

L'auteur donne un bref compte rendu du développement de la Fédération des groupes de femmes de la Colombie Britannique. Fondée en 1973, cette structure est apparue pour unir et consolider les groupes de femmes dispersés à travers la province.

The BCFW grew out of conferences and discussions among feminists and ad hoc groups in B.C. during 1973-74. The milestones in these early years were, firstly, the NDP Women's Committee Conference in September 1973 that focussed upon women's frustration with government policy and inaction. The second event, which followed in early 1974, was a conference organized by Linda Shuto of the Secretary of State Department on Women and Education. This conference held at SFU, drew 'standing room only' crowds.

Women's studies provided the third central issue around which B.C. feminists met. In March, 1974, the focus this time, in part at least, was on the desperate need for a united front. At an 'Action for Women Conference' convened in May of that same year, Gene Errington moved that a committee be struck to investigate the logistics of setting up a federation of women in B.C.

Numerous committees were struck and met throughout the summer of 1974. They formulated a sufficient basis of unity to launch the founding convention of BCFW on September 13, 14 and 15, 1974 at the University of British Columbia. Some of the areas of contention during the early days of BCFW were:

- Structure (should it be hierarchical or horizontal?)
- Rural women versus urban women
- Lesbianism
- Membership (should it be individual or group?)
- Communications

Early discussion within BCFW debated the role that the federation was designed to fulfill. Should it have a very high profile, speaking with one loud, clear voice across B.C.? Should the standing committee take a vanguard position, making demands and issuing statements on behalf of the federation? Or should it be an umbrella organization of women's groups from across the province, facilitating their communication with each other?

What emerged was a federation of women's groups. The objective and purpose as stated in the BCFW Constitution and Handbook, Volume III, is:

British Columbia Federation of Women

JAN LANCASTER



International Women's Day, Vancouver, 1979.

Connie Smith

to bring about the liberation of women through fundamental change in our society. The BCFW works to implement legal, social, economic and cultural change necessary for the eradication of sexism. In order for the women of this province to acquire power to bring about meaningful change we must organize to maximize the collective strength of the women's movement. Only through the strength of united action can the BCFW achieve more than individuals or individual groups. The BCFW will not usurp or duplicate the work of any existing women's groups. We will actively support feminism everywhere in B.C. We will provide a mechanism for communication, education and mobilization to overcome the physical and cultural isolation faced by all our sisters in this society.

BCFW is governed by the annual convention, which takes place each year in the late fall. Delegates from each member group attend in accordance to a ration weighted in favour of small groups; that is, those organizations with less than 25 members can send two delegates, one delegate for each additional 50 members or major fraction thereof up to 100, and one delegate for each additional 100 members or major fraction thereof.

Between conventions, the standing committee is the governing body and it meets a minimum of every third month. The business of the regular convention includes debate on resolutions (action-oriented and policy), receiving and acting upon reports from subcommittees, election of standing committee, ratification of new subcommittees and other business. The standing committee consists of 11 women in specific task positions, 12

In the Face of Innocence

MARSHA MILDON

Hers was a slim face
ivory bones pearl shadows
a face Modigliani might
have learned to draw from

“He was a remittance man,” she said
and shrugged, “sure, I’ve known
hard times too.
He didn’t know a plough from a
scythe, or much else either.
We would’ve starved
in ’32, one room above a store, me
and mother and my little sister, and him
feeling the dust like a personal
affront.
We would’ve starved
but mother’s people still had farms, and brought
what they could
vegetables
up those down-at-heel stairs
And they never looked down on us, nor spoke
ill of him, though mother could have had her choice
of boys who knew farming
Then that Tuesday dinner he threw his bonethin Limoges
clear across the room with fury so precise one shard
grazed mother’s cheek
like a goodbye kiss
He swore he’d starve before he’d eat
another turnip—food for pigs—
and walked all the way to Estevan
wheedling pennies (My babies need milk) at every door
to take us home//England was greenstone
greyrain steaming marble baths with
feet and servants scrubbing our skin redder
than sundust and wind I
could pretend I was a princess
And they never looked down on us
not once, I felt right at
home, though Great Aunt Elspeth would correct
my grammar and clear her throat a little loudly when I chose
the wrong fork
No, it’s no disgrace
being poor” she said
and shrugged

 slim face
ivory pearl
 face
 learned to draw
pain

regional representatives (regions are delineated in accordance with electoral boundaries) and the chairpersons of ratified subcommittees. Its duties include representing the federation to the public, promoting the objectives of the Women’s Movement in B.C. as determined by convention policy and appointing ad hoc committees.

Besides the member groups of BCFW, the federation is structured to allow for subcommittees which are the main action areas of the federation. They are organized around province-wide issues such as employment, health, education, child care and lesbian rights. It is the task of each subcommittee to initiate, develop, promote and implement BCFW policy in its area of specific concern.

Affiliation by groups is achieved by applying to the standing committee in writing, signifying general agreement with the goals of the federation and payment of one month’s fees. Individual women who wish to join BCFW may contact the BCFW regional representative in their area to be put in touch with existing BCFW member groups or they may, with other interested women, form a group which may then affiliate.

Much debate in the province is still generated around the role and usefulness of BCFW. On the positive side, the 1979 Convention held in November in Victoria, B.C., attracted 46 groups and 160 delegates. We were actively visible at the Armistice Day Parade in Victoria, when one of our members read over the public address system a poetic plea to remember women and children who had given their lives in men’s wars. This type of action has been used many times by member groups representing BCFW, in order to protest pornography and rape.

On the negative side, much work appears to be duplicated. Also, rural women still feel isolated from the lower mainland, where innumerable women’s groups exist and support each other. Four member groups have chosen to leave BCFW over issues that they feel they can’t support.

While the time has come to re-evaluate BCFW, its structure, its organization and its role, there is no doubt that because of it women have developed a greater sense of unity across the province. It has provided us with the opportunity to meet and work together. Our constitution and policy have become a catalyst and a model for other women’s provincial organizations. At the end of the Seventies we’re still growing. Better still, we are changing to suit the ever-changing times and looking forward to a new decade.