

# A NEW STRUGGLE NOTES & THE NEED FOR A CHANGING PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN

KT - 24.6.76

- WK BIG FLAME

These brief notes are an attempt to link together the need to review Struggle Notes and the need to take account of the changing situation in the debate on our future perspectives on women leading up to the conference.

The two are linked, because we cannot be confident of a change in Struggle Notes unless we understand what our perspective on women is during this period, and what relation this bears on how we organise.

(I think it would also help our discussions much more if we started to be positive about the different levels of women's struggles which exist. As a first step in these notes, I have used "Women's Movement" to mean the organised women's movement of the kind of women who go to women's conferences, who are in women's groups, who read Spare Rib. And then I have used the more general phrase "Struggles of working-class women" to mean struggles like the equal pay strikes, nursery struggles, battles over housing - in fact most of the struggles we have documented in Struggle Notes.

These definitions are not very satisfactory, because they overlap so much. Nevertheless, I think they help to clarify broad areas.)

## CONTENTS AND MAIN ARGUMENTS

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2. How did we see Struggle Notes originally?
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4. A new Struggle Notes to meet a changing situation.
5. The problems involved.
6. The arguments against.
7. Should we change it? (yes)

### 1. CURRENT CRITICISMS OF STRUGGLE NOTES

#### a. "It's difficult to read"

This has been said time and time again and it's undoubtedly true. But it's true, not because we can't read it (after all, it's better duplicated than anything else that comes out of BF including our more 'popular' leaflets and bulletins), but because it looks so unapproachable to working-class women.

#### b. "It would be better if printed"

Right. But we don't have the resources, because we're too small and overworked and perhaps unambitious.

#### c. "Not enough BF women share the work"

True. Most of the work has been done by three women in Liverpool and three women in West London. And we should discuss more why this has happened. Probably, with a better and more useful Struggle Notes, other women would be more tempted to work on it and use it.

#### d. "It's hard to write for, because we don't know who it's really aimed at"

This seems like a failure to understand our perspective at the beginning (see below) which is all the more reason for being clear and DISCUSSING WHAT WE WANT AND NEED NOW.

#### e. "It's neither for the women's movement or for working-class women"

There is no publication and not even any attempt to make one (with the possible exception of some issues and articles in Spare Rib) which will meet the needs of both. So it's hardly surprising that our first

steps were so faltering. However, I still think it's possible. It's also necessary.

f. "Anyway we just don't have the resources"

We might not have them as BF members but there are many women who regularly read Struggle Notes of which a few might easily help us to produce a womens publication given the right situation and atmosphere.

## 2. HOW DID WE SEE STRUGGLE NOTES ORIGINALLY?

Our main reasons for producing a BF Womens Struggle Notes were:

1. To establish and help build a working-class perspective of women, particularly inside the Women's Movement
2. To provide a disciplined way in which we in BF could draw together and look at the struggles of women
3. To provide a basis on which we could make an analysis of women's struggles in the current period
4. To be a voice of BF women
5. To use it to draw together all the women militants (both working-class and women's movement) that we know and work with

## 3. HOW HAS THIS CHANGED?

Understanding what has changed in the last 18 months means understanding everything - womens struggles in relation to working-class struggle as a whole; developments in the women's movement; the development of feminism and women's consciousness inside BF; and the relationship between revolutionary organisation and the class struggle in the current period.

Most of which I don't have the space to go into here (Hopefully, the lead-up to the conference will clarify some of these points).

However, I would like to add some of my own notes:

- We have developed our analysis of women to a certain extent, (see discussion around housework and wages for housework in Internal Bulletin and Women's Commission; also section on women in Dossier '74 women's articles in newspaper, Women's Struggle Notes etc)
- New women have joined BF (though not as many as we would like)
- We have initiated, though in a small way, a discussion about working-class women in the Women's Movement but...
- We are probably in more contact with vastly more working-class women in our day-to-day practice than previously, and Struggle Notes at present is not up to this
- There is a growing number of women in the Women's Movement who find a response in Struggle Notes to the things they are thinking about, but who are not yet prepared to join BF (mostly through reservations based on knowledge of the rest of the left)
- We are more conscious that the speed with which the current situation is changing is forcing us to find ways to organise with other comrades and militant people even if they are not in the same organisation as us.
- There is an even bigger space and need inside the Women's Movement to develop a revolutionary womens perspective -- IF WE HAVE THE CONFIDENCE AND NON-SECTARIANISM TO DO IT.

#### 4. A NEW STRUGGLE NOTES TO MEET A CHANGING SITUATION

Therefore I suggest that we think of a new womens publication to meet these new needs.

The main aspects of a new Struggle Notes would be:

- a) That it is directed primarily at the working-class women we know or have contact with.
- b) That we can use it also in lots of struggle situations (on pickets, demos, occupied supermarkets (!), in hospitals, in Women's Aid, on the streets, on housing estates, conferences etc...
- c) That we still use it as a major contribution to a working-class perspective and revolutionary feminism in the Women's Movement.
- d) That the content be more varied than Struggle Notes (one or two longer articles, cartoons, letters etc) trying to bring together the best elements of the Women's Movement (womens health, sisterhood, collective child-care, ideas on family, collective organising) with the experience and combattivness of the struggles of working-class women (against housework, equal pay, playgroups etc.)

#### HOW WE COULD DO IT

Because we do not have the resources to product something like this on our own, I suggest that we discuss the possibility of have an open editorial collective, inviting several of the women we know to discuss the idea. The only basis on which this could work satisfactorily is to work out the clear political principles from which we could work.

These should include the following:

1. That our main orientation is to working-class women
2. That our starting point is that the fundamental condition of oppression and exploitation of women in modern capitalist society is rooted to her role as an unwaged housewife.
3. That we believe in the necessity for revolutionary change in society and that we want to contribute to and help to organise that change.
4. That we see the need for the unification of all working-class people in struggle, but that part of that process towards unification requires women to develop their own strength and power as women together, in whatever way possible.
5. We support the six demands of the Women's Movement
6. That we support all struggles of women aimed at increasing women's power whether these are housing, child-care, waged work, against rape and battering etc...

If possible there should be different kinds of BF women in editorial collective (working-class and Women's Movement).

#### 5. THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED

The main one is obvious. The new Struggle Notes would not be the voice of BF women as such. It could not say Big Flame Womens Group on the outside. (Probably we would say on the inside something like "Put together by a women's collective some of whom are in BF, some of whom are... )

If we establish our political principles (see above) clearly enough, it will automatically exclude Working Women's Charter, Power of Women and radical feminists (the ones who don't believe in any male involvement ever).

It would still require a lot of work and even more imagination and good will than at present.

It would have to be regular (to maintain credibility) once every two months AT LEAST.

It would have to have a centralised subscription and contact list. Formalised, organised and that works.

It would be hard to know how much of it we could write as BF as such.

It would be more difficult (though not impossible) to rotate. (Not impossible because there could be open collectives in every town).

## 6. THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST

1. Our politics would be diluted
2. We have built up Struggle Notes as BF women and we would lose credibility if we changed that
3. We would be left doing the shit-work and not being able to give BF the credit
4. We are at a great risk in always being completely submerged in these open/collective settings, when most of the initiative and drive comes from us
5. We would not be free to say how we work as BF women
6. We couldn't advertise BF so much
7. There would always be an uneasy relationship between US (in BF) and THEM (not in BF).
8. We in London could just produce a London BF Struggle Notes if we are the only people who sell it
9. It's competing with Spare Rib

## 7. SHOULD WE CHANGE IT? (YES)

I don't think we should go on producing Struggle Notes as it is, even just to sell in London. There already exists a tension between Women's Movement London and working-class women everywhere else, and I think that's one of the main things we are trying to break down. We should try to produce a publication which we can really use in all the different situations we are organising in. And I think we can be more successful with a new-style Struggle Notes on a picket line than with the newspaper.

It would give us the chance to have serious and more open political discussions with a wider group of women, on a clear political basis. We would have more sellers and more buyers (bigger and better quality circulation - more working-class) than at present. We could develop a much more serious relationship with other women militants on an equal basis. Because it would be more open, more approachable than at present, we could probably have open meetings in different areas based on what was happening and what had been written in that issue. It would not be competing with Spare Rib because it would have a different audience (more day-to-day working-class??). Working-class women in BF would be much more involved in it.

I think we can use it to develop our politics. A publication of this sort is clearly needed in the current situation which draws on the struggles of working-class women of the women's movement and which is also developing a revolutionary perspective. And eventually, I believe that it could basically strengthen BF enormously, by strengthening us and the women we organise with.