



**Anarchist
Unionism:
The Feminist
Connection**

Workers Solidarity Alliance

Feminism and anarchist unionism are not often mentioned in the same sentence. Among working people in general there seems to be little or no knowledge of anarchist unionism or the impact such ideas have had on the American labor movement.

Historically much organizing was done in male dominated industries. Little effort was made to organize the service and communication sectors which were heavily dominated by women workers. But the revolutionary labor movement in America has never been exclusively male. Women have played a major role in all efforts to organize revolutionary unions. Anarchist women such as Lucy Parsons and Emma Goldman are only two examples of women involved in labor struggles.

Our herstory is filled with countless examples of women taking control over our own struggles. From the mines of New Mexico to the aluminum plants of Tennessee, from the packing houses of Iowa to the garment shops of New York City, women organized themselves and, often, their male co-workers. In male dominated industries women walked the picket lines alongside of or instead of the men. Women often fought in the pitched battles with police, scabs and bosses. It was the women who "home visited" the wives of scabs to make sure they became educated about the issues of that particular strike, and to offer mutual aid and support to those families who struck or were locked out by the boss. In the best of anarchist traditions, the women did this on their own.

The history of revolutionary unionism is filled with women organizers such as Industrial Workers of the World organizers Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Matilda Rabinowitz. The history books, however, are silent when it comes to the thousands of working women who sacrificed and continue to



sacrifice to organize. The history of anarchist unionism is filled with women's names.

The Feminist Connection Today

This history is important, but so is the present. Today the fight against sexism and hierarchy often must take place at work. Women are still paid less than men for the same work. Most cases of sexual harassment occur on the job. Child care facilities paid for by the boss are few and far between. Because the majority of American women work outside the home and are facing these and other problems, anarchist unionism has more to offer than ever before.

Women are more likely than men to work in non-unionized jobs, such as those in the service sector and light industrial production. Women's issues and concerns are generally glossed over by the mainstream (AFL-CIO) trade union leaders. And in unions where women make up

the majority of the membership, the leadership is often male.

Anarchist unionists not only offer practical experience with workplace organizing, fighting for decent settlement of immediate issues, we challenge the very foundations upon which sexism and capitalism are built. We offer a valuable resource for women seeking change.

Workers Solidarity Alliance is committed to women's liberation. At our 1990 National Convention WSA reaffirmed our commitment to feminist principles and formed a working group on sexism and feminism. This gender balanced group collects and distributes information. It encourages people to write articles for our own publication (ideas & action) and the women's press.

In addition to writing and thinking about women's issues, WSA is taking action. Many local WSA groups have worked to defend reproductive rights and are working on other issues of concern to women. All local WSA groups provide child care when needed.

We believe that we have a new World to gain. A world free of sexism and exploitation. A world where we, as women and workers, can control our own destinies.

Mujeres Libres!

Free Women Network


In August of 1990 an international group of Anarchist women's groups met in Bordeaux, France. The result of this meeting was the formation of the Mujeres Libre (Free Women) international network.

The network is independent of any political organization and has accepted Anarcho-Syndicalism as a basic strategy. The group is non-sectarian. Network groups are encouraged to work with a wide variety of women's organizations, with special emphasis being placed on abortion and employment rights.

Men are welcome to participate in group discussions and network meetings, but only women may vote on decisions affecting the course of the network.

Currently there are groups and individual members from France, Spain, Chile, England, Australia and Germany. Contacts also exist in Belgium, Switzerland, Italy and the United States. The WSA Working Group on Feminism and Sexism is supportive of the goals of Mujeres Libres!

WSA Working Group on Feminism and Sexism



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