

MAINE LESBIAN FEMINIST NEWSLETTER
January, 1980

"Maine Lesbian Feminist was organized at a workshop at Gay Symposium III. The purpose of the organization was, and still is, to provide a base for support, consciousness raising, and political action. Also, a celebration for Lesbians throughout the State of Maine". C.H.

Minutes from Dec. 16th meeting

Scribe - Deb S.

The gathering in Eundy's Harbor included pot luck lunch, "reaching-out" workshop (my apologies to those who called it "seduction"), Gay Symposium workshop, and general meeting.

General Meeting Notes

1. Someone suggested starting an MLF library. If each Q brings a list of books she is willing to lend (next meeting) to other MLF members we could form an overall list of books available by contacting book owner.

2. January meeting set at Susan B. Anthony Club on the 26th of Jan, in Belfast.

3. There will be a retreat weekend including an MLF meeting February 16-17 in Strong. Please think about what you would like to happen on a retreat weekend--to be discussed at next meeting.

4. There will be a Gay Symposium meeting at UMA, January 19.

Agenda: 11-12 Committee meetings

12-1 Lunch

1-5 Steering Committee Meeting

JANUARY'S MLF MEETING - Jan. 26 at the Susan B. Anthony Club-Belfast.

Agenda: 12:00 - Hellos, etc.

1:00 - Motherhood workshop

2:00 - General Meeting (discuss Symposium also)

3:00 - Music & Poetry (come with materials to share and be ready for a singalong or whatever)

5:00 - Dinner-pot luck (Hot plate is all we have. Bring cold stuff or something to plug in).

7:00 - Dance at Susan B. Anthony Club - donation \$2.

DIRECTIONS TO CLUB:

Located in downtown Belfast, above the Grasshopper Shop on Main St. Enter the door to the right of the Grasshopper, go up to the third floor, turn left and you are there!

ANNOUNCEMENTS & INFORMATION

*** California Amazon relocating in Maine. Needs a home, preferably near Augusta (but open to other areas). Contact: Marlane RFD #2 c/o Clark; Gardiner, Ore 04345. Tele # 582-4580.

***Portland Area Women: "The Women's Room" has been opened since Sept. Volunteers there offer support groups, a lending library, evening entertainment, and speakers from the community. They will be open as long as they have your support. Hours are 9 am & 9pm every Thurs. For more info call Mary Hondo at the YWCA, 87 Spring St., Portland, 772-1906 or Marilyn at 772-2753.

***Willie Tyson's new album "Willie Tyson" now available. Look for it at bookstores (feminist of course). Lima Bean Records.

***New Years Dance Dec. 31st 9pm -1 at Old Cambridge Baptist Church, Mass Ave, Cambridge, Mass (between Central & Harvard Square). \$3.50 d

***Lesbian Custody Case: Bunny King of Franklin County (Western Mass) is fighting for the custody of her 2 children, Michelle 7 & Jacqueline 5. This past fall, the custody hearing in Probate Court lasted 5 days. There were extensive inquiries into Bunny's mental, emotional, physical health; economic, educational & family background, religious affiliation, her lesbianism, other relationships, anything that could be dragged in. After 3 painful months, the judge, a 70-year old white male handed down his decision: that in his opinion "...the environment in which she proposes to raise the children, namely a lesbian household, creates an element of instability that would adversely affect the welfare of the children.". His aim is to uphold the status quo. Bunny, her lawyers, family, friends, & supporters are not willing to give up & give in to this blatant ~~XX~~ form of patriarchal oppression & discrimination. They have 60 days to appeal & need \$6500 \$1500 of which we need in 30 days for a transcript of the record. Give what you can. Franklin County Lesbian Alliance, P.O. Box 235, Deerfield Mass 01342. Make checks payable to Bunny King Defense Fund. For more info call (413) 772-0807. Thanks. L.H.

DATES TO REMEMBER

*** State Symposium Planning Session at Univ. of Maine - Augusta, 10:00 - 11, Committee Meeting, 11-12, Lunch; 1:00 State Meeting. Everyone welcome

*** January 26th MLF Meeting at Susan B. Anthony Club, Belfast

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+++ THE SUSAN B. ANTHONY CLUB 000
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This is a club for Q identified Q. It was created with the intention of getting cultural, social & educational events happening in Maine for Q. So, if you want something to happen & keep happening, help by supporting the place or by using the space for Q's events. Write to Susan B. Anthony Club, c/o MLF P.O. Box 125, Belfast, Maine 04915x.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January

- Sun. Jan. 6 - Concert with Jan & Margaret Shakespeare, cellist and classical fiddler. 3:00 p.m. \$2.50.
Sun. Jan 13 - Film/Discussion series. Banners & Babies 2:00 p.m.
Sat. Jan 26 - MLF Meeting 12-5 with potluck dinner after
DANCE 7:00 Q Q Q Q Q

UPCOMING

February

- Sun. Feb. 10 - Film
Sat. Feb. 23 - Valentines Dance

March

Poetry reading

POETRY CORNER

At the last poetry reading (Dec. 2) we passed a paper around and everyone wrote a line; this is the poem we came up with when we put the lines together!!

Color of the room is blue
without a word
we hear the whispers
entering rain
do not live in the margins
We come together as one in the circle
sharing the wonder of our sisters' hearts
Together we find the reasons
for the connections and the differences.

PUBLICATIONS:

*** "Signs: Journal of Q in Culture and Society". Published quarterly by the Univ. of Chicago Press 1 yr/\$16. Send to: The University of Chicago Press, 11030 Langley Ave. Chicago, Ill. 60628

*** "OUT LOUD: A collection of New Songs by Q" Ink works Press: 4220 Telegraph Ave., Oakland, CA 94609 \$5.95 plus 80¢ postage.

*** A book of poems by Jean Sirius "WOMYN/FRIENDS" True poems about womyn from Sirius Books, Box 1027 Brooklyn, NY 11202 \$2.00 plus 50¢ post.

*** "The Allegheny Feminist"-a newspaper to keep up with the Q's movement and activities. \$5/yr. P.O. Box 7483 Pittsburgh, PA 15213

*** "SPARE RIB" Britain's only monthly feminist magazine. News and features from Britain and all over the world, plus books, films, theatre and music reviews \$21/yr airmail or \$13/yr seamail. Send to: Spare Rib Subscription, c/o Linda Phillips, 114 George St., Berkhamsted, Herts HP4 2EF, England.

*** EYE TO EYE: PORTRAITS OF LESBIANS: photographs by JEB plus herstory

of Lesbian photography by Judith Schwarz \$10.50 from Glad Hag Books, Box 2934, Washington, DC 20013.

XXXXXXXXX*** "New Directions for Q" A bi-monthly newspaper \$6/yr, 223 Old Hook Rd, Westwood NJ 07675.

There Shall never be another season of silence until Q have the same rights men have on this green earth. Susan B. Anthony

REQUEST FROM THE NEWSLETTER STAFF*****

Please send your thoughts or any info that you wish to share. We put the Newsletter together the last week of every month so send it in before that time. Got any poems, stories, etc?? send to address below.

MLF NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTION

IS THERE A LAVENDER MOON ON YOUR ENVELOPE? YOUR SUBSCRIPTION IS DUE. MLF needs your \$5 (yearly subscription rate) in order for us to continue the Newsletter. It costs \$ to send it out. Please contribute as much as you can if not \$5. Thank you!! Send to: MLF

Checks made payable: MLF Newsletter

P.O. Box 125

NAME

Belfast, Maine 04915

ADDRESS

I DON'T WANT THE NEWSLETTER

COME HEAR ♀ MUSIC!
\$2.50 or what you can afford

MARGARET SHAKESPEARE
classical fiddler

with
cellist

JAN SHAKESPEARE

JAN 6

3:00 PM

SUSAN B. ANTHONY CLUB
BELFAST

\$2.50 or what you can afford



NOW Convention

Out of the Revolution Into the Mainstream

By Kerry Lobel & Jeanne Cordova

The setting was as complex and as overpowering as the politics which took place. When the largest feminist organization in the women's movement brings its annual convention to a luxury, 30-story, glass belted tubular hotel with 350 menu items, you know the Women's Movement has gone establishment.

Indeed, out-of-the-revolution-and-into-the-mainstream was the story of the weekend. What happened at the 12th Annual NOW Convention is in many respects what is happening to the Women's Movement. NOW moved to the right, and abbreviated feminism in the name of efficiency.

Inspired by its charismatic President, Eleanor (Ellie) Smeal, the delegates accomplished this feat by: sweeping out of office its only open lesbian incumbent, denying office to the only woman of color running, and refusing re-election to a politically radical officer. The new leadership of the National Organization for Women is, perhaps appropriately, five white straight women.

Throughout the Oct. 4-6 Convention held at the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles, it was clear that the 860 delegates and the 2,000 related Convention-goers

were focused solely on the elections race.

President Ellie Smeal and Executive Vice President Judy Goldsmith ran uncontested for second terms, so the heat of battle centered on the offices of Action Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. With no campaigning of her own to do, Smeal formed a ticket of five, and campaigned hard for them. Her cadre, which was alternately called "The Team", "The Slate", or "The Machine", consisted of Smeal, Goldsmith, Jane Wells-Schooley, Sandra Roth, and Alice Chapman.

Testifying to the hard won strength of NOW's Lesbian Caucus, all of the candidates lined up to speak to NOW's largest special interest group.

Incumbent treasurer, Eve Norman, stressed her political record, detailing her participation in the 1971 drafting of NOW's first lesbian resolution. Her opponent, Alice Chapman, stressed her professional accounting background.

Incumbent Secretary, Sandra Roth, championed her record in office, while Sharon Parker, a woman of color from Washington, D.C., who later opened her delegate address in Spanish, also spoke on her political merit.

On the strength of their own merits, Arlie Scott, incumbent Action-Vice President, and Jane Wells-Schooley, the

state backed candidate, were well matched, sophisticated speakers, each with a history of outstanding accomplishment in her own field.

Speaking before the delegate body, Schooley said, "Now is the time for bold action and new leadership, we are at a crisis of inaction! NOW must have a national campaign of the size and scope of the ERA campaign on the issues of reproductive rights and lesbian rights. We must dramatically increase minority participation in leadership."

In addressing the delegates, Scott detailed her position, noting that a "platform is something you stand on, not something you run on." Scott stressed the crucial need for NOW to participate in the 1980 elections as an independent feminist force, rather than as an adjunct to the Democratic Party. Saying, "We will never return to our closets or coat hangers," she stressed the need for unity and commitment to action on abortion and lesbian rights.

To uninformed delegates, the Action VP candidates differed little. A vocal minority loudly applauded every other line of both candidates, but the large majority of voters remained undecided.

All The President's Women

As Ellie Smeal took the podium, it became clear that the President herself, not Schooley, was Scott's opposition. Departing with a decade's tradition, the President came out publically and strongly for a slate for the first time in NOW history. Explaining her reasons, an impassioned Smeal told the delegates, "This (backing a slate) is the most difficult thing I've done for NOW... the challenge that lies before us is so difficult that we must have as our leadership the strongest possible leaders... this group of officers is strongest and I seek actively for their election. My duty is to tell you how I feel."

In the hour that followed, Smeal faced tough questions as the membership struggled to understand what was happening. "Your slate is tantamount to a cabinet, do you think we should change the by-laws?" "How is your slate exemplary of NOW's Affirmative Action commitment?" "If there is so much friction between you and the incumbents, how has NOW been able to come so far in the last two years?"

In what many perceived as a stunning abandonment of NOW's principles of Affirmative Action, Smeal defended her slate saying, "I believe we must go for qualifications. For too long we've had token representation in this organization." She noted that the members of the slate initially began as independents, and said, "I did not go out to find people of all combinations of the human race."

In the name of running a "clean" campaign, Smeal refused to be explicit about the "friction in the home office" that her slate was designed to cure. Questioned by delegates as to the truth of a rumor that she wanted a change in the bylaws which restricted a president to two

terms, Smeal dodged, "I'm running for office now."

The controversial and testing session ended as one delegate addressed Smeal. "I am agonized and distressed trying to decide what to do. I need to know, can you work with whoever is elected?" Smeal concluded, "If that happens, a tough job will be tougher. . . and I will find that I am out of touch with the membership."

The delegates had been issued a challenge and they knew it. The polls opened a half hour later, and when they closed that evening it was clear that, whether out of admiration, fear, gratitude or acquiescence, the membership of NOW had given their president what she wanted. The slate was in by almost a two thirds margin.

What Price Victory?

The election tension seemed to break at last on Sunday afternoon as Arlie Scott joined Smeal on stage to make a final "thank you" speech.

A hush fell over the delegate body as retiring V.P. Arlie Scott took the podium Sunday afternoon. "You are the most courageous women I have ever worked with, and I want to thank you for the last ten years of support," Scott said. "I thank NOW for changing my life and making it meaningful." As Smeal crossed the stage and hugged Scott, the show of unity was greeted with a standing ovation and collective sigh of relief.

However, observers questioned whether the wounds to NOW could be healed by a speech which Charlotte Bunch, a Scott campaign committee head, called, "A display of loyalty to feminism, not necessarily to NOW."

The 12th Annual NOW Conference concluded anti-climatically with the writing of some 129 resolutions. Only a small number of these were heard by the delegates, but the body did pass a Lesbian & Gay Rights Resolution which called for the hiring of a full time staff person to work on lesbian issues, the promotion of a national campaign for lesbian rights, and the expenditure next year of \$25,000 on

gay issues.

Single Issued Future?

Late Sunday afternoon, a group of lesbian and straight feminists who called themselves "Appalled Women" (AW) met and discussed their frustrations. Some said they would leave NOW, but others who wanted to remain discussed the formation of a Feminist Caucus within NOW and the publication of a 'NOW Free Press'.

Lesbian leader Del Martin, who was the first chair of NOW's Lesbian Task Force, bluntly stated, "NOW is no longer a feminist organization." Referring to the campaign tactics of the Smeal slate, she charged, "NOW is trying to overpower its members rather than empower them. This is male type politics, an inability to struggle with disagreement."

Feminist historian and NOW member Marilyn Murphy warned, "To get the vote in 1920, the Suffrage Movement sold out the immigrant question and blacks. The women said, 'let us vote and we'll counter the vote of the foreign men and black men.' What's happening now is — give us the ERA at any price. NOW is becoming respectable and is paying the price of sisterhood."

Referring to Smeal's plea for qualifications as first priority, disenchanted AW member, Harriet Perl observed, "Mussolini did make the trains run on time. But I don't want efficiency, I want feminism."

Yet others disagreed. A California delegate commented, "I'm a feminist, Smeal's a feminist. All of us, feminists. Why must others label us playing male politics when we disagree?"

It is clear that the results of the 1979 NOW elections raise serious questions for the organization's future. There are no women of color and only two open lesbians in NOW's top 27 posts (Board and officers). All five officers are straight, three are from a single geographic region (Mid-Atlantic), with the top two coming from the same state. The top three officers

have a primary commitment to the ERA and their backgrounds are heavily weighted to that one issue.

Although newly elected officers dismiss criticisms that NOW is becoming a single issue organization, it is feared by many NOW delegates and observers that NOW's new leaders lack the expertise to deal with a wide range of issues. The "homogenized monolith", as one member described it, may experience serious difficulties in reaching out to women of color and in speaking credibly about affirmative action and the organization's commitment to a visible lesbian rights campaign.

Finally, the Smeal slate's campaign tactics may have taken their toll on committed NOW members. Allegations of improprieties regarding Eve Norman's job as Treasurer, and the secret playing of a tape of a Board meeting wherein Arlie Scott raised questions about supporting the March on Washington (at a time when major gay groups were themselves questioning the timeliness of the March), were seen as attempts to discredit Scott's and Norman's characters.

A week after the Convention feelings still ran high. Kay Whitlock, former Chair of NOW's National Lesbian Rights Committee called Smeal's victory "vicious and brutal." She summarized, "The new slate of officers reflects and represents no diversity of (NOW) membership. Those three courageous and capable persons who ran independent campaigns. . . deserve the thanks and gratitude of feminists who believe that diversity in our movement is a strength and who believe in a multi-issue feminist perspective."

In her address to the delegates, Smeal said, "Remember our determination this weekend, and remember equality for women and the goals of feminist philosophy. We will bring them home to America and to the world."

NOW has a long and hard road ahead. Observers wonder if Smeal, Goldsmith, Schooley, Roth and Chapman can, indeed, bring NOW members home. ■

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