fairly good response. A resolution will be presented to the R2N2 National Conference on November 12-15.

3. Regroupment. Report from Dan on Iowa (separate), and discussion of project thus far. General agreement that the Nov. 15 meeting will be very important in determining whether others will take an active part in the program.

Also discussed plans to hold a national meeting of IS in March to assess regroupment. Will be combined with a one-day school.

Dan to travel to the West Coast in January.

Report on the NOW Convention -- Elissa

With 220,000 members, decisions made by the National Organization for Women at annual conventions have a major impact on the women's movement. This report is strictly second hand, but because several people have asked for an analysis, I'm taking a stab at it. Information comes from a report in Off Our Backs, conversations with NOW members and the NOW national office.

NOW alternates "issues conferences" with conventions that elect officers. This year's convention elected a new president, Judy Goldsmith, and was particularly important because the defeat of the ERA concludes one chapter in the women's movement, and hopefully begins another. Losing the ERA also raises basic questions about the validity of NOW's strategy.

NOW's membership has doubled since the 1978 ERA demonstration in Washington which really marked the beginning of NOW's focus on the ERA. Of course, the vast majority of NOW's members are really only subscribing to the "National NOW Times," but there is no question that NOW grew tremendously through the ERA campaign. NOW has announced its intention to have a million members "by the '84 elections."

At the same time, there is a real current of dissatisfaction at the chapter level which seems to be over 1) the exclusivity of NOW's focus on the ERA and 2) lack of responsiveness of the national office to the needs of local chapters. Rank and file members seem to feel that they have little input into NOW's decisions, and get little resources for chapter building, financial help, strategic ideas.

This conflict was played out in the race for president of NOW, where Judy Goldsmith, the hand-picked successor by Ellie Smeal, ran against Sonia Johnson, the ex-communicated Mormon. Goldsmith was touted as the "experienced" candidate, that is, she came up through the ranks and was thoroughly committed to the policies concretized by Smeal. Johnson, whatever her political shortcomings (and I'm sure they are many), was seen as an activist who declared that NOW should be "a civil rights movement." Johnson most recently made headlines for leading a hunger strike on the steps of the Illinois capitol during the last days of the ERA. (Conservatives credit this action with ruining the ERA's chances.)

Although the final vote Goldsmith won by 432 votes, it was actually a very close race. NOW takes a lot of pride in its political savvy, and has designed a byzantine election procedure to prove how sophisticated they are. Delegates rate candidates in order of preference on a ballot. If no candidate has a majority in the first tally, the candidate with the least votes is eliminated and her votes are divided up among the other candidates until a victor emerges. This eliminates the need for run-offs, but also removes a certain dynamic from the process. On the first tally, the difference between Johnson and Goldsmith was only 125 votes (out of 1853).

Presented to the convention was a new plan to change the composition of the state legislatures by pouring more of NOW's resources into electoral work. (And NOW has a PAC fund that has the DP drooling.) This plan was adopted by the National Executive Board, and the convention was the occasion of announcing it to the press. So much for democracy. When Smeal hinted at the campaign just after the defeat of the ERA, she spoke about making women a "third force" in the electoral process. Hopeful radicals read that to mean that the women's movement would be forming its own party, while DSA warned through Roberta Lynch's IIT column that a third party was "manifestly impractical." Not to worry, NOW has no intention of breaking with the Democratic Party. In fact, the new policy is to elect Democrats, even if the opposition is feminist but Republican. NOW's decision not to support Millicent Fenwick was another of the convention's controversies.

NOW continued

Goldsmith, naturally, interpreted her election as a mandate for the continuation of the focus on electoral work. But the underground rumblings belie the public face.

For example, resolutions that came out of the issues hearings went to a Resolutions Committee for a rank ordering before they come up on the floor before the body as a whole. When delegates got the ordered list, Insurance was first, with issues like Minority Issues, Lesbian Rights and Reproductive Rights so low on the list that they were guaranteed not to fit on the agenda. The delegates objected and voted to reorder the list so that Lesbian Rights was first, Minority Issues second, and Reproductive Rights third.

On electoral politics, Smeal was constantly on the defensive, trying to explain why candidates should be supported even when they do not stand for NOW's basic positions. "There are very few perfect votes," Smeal said. "It might be better to save a person with seniority" who is not in agreement with NOW on some issues if another candidate, even a "perfect vote" would not be in a position of power if elected.

NOW's focus on electoral politics, especially in the absence of an issue is likely to present problems for them. Anyone who has ever worked for a candidate knows that it is made up of usually boring and tedious work; it is not the kind of strategy that can inspire a movement.

But it presents problems for the left as well, because without an alternative strategy, we have a real problem too. Radicals and socialists in the women's movement have to find a way to tap into the energy and discontent expressed at the NOW Convention in order to rebuild a women's movement.

Report on Labor Conference

Over 750 people attended the conference on "Organizing Against Concessions". Some 48 unions were represented with auto and steel in the lead again. People came from 25 states, plus DC., and 3 provinces of Canada. The Canadian representation was much larger than last year. While politically experienced people were clearly in the majority, there was a higher proportion of workers with little or no prior political activity other than their union work. While the issue around which the conference was organized was narrower, the level of political discussion was higher than last year. It appeared that no one was particularly turned off by the leftist ideas presented in a number of talks - except for one speech by a rather ultra-left public employee, which put off other leftists as well. The key-note speech by Jean-Claude Parrot, while low key in tone, was a good radical labor speech with a high level of content. With some exceptions most of the speeches were well prepared and well delivered. The workshops were uneven in quality; Some of the issue,

delivered. The workshops were uneven in quality, some of the area and union meetings were not well prepared. Some of the issue, union and area meetings produced concrete results, for example, the formation of a national network of unemployed organizations to be set up along the lines of the Rank & File Exchange in Auto. An evaluation of the conference will be forthcoming.

What's Happening in El Salvador?

Inconclusive Salvadoran government offensives during the summer have strengthened the guerillas militarily. Everytime the government is unable to win significant offensives, troop moral and government credibility decline. In October the FMLN launched a major military offensive, capturing numerous small towns and carrying out some military operations in and around the capital for the first time in many months. They also cut the Pan American highway, effectively splitting the country into two parts. The FMLN also claims to have shot down a couple Huey Helicopters over the summer. In addition to these more conventional military efforts, the FMLN is continuing a strategy of economic sabotage, including the bombing of electric generators, power transmission lines and oil storage facilities. The logic being that these facilities are part of an infrastructure that keeps the government going. These attacks divert aid money from the army to repairing these vital government facilities.

Also in October the FDR launched a new diplomatic offensive. FDR and FMLN leaders announced in Mexico City that they are willing to hold a "dialogue" with the Salvadoran government with no pre-conditions. Previously they had required that the US participate directly in any negotiations and a restructuring of the military as pre-conditions to any talks.

The possibility of negotiations or the semantic innovation of "dialogue", opens up all sorts of risks for the opposition coalition in El Salvador, however, the fact that the public announcement for the initiative was made by both FDR and FMLN leaders gives some assurance that this is not the beginning of a split between the political and military groups. More likely it is a tactical move to open up more discussion between the opposition and those who participate in the current government but are opposed to the more extreme right-wing elements. In recent months the coalition of right-wing parties under the leadership of D'Aubuisson's AREANA party has partially unravelled. There is a growing possibility that some of the more traditional rightist military parties could bloc with the Christian Democrats in the Assembly, marginalizing AREANA.

Of course this possibility has raised the fear that the ultra-right might try to stage a coup. Earlier this month rumors of such a coup led to the re-shuffling of some military officers in El Salvador. Its hard to imagine that a right wing coup could occur in El Salvador, given that the right is already in power!

The possibility of a more "moderate" coalition emerging is a possibility that the FDR/FMLN would like to encourage. Despite the rapid polarization of politics in El Salvador, there still exist differences of significance within the existing government. D'Aubuisson and his Hitler admiring followers pose a genuine threat of fascism in El Salvador.

The far-right's response to this initiative has been to unleash a barrage of "disappearances" in San Salvador. Those targeted were FDR leaders and leaders of the professional and technical workers association of El Salvador. These were the very people who would be initiating and encouraging such a dialogue. This is the far-right's way of ensuring no dialogue occurs. These recently disappeared people, some of whom the government admits to be holding (the others are presumed to have been killed by death squads) have put more embarrassing stains on US policy. These developments may yet bring El Salvador back into public scrutiny. The upcoming presidential certification to Congress that human rights violations are being curbed in El Salvador, provide a focus for renewed interest and activity for the anti-intervention movement.

One confusing element in all of this is the recent public statements by Ambassador Hinton of human rights violations in El Salvador. Hinton made a

El Salvador cont.

speech to the Salvadoran Chamber of Commerce about how things would have to be improved. He implied a possible aid cut off and used the same figure for people killed in El Salvador as the Solidarity movement -- 30,000. The Reagan Administration moved quickly to tone it down, but its significance remains unclear. Some possibilities are that it is actually getting difficult for Washington to control their friend D'Aubuisson, and some pressure is needed to get a conviction of the murderers of either the muns or the AIFLD workers. Such a conviction would make the January certification much easier for Congress to swallow. A second possibility is that Washington is trying to signal those in the military that the time is right for a change or shake-up in the Salvadoran government. Perhaps something to push D'Aubuisson out. In any case, such a move would be designed to provide some sort of face lift for the Salvadoran government and pave the way for hassle free certification in January.

As this newsletter goes to mimeo the Salvadoran government is mobilizing for its largest offensive to date. It will involve 10,000 to 13,000 Salvadoran troops, with possible support from 3-5,000 Honduran troops. (It has been reported that the Hondurans are moving relief agency workers out of the border area -- to avoid having international observers around).

CISPES nationally is encouraging chapters to do visable protests around the January certification. They are also launching a fund raising campaign. The campaign will start this spring and will raise funds for medical aid for El Salvador. These funds will go to the liberated zones to build clinics etc. So everyone keep in touch with your local CISPES chapter and help make the January certification as difficult as possible.

Foss

NY Report

The Solidarity Committee (formerly the Solidarity Support Campaign) held a highly successful public forum to defend the political prisoners in Poland, especially the leadership of KOR facing "show trials" for treason. Speakers were Bernadette Devlin, Paul Sweezy, Paul Robeson Jr., Marta Petruszewicz (sociologist), Daniel Berrigan, and Tony Mazzocchi. With the exception of Berrigan, who went off on a tangent attacking the backwardness of American workers, the program was quite good. The S.C. is still in the p process of working out its next steps toward a defense campaign and other work. Much interest was expressed at the forum in terms of people signing mailing lists and sales of literature.

Paul Robeson Jr. will be speaking at a college in Kentucky on the theme of Polish Solidarity and the trade union movement in South Africa. There is a possibility of this being developed into a larger speaking tour. Quite possibly, meetings could be arranged in any cities where money could be raised (from schools, etc.). Contact Mel in NY if your branch would like to pursue this. Robeson is a very effective speaker on the interconnections of the struggle for freedom in the East and West.

I.S. members have initiated a joint anti-war fraction which includes ourselves, SSFN, RWH and independents. One meeting has been held so far. Work in Central American solidarity and the disarmament (i.e. Mobilization for Survival) movements will be the focus of discussion.

We have also established relations with members of Proletarian Unity League in NY. They are interested in activity around the labor paper work, and a meeting will be held this weekend to report on the recent conference. We are also exchanging literature with them.

-Mel via DF

This is important- Read it. ↓ ↓

The Center for Changes is a new, tax-exempt educational organization that was formed to promote projects for unity on the left.

Those who wish to can now make tax-deductible contributions to the Center for Changes in lieu of dues.

This is important too!!!

Now is the time for all good comrades to come to the aid of their organization.

We are kicking off the regroupment campaign in a more public way than to date. The December/January issue of Changes magazine will have a new, improved article on our ideas about regroupment. It will, also, feature articles by representatives from different groups as well as independent socialists responding to our article which has had advance circulation.

We are using this as an opportunity to get wider circulation of our magazine and in turn, our ideas about the need for unity on the left.

WE NEED YOUR COOPERATION! Please go straight to your address book and send us the names and addresses of everyone you think might be interested in learning about the discussion going on around regroupment. The persons whose names you give us will receive one complimentary (free) issue of the next Changes magazine.

We hope that this will whet their appetite and pique their interest and that they will subscribe to Changes post haste.

All kidding aside, this is a very serious appeal for your help. At this time, our ideas about the need for regroupment are being discussed by a very small circle of people. We want to spread the word much more broadly, and in addition, we want to increase the circulation of Changes many times over.

Please do your part in this effort! Send names and addresses and phone numbers (so if we have travelers to the city where your friends live that they might be contacted). We are providing a form to make this job easier. Use extra paper if you have more names than there is space for on the form.

PLEASE GET THESE FORMS BACK TO DETROIT BY DECEMBER 3rd AT THE LATEST.

Thanks for your help and encouragement with regroupment.

Mark Jim O. Ed. W. Carole, Dan, Kim, and Foss
Theda Arthur Jack Metzgar
Passerino Rita Tom Purbois
Bruce B. Ken W.

R2N2 Report -- Elissa

The Reproductive Rights National Network held its annual national conference in Chicago November 12-15. About 200 people attended, representing 40-50 of R2N2's member groups (out of a total of 100+).

The conference was pretty low key, more educational in nature than strategic. The conference reflected past demands of lesbians for more support, and there were two main sessions on that subject. The next conference will reflect the demands of Jewish women for more support--and should be pretty explosive as many of the socialists at the conference felt the problem of Palestinian oppression was at least equal to Jewish oppression.

The most interesting discussion occurred on Sunday night on the topic of "The Future of R2N2 and the Women's Movement." Cathy (from Solidarity) gave a very honest appraisal of the state of R2N2 and the prospects for future organizing. She argued that R2N2 needed to broaden beyond reproductive rights issues, a perspective I agree with. Cathy, who has been on R2N2's steering committee for a number of years, said her impression is that the Network is more of a success on the national level than on the local level, that local groups have only succeeded in creating a small core of activists that don't grow very much. The other two speakers were Myesha, a Black woman in or close to Line of March, who called for more political debate in R2N2, and Debbie, not sure of her affiliation, if any. Debbie expanded on the perspective laid out by Cathy, saying that groups in R2N2 say they are not single issue, that they have a broad program, but in reality we have made reproductive rights the fulcrum around which any other question flows, and that this needs to be reassessed.

It was during this session that I and others put forward the idea of a national conference sponsored by R2N2 on "Strategies for Women's Liberation in the '80s." Both Cathy and Debbie (as well as myself and Marilyn from STO) signed this resolution. There was not a lot of discussion of the idea, and it was couched in the most "exploratory" terms, but the idea was well-received. A small group of people signed up to work on the conference, with Debbie promising to coordinate. Tune in later for further developments.

Within R2n2 there are growing numbers concerned with the difficulty of building the organization, both locally and nationally. These people tended to want serious discussion of perspectives, to broaden beyond reproductive rights issues, to make R2N2 some kind of political pole in the women's movement. On the other hand, there were significant numbers who thought that with a little more energy people could go out and build the group, and that activity should be emphasized over politics. Barbara from the ISO had this position. A third group thought the function of R2N2 should be to meet the needs of its members; this was the group that wanted R2N2 to be more responsive to the needs of lesbian or Jewish members. The last two points of view preferred an orientation with more educational, show-and-tell conferences. Others found this inadequate.

My overall assessment is that R2N2 has a lot of potential, that it has enough credibility to be a left pole in the women's movement--if it chooses to develop that potential. It is also a useful arena for left groups to work together. (Leftists in attendance included Solidarity, Line of March, ISO, Workers Power, Sojourner Truth Org, Revolutionary Socialist League, and of course IS. There were also significant numbers of Black women, two of whom were elected to the steering committee.)

(See reverse side for copy of the resolution on a national conference.)

ON AN EXPLORATION OF A NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
WOMEN'S LIBERATION - A STRATEGY FOR THE '80s

Given the precarious position that women find ourselves facing, politically and economically, at this time; and given the apparent crisis in the women's movement, new questions face all of us.

The defeat of the ERA, the stalemate we encounter concerning abortion, the scotching of the most effective affirmative action programs, which benefitted women, particularly women of color, the increasing disparity in wages between men and women, have made us aware that despite the widespread influence of the ideas of women's equality and liberation, things are amiss.

The backlash against the ideas of sexual freedom, women's equality and reproductive control extends beyond the "New Right" to the New York Times Magazine article on the "death" of feminism among young women, and the "New Left" pro-family pap of Lerner et al. Questions about what should be done abound within the organized sectors of the women's movement, the independent activist women, and certainly, within the ranks of R2N2 itself.

The questions are many: What is the perception of Women's Liberation and the Women's Movement among a broad section of people? What is the cause of the backlash and the defeats? Have we made strategic or tactical errors? Can issues of Women's Liberation see any advances in the coming period, or even gain a broad and active following? What do we do next?

The questions are being asked quietly, but clearly. Until now, the only clear response being heard nationally is that of NOW which is relying on an explicitly electoral strategy within the Democratic party. Many of us feel that it is an inadequate strategy at best.

Yet, to date, there has been no forums for the rest of the women's movement to raise the questions nationally, let alone answer them. And few organizations are in a position to initiate such discussion among activists throughout the country.

Therefore, we propose that, given our national infrastructure, our good relations with other sectors of the Women's movement, and our deep concern with these issues, R2N2 EXPLORE the possibility of jointly initiating a national conference of women to explore these and other questions relating to a Strategy for the 80s.

While our proposal is just that, and leaves many questions unanswered, such as who would form the core initiating group; who would be the main participants at the conference, we think that the time to TAKE THE FIRST STEPS are now. Only then can we begin to define the answers.

We suggest that a committee be appointed to talk to groups (primarily activists/non-electorally oriented with an emphasis on Women of Color) and to prepare a preliminary proposal on the scope and content of such a conference, to be submitted to the RRNN for approval. Given that the Network meets once yearly, we suggest that the proposal be approved or defeated by referendum since the success of the venture depends on all member groups participation.

Elissa Clark - Detroit
Cathy Cristellar - Chicago

Marilyn Katz-Chicago
Debby Rosenberg-Chicago