

# on our way

the women's center newsletter  
17 JANUARY 72 volume 1 no. 6  
from 595 mass. ave. camb. 661-9650



Dear Sisters.

I've just got back from London, where I hung out a little at the Women's Liberation Workshop, and talked to some of the women in the women's movement there. I want to write about the Workshop organization because I think they've managed to create a real woman's politics, based on trust and equality. And they get things done.

The Workshop is an umbrella organization which allows 30 - 40 small groups in the London area to coordinate, make decisions, and support each other. To belong to the Workshop, to have a vote in the 'Office Collective' meetings, which make the decisions for the Workshop, you have to be in a small group. This is any group of more than four who've been meeting at least six months and subscribe to a very general statement of direction drawn up for the entire women's movement in England last year and called the Four Campaigns: 1) equal pay and opportunities 2) equal education and training 3) 24-hour nurseries 4) free contraception and abortion on demand. You can attend the Office Collective meetings and speak if you're not in a group, but you can only vote as a representative of a group. Each group is supposed to send a representative to the Office Collective meetings which are held once a month. In fact, on the average, only ten representatives out of the forty or so groups actually show up at a given month. The representatives are chosen any way the particular group desires. Usually it is a volunteer, and usually it is the same person each month. (I think this is bad. I think it should definitely be rotated. According to what I heard, most of the groups just let their most 'active' or 'political' member do it, because, after all, no one wants to go to meetings, so the others don't get involved at all.) When there are important decisions to be made, the Office Collective works out the wording of a vote and sends it round to the groups. People then vote as individuals.

Although the Office Collective, meeting once a month, has final say on all decisions, that is not quite enough for day-to-day coordination, so a group formed called the Working Party, completely open and composed of anyone who wanted to be in it. That group makes day-to-day decisions about the office, and calls emergency meetings. Each week the Working Party composes, types, and mimeos the Workshop's newsletter, one mimeographed sheet, and sends it out in bulk through the mail to the small groups. It reports only internal news - times of meetings, people who want to start groups, results of votes, etc. Whenever there's work to be done in the office and there aren't enough volunteers, the Working Party does it. If the office worker has any questions, she asks the Working Party.

At the moment the Working Party has about eight people in it. Anyone who doesn't like what it's doing joins it and changes it. However, it obviously has a lot of potential for manipulation, and in practice, it sometimes makes people feel there's an elite running things. A lot of women in small groups feel the women in the Working Party are the heavies.

In a way, the Working Party reduces the potential for conscious or unconscious manipulation, because it is strictly accountable to the Office Collective. It also provides a collective framework for those women who want to work on organization. The Working Party seems to provide the benefits of accountability without having to have elected officials.

After experimenting for about a year with volunteers, the Workshop finally decided to pay one woman to be a fulltime office worker. Having a paid worker has a couple of great advantages. There really is someone there all the time. Once people realize this, they use the office a lot. Calls come in from people who want abortions, who want to join the movement, who want a speaker, who are in from out of town, who want to know if anything's being organized to protest something that's just happened. In London, the problem was that there was too much for one or two people to do. The second great advantage is that the office worker really knows what's happening, and can connect the people who want X with the people who've got X. A lot of information an office worker has is stuff she's picked up from people calling about one thing and mentioning another.

The advantages of reliability and coordination are balanced a bit by: 1) fewer people volunteer when there's a paid worker (though 3 volunteers came in one day when I was there) 2) the office worker is in a position of great power, both because she possesses all the information and because she can consciously or unconsciously manipulate decisions (for this reason, I don't think any office worker should stay for more than 3 months.) 3) the office worker can come to look on the office as her domain 4) after a while, people expect the office worker to know everything and handle everything, and they let the entire burden of the women's movement slip onto her shoulders 5) the particular politics of any given office worker might freak some people out.

The responsibility for *Shrew*, their magazine, rotates every two months to a different small group. *Shrew* tries 1) to express women's thoughts about themselves and the women's movement 2) to explore a different problem or a different action project that the group has taken (e.g. child care, small groups, housewives, night cleaners) 3) to reach out to other women not now connected with the movement. Recently it has added two pink sheets in the centerfold containing women's movement news. I really like reading *Shrew*. And I think passing it from group to group is a terrific idea. Like the other ways the Workshop works, it brings everybody into the action. Women don't feel isolated, and know they can express themselves.

There are dues of one pound a year (c. \$2.60), which, along with the cost of the newsletter (2 pence - 5¢ a copy) and any copies of *Shrew* (7½ pence - 20¢ a copy) people want to order, is gathered and sent in collectively by the small group. People who can't pay are supported by their groups.

We should look pretty carefully at the question of how important groups are before we decide on a structure like the London one which pretty much forces people into groups. More and more people, after their first six- or nine-month consciousness raising, aren't in a group any more. Just on the basis of what I've seen, I think the structure is a good idea. The London definition of a group isn't very strict, and I think we need some pushing to overcome our individual isolation. A lot of people have fallen back into pre-women's movement patterns. Being in a group is powerful.

I'm writing this with a feeling of urgency. The London experience is very exciting. People make the decisions in their own groups; they share with each other and they understand each other. I talked with a lot of people, and everyone felt connected, no-one felt cut off from decision-making, everyone was involved and active.

We need something like this in Boston. What do you all think?

Love,  
Jane de Long

(This letter has been extensively edited to fit it into the newsletter. The entire letter is available for reading at the women's center office)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Linda Gordon will speak on 'Racism and the Birth Control Movement', on Thursday, Jan. 24, at 8 pm, as part of the Feminist Studies Program of the Cambridge -- Godard Program. 1878 Mass. Ave., 2nd fl., near Porter Square. Open to all women.

**WORKSHOPS:** Caravan Theatre women's workshops and men and women's workshops using techniques adapted from theatre games and improvisations to explore relationships, re-examine sex roles, try alternative behavior, explore whatever personal issues we have. First workshop - Feb. 5th. Please let us know if you have campus contacts. Call Bobbi Ausubel, 861-8737

*Women interested in therapy groups:*

Radical therapy groups, rap groups, theme-oriented groups, etc., will start in the Women's Center when it opens. Any interested leaders, members and women interested in finding out more about Women's therapy, leave your name and phone number at the Women's Center Office, 661-9650 --- 595 Mass. Ave., 2nd fl.

Lesbian Liberation meetings Wednesdays at 8 pm -- at the Women's Center Office and/or Media Center, 2 Brookline Street, Cambridge, On Wednesday, Jan. 26, all interested women should come to discuss/decide upon ways of using gay space at the Women's Center.

Friday night is gay night at the office. Women wanting to know more about or get into gay women's liberation or wanting to be more in touch with gay women, come to or call the Women's Center Office between 6 and 10 pm;

Meeting for women interested in a **WOMEN'S YELLOW PAGES**: directory of services in the Boston--Cambridge area. Wednesday, January 19, at the Boston YWCA, Copley Square, 7:30 p.m. or call 536-7940, ext. 55.

Courses for women at the Boston YWCA, 140 Clarendon St., beginning January 24, lasting 10 weeks: 'Car Repair' (given by the Somerville Women's Car Repair Collective), Tuesdays, 1:30 -- 3:30 pm (\$20); 'Home Repair', Tuesdays 7 -- 8:30 pm (\$20); 'Woodworking with Hand Tools', Wednesdays 3--5 pm (\$26); . Women can arrange for their preschoolers to stay in the supervised YWCA playroom for a nominal fee. Call 536-7940 for more information.

Women's commune beginning in New Hampshire, 500 acres, big old house. Farming and maple sugaring begin in March and April. Crafts shop may open this winter, women political activists and hardworking women welcome. Berries and wild fruit everywhere. Come visit or call anytime. Martha Burgess, New Boston Road, RFD 1, Franklin, N.H. 603/934-3597.

**PLAYGROUP** openings for two girls between 3 and 4, near Central Sq. 9:30-5. Parent co-op (both when feasible), \$15/week. 2 teachers in morning, parents in afternoon (1 aft./week). Church basement, good equipment, free atmosphere. Call Toni, 547-9299, after 5.

**SUPERVISED PLAYGROUP** for children between 3½ and 5½. Run by a Cambridge mother with pre-school teaching experience. Large yard, quiet street, between Harvard & Central Squares. Pay according to your income. 868-0179

Feminist library student from NY, 24, seeking roommate(s) with apt. in Boston or Cambridge. Hopefully non-cigarette smokers. To begin anytime in Jan. Call station-to-station at night, collect OK. NIKKI' (212) 877-8064.

**CORRECTION** to the last issue of the newsletter: the (smudged) telephone number for the women's history group is Karen, 354-4343; that's 354-4343.

### MORE NEWS ABOUT THE WOMEN'S CENTER:

*Some women are working on plans for a mass meeting (date not yet set.). This hopefully will be the meeting where we decide the organizational structure of the new Women's Center.*

In the November 29th, Issue No. 4 of the Newsletter, there was a proposal for how the Women's Center could be run: copies of the newsletter are available at the Women's Center Office. Also check out the letter in this issue about the running of the Women's Center in England. Any ideas, proposals/criticisms of the already proposed running methods should be brought to the Women's Center Office so we can print it before the mass meeting. To hold the chaos level down as much as possible, it's very important that there be some concrete suggestions for us all to read and think about before the meeting.

Also -- we'd like to hear from groups or individuals who are interested in using space or have ideas about how space should be used, so we'll have some idea of what space demands might be.

**THE WOMEN'S CENTER IS HAPPENING. IT IS IMPORTANT TO GET CONCRETE. IF YOU HAVE IDEAS (about the mass meeting, proposals suggestions, etc., ) PLEASE WRITE THEM UP AND/OR CALL AMBER AND JUDITH AND NANCY --- 354-5412, or 623-2513 or the WOMEN'S CENTER OFFICE- 661-9650.**

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**THE OFFICE NEEDS STAFF: COME ON IN AND ANSWER THE PHONE AND MEET SOME PEOPLE**

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**STAFF FOR THIS ISSUE: JUDY BRUNELLI, ALISON, IRÈNE -**