

Socialist Feminist Conference

MS – 141

Wright State University
Department of Special Collections and Archives

Processed By:
Linda Rinehart
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Introduction

Records of the Socialist Feminist Conference held July 4-6, 1975 were accessioned into the Wright State Department of Archives and Special Collections on September 30, 1983. The accession number of the collection is 83-17. Robin Suits, who was a member of the Dayton Socialist Feminist Group instrumental in planning the conference, donated the materials.

The papers in the collection date from September 1974 to October 1975. The collection is in one Hollinger box and 20 file folders. It is organized into 7 series:

- Series 1- Background and Fostering of the Socialist Feminist Conference
- Series 2- Steering Committee Details
- Series 3- Members of Conference Planning Committee
- Series 4- Conference Registration
- Series 5- Post Conference
- Series 6- Printed Materials
- Series 7- Tapes

There are no restrictions on the use of this collection.

Brief Biographical Sketch

The Socialist Feminist Conference was held July 4-6, 1975 at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. It brought together activist women in one of the most significant political events in Dayton area history. The Dayton Socialist Group of the New American Movement was instrumental in bringing the conference to Yellow Springs. Robin Suits and Julia Reichert of the Dayton group spearheaded the organization of the conference. The conference was planned to bring together and build a unified broad based movement for Socialist Feminism.

The conference was open to any woman who agreed with the goals of social feminism. The conference was not open to men. The planning committee agreed on four principles for unity:

- I. We recognize the need for and support the existence of the autonomous women's movement throughout the revolutionary process;
- II. We agree that all oppression, whether based on race, class, sex, or lesbianism, is inter-related and the fight for liberation from oppression must be simultaneous and cooperative; and
- III. We agree that socialist feminism is a strategy for revolution,
- IV. We take our movement seriously; discussions at conference should be in the spirit of struggle and unity, to move socialist feminism forward.

The conference was designed to provide equal time on theory, strategy, and practice. Music, dance, drama, and art accompanied the discussions. Small group discussions were planned that included such topics as women in prison, abortion, Jewish lesbians, self-defense, the family under capitalism, and others. Most of the work for the weekend conference was planned to involve Work Place ORGANIZING, Community organizing, and Building a Socialist Feminist Movement. Third World members dealt with oppressed racial and national minorities. A Third World Women's Caucus was held.

Culture was an integral part of the three day event. A play, Lady in the Corner, was presented by the Circle of the Witch theater group, a collective feminist theatre from Minneapolis. A party was held with a women's band. Women's films were shown and places were provided to display photographs, art, and other works of the women.

The conference was attended by over 1,600 women with differing view points in all the topics. There were struggles during the meetings. The purpose of the conference was to build and unify a solid women's movement; however, indications are that it split and disillusioned some. Discussions and workshops were dominated by strong viewpoints. The conference for women was climatic in that it seemed to be the high point in the activist women's movement. The conference was a success in what they were planning to do, but after the conference many women left the movement and within a year most of the groups that had organized the conference had disbanded. One group that did not disband is the Radical Women, which went on to grow from a Seattle, Washington based group to an international organization (website at

www.RadicalWomen.org). Shortly after the conference, the Dayton Socialist Feminist Group split with the New American Movement, and it was not long thereafter that the Dayton Socialist Feminist Group became extinct.

Information for this historical sketch was taken from the “Socialist Feminist Conference” publication located in File 20 of this collection and a personal interview with Mrs. Robin Suits on June 4, 1984.

Scope and Content

The records and correspondence pertaining to the Socialist Feminist Conference provide insight into a significant women's movement. The collection includes correspondence relating to the "birth" of the conference, as well as correspondence pertaining to planning the actual conference. Letters to and from the major members of the planning committee provide ideas of the political thinking of the day. The collection is arranged into six series.

Series 1, Background and Fostering of the Socialist Feminist Conference, includes general correspondence from women across the country who urged the planning of the conference. Letters from the Third World Alliance, Black Women's Caucus, and other third world "sisters" are incorporated into one file.

Series 2, Steering Committee Plans, is records of the steering committee meetings held in various areas of the country. Notes from meetings in November 1974, February 1975, March 1975, April 1975, and May 1975 are included. Very specific ideas for the conference and workshops are included in the minutes of the meetings. Rough drafts of the agenda and procedures for the conference are in papers in File 4. A policy paper written by Barbara Ehrenreich for presentation at the conference is in File 5.

The files in Series 3 are correspondence and papers of the nine major organizers of the conference: The Dayton Socialist Feminist Group, The Boston Area Socialist Feminist Organization, Chicago Women's Liberation Union, C.P. Gilman, Lexington (KY) Socialist/Feminist Union, New York Women's Union, Radical Women, Twin City Union, and Valley Women's Union. Several files include position papers of the various organizations. The Dayton group's papers deal mainly with the New American Movement and requests for that group to endorse and coordinate the conference. The Lexington file has a rough draft of the symbol used at the conference and the Radical Women file includes reprints available at that time.

Series 4, Conference Registration Details, has three files that are informal requests for conference information, conference applications listed alphabetically, and a rough draft list of conference attendees. A note might be made here that the estimate at the conference was 1600 women. This number of conference applications is not included in the collection. One can get an idea of the number from the rough draft list in File 17.

Series 5 is a file of Post Conference Press Releases. Among these are "Saskatoon Women's Liberation News Letter" and "What She Wants." Series 6 is Printed Materials including various reprints, pamphlets, booklets, and articles pertaining to issues of the women's movement. In the last file, File 20, is a copy of the Socialist Feminist Conference leaflet mailed to women giving conference information and application procedures. All the printed matter gives a look into the topics of issue at conference time.

Series 7 consists of audio tapes recorded at the conference sessions.

All correspondence is arranged chronologically within each file. The undated letters are to the back of each file. The conference applications are arranged alphabetically.

Container Description

<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
Series I: Background and Fostering of Socialist Feminist Conference			
1	1	General Correspondence	Sept. 1974-Jun. 1975
	2	Third World Contacts	Oct. 1974-Jun. 1975
Series II: Steering Committee Details			
1	3	Steering Committee Minutes	Nov. 1974-May 1975
	4	Rough Draft Agenda Items and Correspondence	n.d.
	5	Agenda, Procedure, Evaluation Forms, and Position Papers	n.d.
Series 3: Members of Conference Planning Committee			
1	6	Dayton Socialist Feminist Group	Sept. 1974-Apr. 1975
	7	Boston area Socialist Feminist Organization	Oct. 1974-May 1975
	8	Chicago Women's Liberation Union	n.d.
	9	C.P. Gilman	Nov. 1974-Apr. 1975
	10	Lexington Socialist/Feminist Union	Sept. 1974-May 1975
	11	New York Women's Union	n.d.
	12	Radical Women Seattle	Oct. 1974-Oct. 1975
	13	Twin City Union Minneapolis	Nov. 1974-Oct. 1975
	14	Valley Women's Union Massachusetts	Oct. 1974-Mar. 1975
Series IV: Conference Registration Details			
1	15	Request for Conference Information	n.d.
	16	Conference Applications	n.d.
	17	Conference Registration Lists	n.d.
Series V: Post Conference			
1	18	Post Conference Press Releases	n.d.
Series VI: Printed Materials			
1	19	Women's Movements – Pamphlets and Reprints	n.d.
	20	Socialist Feminist Conference Mailing Leaflet	n.d.
Series VII: Tapes			

2	1	Third World Panel Conference Critique	n.d.
	2	Conference criticism	n.d.
	3	Day Care Workers Union Organizing	n.d.
	4	Building the Movement	n.d.
	5	H. Wyloff	n.d.
	6	Health	n.d.
	7	Sterilization	n.d.
	8	How to redefine working women's history from a Socialist perspective	n.d.
	9	Theory Panel	n.d.
	10	Third World Panel	n.d.
	11	Women in Vietnam; Women in Prison	n.d.
	12	Community organizing panel; Economy	n.d.