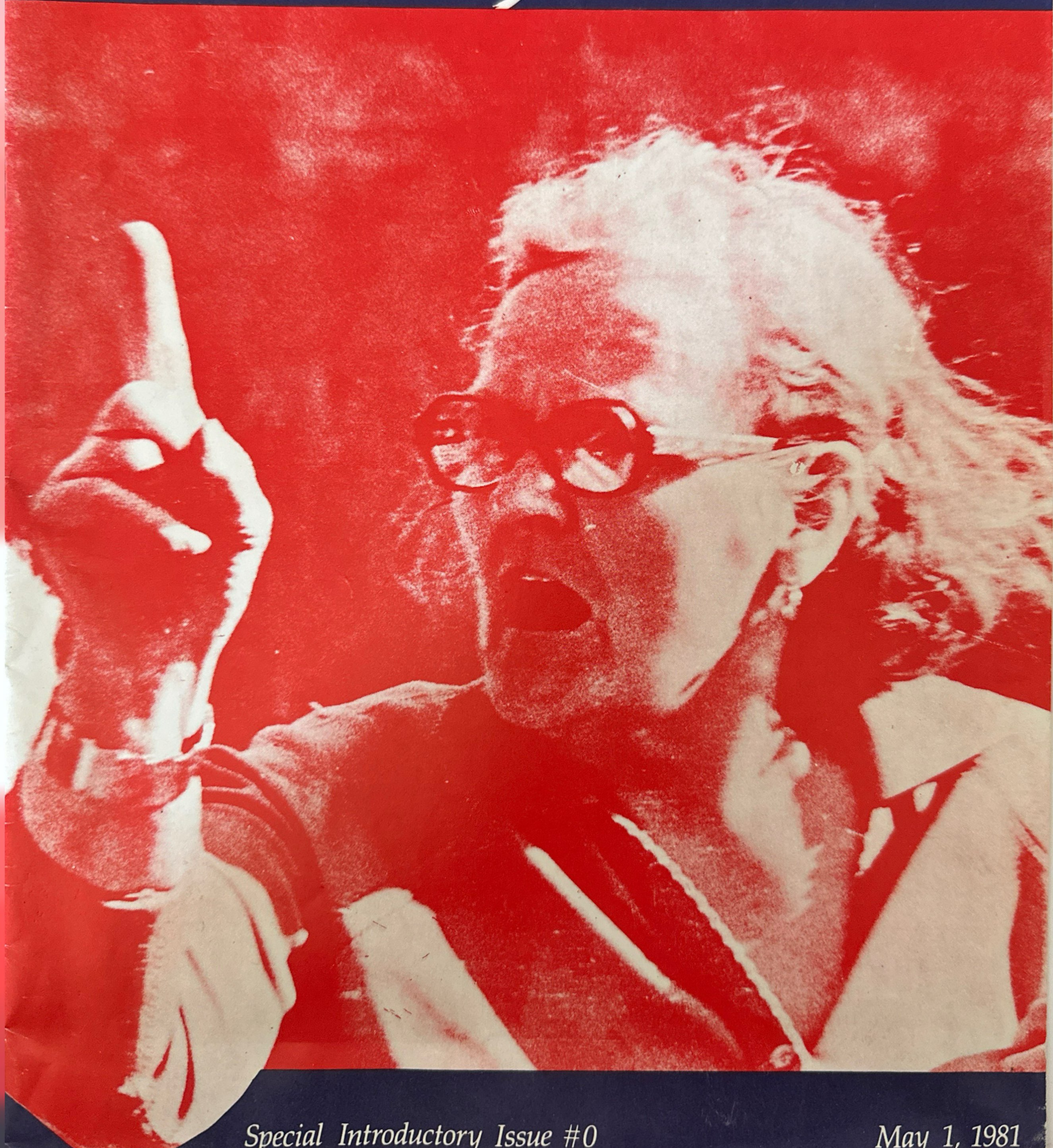


Connections

An International Women's Quarterly



Special Introductory Issue #0

May 1, 1981

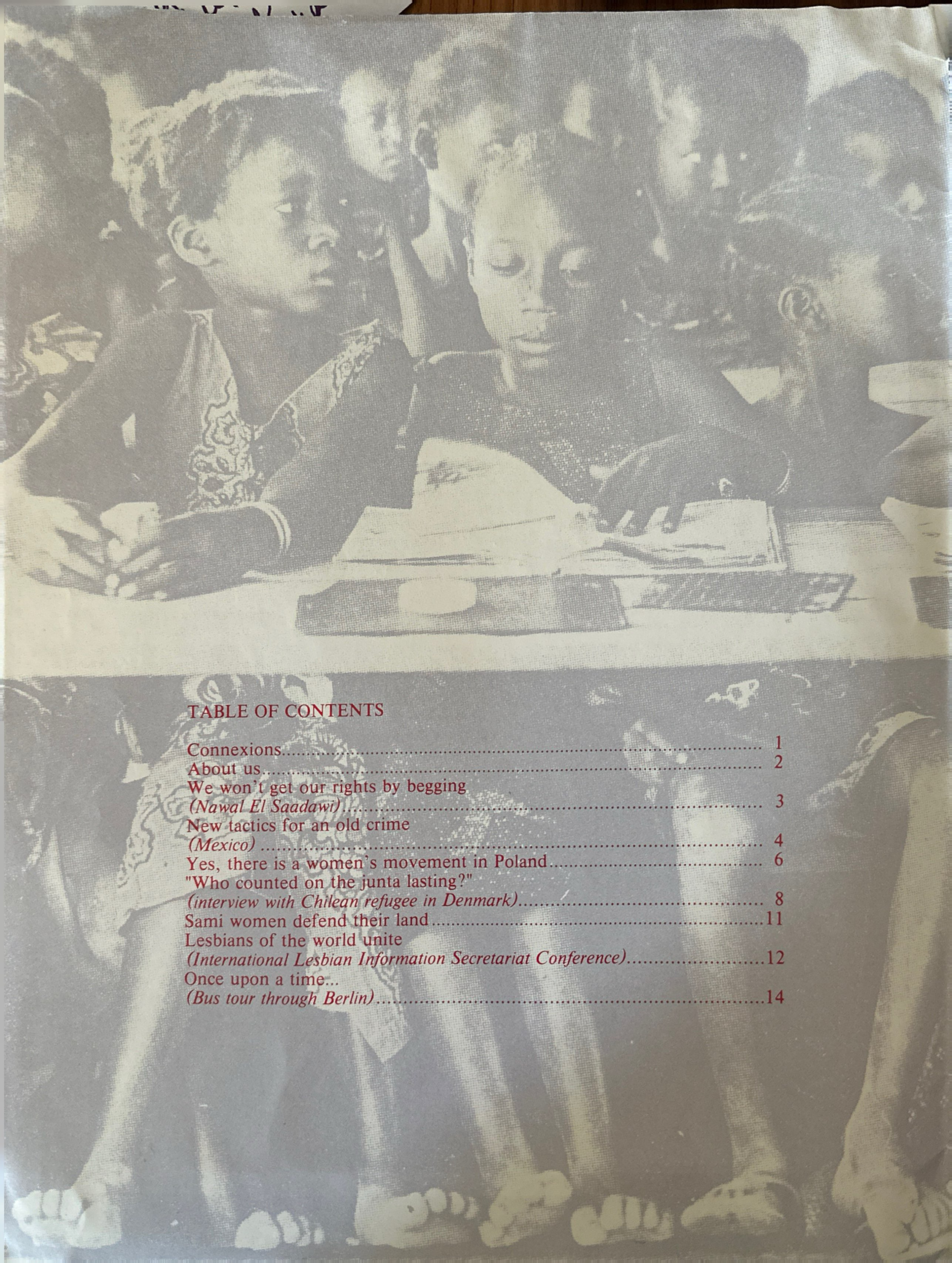


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—*Connexions*—

A journal of translations by, for and about women.

Connexions is the collective product of feminists of diverse nationalities and political perspectives committed to building an international women's movement. The articles you will read in *Connexions* will be written by women from other countries. Most will be direct translations of single articles and interviews. On occasion, when we have a large selection of material on the same subject, we will compile the information. In these cases, we will try to remain as faithful as possible to the original writings, for our goal is to present the experiences and struggles of women abroad as seen through their eyes. Priority will be given to articles appearing in the feminist press. We will also use material written by progressive women journalists published elsewhere.

We want to go beyond merely providing facts and information, and hope that by passing on—as directly as possible—women's writings generally unavailable in the U.S., we will be helping women in the U.S. to understand and connect with the experiences and viewpoints of women in other parts of the world. *Connexions* will be published every three months beginning June 21, 1981. Each issue will be devoted to a specific theme and will contain:

Facts and Figures *Relevant information on the context within which women in different regions of the world live, work and organize, including a demographic, economic and political profile of specific countries and/or regions.*

In building an international women's movement we believe that it is essential for us to understand that the issues we face are not always the same. Within each nation women's lives vary according to differences in class background, ethnic origins and sexual preference—among other things, so, too, do our lives differ from country to country, culture to culture, continent to continent. Only as we recognize our differences, will we begin to grasp the deep roots of our similarities and join forces around the basic struggles that are common to all women.

Women in Action *Reports on current developments in the international women's movement: how women organize in different countries and around which issues; the difficulties they face; and the solutions they find. An historical examination of how early feminists dealt with similar issues, and accounts of revolts and struggles by women in the past.*

We believe that it is only by collective action that we will achieve the kind of change that we, as feminists, seek. By reexamining our past, we want to remind ourselves of the ways that women in earlier times, under different historical conditions, took collective action to confront strikingly similar issues.

Women's Culture *Interviews with women writers, performers and artists. Reviews and translations of women's poetry and prose.*

Our cultural expressions are powerful means of bridging the gaps between us that our political and linguistic differences sometimes create, and of broadening the channels of communication.

A *Resource Guide* will be included in each issue, giving the names and addresses of relevant organizations and a short bibliography of additional readings available in English and other languages.

Our goal, in producing an ongoing international women's publication, is two-fold:

to look beyond the borders of the U.S.; to inform ourselves about the world we live in; and to connect our lives with those of women living elsewhere.

to contribute to the growth of a worldwide network connecting women working on similar projects by researching, establishing contacts and exchanging information with other women's organizations.

To a large extent, the economic and political conditions under which we live determine the issues to which we give priority. Women do not live in a vacuum, but in what is still largely a man's world. It is essential for us to understand the workings of that world if we are to understand each other. We wish to encourage women who are not interested in "politics" to become so; those who do not read "political" literature to do so. We hope that *Connexions* will be one step toward building an international women's movement. □

Connexions Connexions Connexions

There is a lack of information in the U.S. about other parts of the world. Often the viewpoints presented in the U.S. press vary greatly from what we learn through friends abroad and foreign publications. As we read and read to get a grasp on what is happening elsewhere, we find that there is never enough about women, and what little there is, is rarely written with a feminist perspective.

In 1979, a few of us decided to do something about this lack of coverage on women by putting together an international women's reader. At first, we didn't know what exactly we wanted to do and how we wanted to do it. Some of us were working on a monthly newsletter of translations from the international progressive press and had made it a point to print articles about and by women. But there was always more material than space allowed and we just didn't want it to sit on the shelf. For months we worked together, combing through magazines from the international feminist press, discussing all kinds of ideas and concepts, arguing occasionally as we raced to meet deadlines to produce a special women's booklet. We concentrated on working women, and the title *Second Class, Working Class* reflects one basic experience that all women have—we work all our lives, inside and outside of the home, and we are always regarded as inferior. In November 1979, *Second Class, Working Class* was printed by Up Press, a women's printshop.

After six months of work, we were all exhausted. We talked about doing another issue, perhaps with a different theme, but no one seemed quite ready to undertake anything so ambitious. But the satisfaction of working together on *Second Class, Working Class* lingered. It sold well and soon people were asking us when the next issue would be coming out. We thought about a sequel. Then through contacts and publications we heard about the creation of an international feminist information network. Vague as that sounded, we wanted to be part of it. Because of our experiences working on *Second Class, Working Class* and the materials and sources we had collected, we could best contribute by producing a journal of translations of what women in other countries had to say about themselves.

In July 1980, two of us went to the alternative women's conference in Copenhagen to discuss with other women how to create an international feminist network. The beginning dialogue between women of industrialized countries and third world women made us more aware of our differences. Yet, it also helped us understand the similarities we share. We realized once again the importance of learning about each other and of exchanging information.

After Copenhagen we formalized our plans to start a women's journal of translations from the international feminist press. We talked to women outside of our group; many responded and joined us. We are women of diverse backgrounds. Some of us are from the U.S., many having lived abroad; some of us are from other countries. Our different languages allow us to read and translate foreign publications. We all speak English, and share a range of journalistic skills. We have worked together for nine months and here we are with *Connexions*. □

This is a 12 page special introductory issue. *Connexions* will be a 32 page quarterly. The first issue will be published June 21, 1981.

Contributors

Barbara Baraff, Elizabeth Bell, Kate Benn, Bridget Boylan, Cecilia Brunazzi, Sandra Chelnov, Max Dashu, Sandy Emerson, Linda Fogel, Norma Fox, Janis Granger, Kallie Halvorson, K. Kaufmann, Kathy Mooney, Anne Murphy, Harriet Older, Ines Rieder, Shana Ritter, Patty Ruppelt, Merle Shaw, Kathleen Tandy, Leonore Veltfort, Adelheid Zofel.



We won't get our rights by begging

(From *Newsfront International*, English-language bi-weekly, October 1980.)

*The following is excerpted from an interview with the Egyptian physician Nawal El Saadawi. The interview was printed in full in the October 1980 issue of Newsfront International. Nawal El Saadawi, now living in her native village in Egypt, spoke to a Newsfront correspondent at the U.N. mid-decade conference for women in Copenhagen in July 1980. Nawal El Saadawi is the author of many novels and short essays. Her book *The Hidden Face of Eve* was published in English by Zed Press in 1980.*

To me, real feminism means being revolutionary. To be revolutionary means that one examines the problems of women from all aspects: historically, sociologically, economically, and psychologically. And if you carry out this analysis, you should be against the establishment, the patriarchal class system. As a radical feminist, I think you should oppose imperialism, Zionism, feudalism, and inequality between nations, sexes and classes.

Many women become feminists because it is in fashion. But if you ask them what they mean by feminist they don't know. Feminism means you have to read a lot, to understand a lot, to feel a lot and to be honest. And to say what you believe, in spite of the government, the establishment, or the institution where you work. You may have to sacrifice a lot.

That also is feminism.

Fighting for a cause, women become liberated, mentally and psychologically. Yet it is not enough for women to just participate in revolution. Women have participated in revolutions now and in the past. They were liberated during the revolution, and then what happened? After the revolution, there was a relapse. Why? Because women have no political power. They are used by the revolution to carry bombs or to fight, but the revolution is still dominated by men. The leaders are men, not women.

A woman may be used as a tool in the revolution—just as she is a tool in marriage or a tool in the hands of authorities, whether they are revolutionary or not. Because women have no collective power, male authority will tell women to go back home once the revolution is over. Women must come together and become politically powerful to prevent relapses in the revolution. They struggle in the revolution, they fight colonialism and fight for national independence, and afterwards they ought to participate in the government as half of society. They ought to have the same rights as men. But this does not happen because women lack political power.

Women should come together and be politically organized. We need a political party of women, not only social organizations. They have to be afraid of us. We must be able to threaten governments, to make them fall if necessary. But to just talk and write, that won't get us anywhere. Throughout history, no group of people

has ever obtained their rights by begging peacefully; they have snatched it from the hands of the authorities. There is no other way for women to win.

International discussions can allow women from different countries to make an accurate diagnosis of the common enemy. This unifies women. If we say our enemy is men or religion or Islam or Christianity or the President of the U.S., we are divided. But if we look at things globally, a lot of women will say that the common enemy for all women all over the world is the patriarchal class system. And what did this system create? It created imperialism. Imperialism is the offspring of the patriarchal class system of our modern society. So we, as women, can say that imperialism is our common enemy. Multinationals are the enemy of women in the U.S. and in the Philippines, in the Middle East, in Africa and in Asia. That's a start.

But women in the U.S. are more comfortable because they don't experience the imperialist fight which is taking place on the grounds of the third world. The war is happening in the Middle East because of the oil. American women do not feel the effects of imperialism in the same way as women in Cairo or Beirut. But even if women are privileged they are still exploited within the whole system.

Women must not be divided on small issues: religion, color, race. We shouldn't forget these, but we have to recognize the original enemy, the one who created all the splits amongst us. Who is exploiting all of us? It's imperialism and the patriarchal class system. Male domination and class domination. Some Western women think it's only male domination. But we have class struggle, and we have the struggle between the sexes. When we learn that, we will be able to come together politically and organize. □



NEW TACTICS FOR AN OLD CRIME

(From *die Tageszeitung*, West German daily, February 2, 1981; IPS wires, 1981; and *Fem*, Mexican feminist monthly, November 1979.)

According to official statistics, a rape takes place every ten minutes in Mexico City, on the streets or at home. A rather shocking statistic. Until recently, women living in Mexico City had no where to go after becoming a statistic. But now any woman seeking help, especially in regard to rape, can go to Mexico City's first women's center. The center, opened in the spring of 1980, is organized and financed by two feminist groups and a civil rights organization. Twenty women and two men volunteer to guard the house, which they rent together. The center is organized into health, publication and distribution committees. Information is available on the psychological effects of rape. After a rape, many women feel guilty and are pressured to believe that they may have encouraged the rapist. Families often reinforce this sense of guilt forcing some women to never report the incident rather than be blamed. Many women who are economically dependent on their families, prefer to remain silent than to be thrown out of their parents' or husband's home.

The center wishes to provide more than rape counseling. "For those who come to the center, they will find that they can become conscious of their situation in society, find ways to change their status, and learn new ways of relating which are more equal and anti-authoritarian. It will be a place where women will discover that female solidarity is possible," explains one woman from the center.

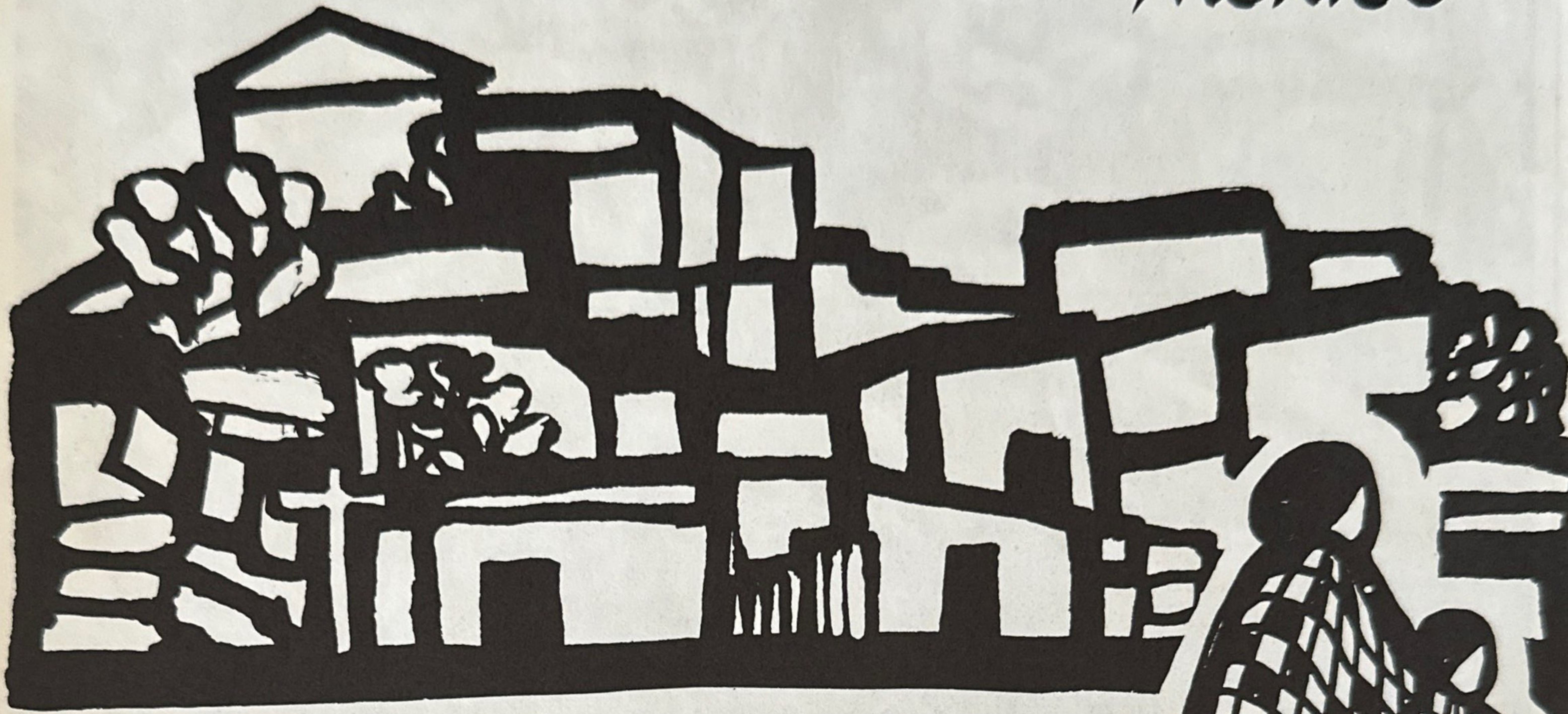
The center is not the first indication of Mexican women organizing. Mexico's women's movement, as in other countries, has a long untold history which women are currently piecing together. In the mid-twenties a Mexican journalist, Maria Rios Cardenas, founded and edited the feminist publication *Mujer* (Woman). Cardenas was disturbed that Mexico was indiscriminately adopting North American customs with the exception of what she deemed to be the most important, the custom of what she viewed as an apparent respect for women. She blamed machismo to be the main cause of women's second class status. In Mexico City's streets, women of all classes and ages had to put up with obscene and offensive comments directed at them by men. Much more serious than this verbal assault was the problem of physical assault. Rape was supposedly punishable by law with a 12 to 15 year sentence

of imprisonment. Yet all male juries refused to consider rape a serious crime, making it nearly useless for women to fight it in the courts. The few rapists who were convicted, rarely completed the full term.

To protest rape, *Mujer* did not call upon its readers to take to the streets, but rather, in 1928, urged its readers to form small feminist organizations as a means to build a national federation of women. By the late twenties, *Mujer's* readers, mostly middle and upper class, had influenced the media and the legal system and helped change familial law. However, the economic crisis of the thirties followed soon after by World War II, prevented these changes from being implemented and the movement remained forgotten for some years.

During the 1960's and the 1970's, Mexico City grew extensively to the present population of an estimated 14 million. Mexico City's cultural and political development is strongly influenced by the many intellectuals and growing number of Latin American exiles and political refugees living there. Many women from the middle and upper class work in professional fields and thereby have been able to establish some independence. These

MEXICO

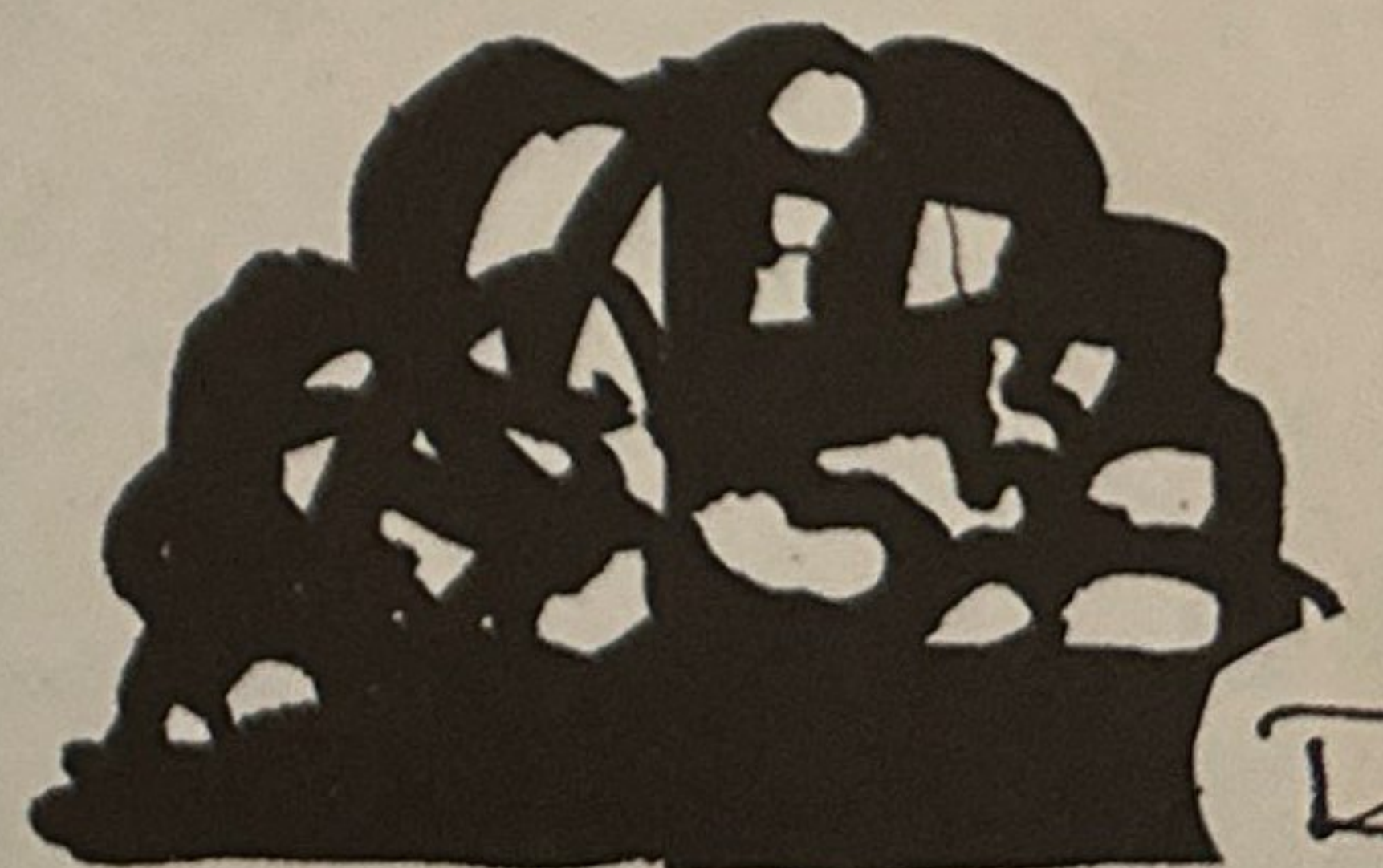


women were the first to delve into the history of Mexico's women and to begin again to raise feminist questions.

While the feminist movement in Mexico is limited to the urban areas, mainly Mexico City, Mexico's population is largely rural. The agrarian structure offers limited opportunity for women to establish economic independence since women receive little or no pay for long hours of work in the fields. Women typically find work in the service sector, especially in the tourist areas; the few women who have factory jobs, are considered fortunate. The work force of PEMEX, Mexico's nationalized oil company, is only 8% female.

Mexico's women's movement is presently organizing against violence against women. In the late twenties, women tried to fight rape through the courts. Today, the tactics have changed. Women are staging demonstrations and forming alliances, resulting in the opening of Mexico City's first women's center. The founders want the center to serve all women who want to take drastic measures against rape. As one woman explains: "As long as the system silently encourages rape, women will have to organize against it and against the system which supports violent acts against women."

□



Original drawings by Mexican artist Rini Templeton, courtesy of the Data Center, 464 19th St., Oakland, CA 94612.



Polish textile workers

Yes, there is a women's movement in Poland...

(Translated from *die Tageszeitung*, West German daily, February 4, 1981.)

To the right of the entrance to the University of Warsaw a small staircase leads to the basement where the official student organization *Sigma* holds its meetings. Here sits Krystyna Kowalewska, one of the founders of *Sigma*, Poland's first feminist group organized in late November 1980. At that time around one hundred women were coming to *Club Sigma*, a few out of curiosity, a few very skeptical, all with different ideas about what a women's group should be. "We have learned about the experiences of Western feminists," explains Kowalewska, "and we are adapting them to our particular situation in Poland. We've already made a few contacts and want as much information as possible about the women's movement in other countries. We have plans to publish a women's newspaper and to start a women's theater. The history of women, their ideas and lives must be known. We're the ones who will have to do it. Presently we are planning a seminar on Polish women who have managed to escape the narrow traditional women's roles to become artists and scientists. We also want a feminist gallery to display their works."

The group has already published a list of demands which they want to discuss with factory workers and Solidarity, the independent trade union. "Although some members don't take the organization that seriously, the majority of the group is more or less radical; presently the entire group supports our demands. Many of our demands conflict with the position of the Church. For example, abortion. The Church has clearly spoken against it. We can't accept that." (Abortion has been legal in Poland since 1958.) *Sigma* demands that women be given the opportunity to reach their full potential. "In Poland women have little time to concern themselves with their oppression. They have to work, take care of the house without the aid of modern appliances, stand in store lines, raise the children—everything without any help from men." This inequality extends into the workplace; for example, women factory and pharmaceutical workers earn less than men. Men

also have an easier time gaining admission to certain academic programs such as film, art, agriculture and medicine. Men with the same qualifications as women are the first to be promoted.

"We want to have a women's movement here. Articles, newspapers, magazines—anything that will help us change stereotyped ideas about women. We need the help of the Western women's movement!"

Anyone who has books, magazines, films, tape cassettes or similar items on the women's movement and women's problems can send them to the following address:

Krystyna Kowalewska
c/o Uniwersytet Warszawski
Klub Sigma
u. Krakowskie Przedmiescie 24
00-325 Warszawa
Poland

Demands

- Encourage women to struggle against the existing exploitation and oppression.
- Time off for childcare shared by both parents. Leaves of absence for up to three years alternated between parents.
- Equal pay for equal work. (Most women's jobs, even though they are physically and mentally as demanding as men's jobs pay less.)
- Enforcement of the "law of opportunities" for women regarding university admissions in male-dominated fields; hiring and promotion of women to management where women with equal or superior qualifications than their male counterparts are discriminated against.
- Dissemination of our ideas through the creation of:

A feminist newspaper

A feminist theater

A feminist gallery

Meetings, workshops and talks with women who, among other

things, are knowledgeable about feminist ideology and art.

An information center covering issues such as: feminist movements; great women past and present; the situation of women in Poland and the world.

Contact with feminist movements of other countries. (Contacts already exist with groups in West Germany, France and the USSR.)

- Defense of women's interests and aid in developing their feminist consciousness.
- Individual leaves of absence for students who are three months pregnant.
- Increased representation of women in school texts.
- Adoption of a wide interdisciplinary women's studies program. Consciousness-raising for women to strengthen their resistance against pressure to conform.
- Information on women's role in society.
- Development of social services for women.
- Emphasis on using leisure time to pursue intellectual, artistic and physical development.
- Improvement of the social prestige of single and divorced women, or single mothers and their economic situation.
- Equal rights for married and unmarried couples.
- Increase in men's responsibility for their children and for abortion; presently physical and moral burdens of abortion are placed solely on women.
- Changing the arrogant and patriarchal management of women's sports collectives.
- Abolishing stereotyped images and harmful myths about women.

Issue No. 1, focusing on "Women Organizing Against Violence," will be published June 21, 1981.

Who Counted on the Junta Lasting?

Chilean Refugee
in Denmark



(Translated from *Kvinder*, Danish feminist monthly, June-July 1980.)

Rosa Labarca came to Denmark six years ago as a political refugee from Chile. She is 28 years old, studies mathematics and works as a keyboard operator at an EDP-company at night. She is active in the Association of Danish-Latin American women.

We talked with her about the women's movement in Latin America versus that in Denmark, about being a Chilean refugee and about being a Chilean woman in Denmark.

Q: Do you find that there is a difference between the women's movement in Denmark and in Latin America?

A: Yes, here in Denmark, you say that women have the same problems whether they're working class or bourgeois. Perhaps it is possible to maintain this in Denmark, but the social and class distinctions between women in Latin America are very great.

Q: The fact that the women's movement in Denmark mainly consists of middle class women has been a touchy problem for us, for fear of dealing exclusively with that group's problems. But isn't it also true that a movement's analysis can only be its members' problems.

A: That is true. But your general political outlook is different. Here your basis is the material difficulties in everyday life. In Latin America there is a more ideological approach and this is also true in relation to the woman question. There are politically active women who maintain that it is wrong to speak of feminism at all in Latin America, that is reactionary. Bourgeois women were mobilized against the Allende government in Chile, for example.

In Latin America the problems of the working woman are different from those of the housewife; and the problems of the housewife are different from those of the intellectual. The movement must be defined by the problems of the majority and not by those of the minority.

But it depends on the way you look at it. Do you regard women as a distinct exploited social group, or do you regard them as a group subject to different social distinctions—worker, bourgeois, petty bourgeois, etc. I find it a very difficult question, especially in my case, coming to Denmark as a political refugee. All this talk of feminism was difficult to understand and sometimes I thought that it was rather far out.

That is one of the reasons why we neither call ourselves feminists nor socialists in the Association of Danish-Latin American Women. We're a support committee but we want to learn as much as possible from the Danish women's movement because it is important to bring up the issue of women in Latin America and it is important for us as political refugees to support those women's groups that do emerge.

Q: What has been the greatest difficulty about coming here as a woman refugee?

A: The language and society. But all in all it hasn't been that difficult to come to this



country as a woman. In Latin America you are very isolated from society as a woman. Most women are housewives and live within the confines of the household and don't know much about what is happening in society. When you come to this country as a refugee, you still live in the same situation, you are isolated. So you do not feel a great difference. The men do, on the other hand. In Chile they were active and participated in society, they had jobs, their political work and their friends. They lived mainly outside the home. Here, they have come to a society they don't know, they don't know the language, they don't have any friends and are not able to be politically active... They have lost their identity.

Q: Were the refugee women housewives in Chile and did they come to Denmark because their husbands were politically active, or were they themselves politically active?

A: I don't have the exact figures, but most of them are housewives that have accompanied their husbands in exile. Most of them have coped well coming here because they've always had to take care of the children and household, and to be able to do that here, they had to learn the language quickly. They go shopping, go to PTA meetings, go to the doctor, etc. In this way the woman quickly attains an identity that resembles the identity she had in Chile. She is still a housewife and mother and doesn't feel as isolated and doesn't experience the same depression as the man does.

Q: Do many Chilean women refugees work?

A: Most women work.

Q: Do they work for economic reasons?

A: They've taken jobs as maids and unskilled laborers because it has been more difficult for the men to get work, partly because of unemployment, partly because the men have had greater difficulty adjusting. First they had to learn the language, then be re-trained, and with the rest of the adjustment difficulties, it has been too

much for them. Besides that, no one counted on staying here for more than two years, at most. Who counted on the junta lasting?

Q: Are women satisfied with their cleaning jobs?

A: They are glad to have work. In Chile they cleaned all their lives and never received any pay. Here they get an hourly wage and it is a positive experience for them. And they feel that they can decide for themselves what they want to buy with the money they have earned. In Chile a woman had to ask her husband first if she wanted to buy a pair of shoes—not only if she was allowed to, but also if he approved of them. Now she decides what she wants to buy for herself, for the children and the household.

Q: Do the marriages survive this change of roles?

A: No, the husband no longer feels that he is the man around the house, and most of them are not able to talk with their wives about what is happening. They are too proud to do that. They prefer to find another woman and avoid any discussion, which doesn't solve anything and often results in the husband having one depression after another. And the wife has to take care of the children economically and morally. She has to function normally all the time. Chilean refugee women have gained in self-assurance and self-confidence by what has happened to them in Denmark. But only 5% of the Chilean refugees I know of are *not* divorced and it's the married couples over 50 that have stayed together. In Chile divorce is quite uncommon.

Q: Is it the husband or the wife who wants the divorce?

A: Often it's the wife. She doesn't get any help from her husband around the house or with the kids. If a Chilean man goes shopping or takes his child to kindergarten he is looked upon as "spineless," as henpecked.

And since the wife has to take care of the home and go to work, it is easier to be alone with her kids rather than endure constant arguments with her husband over helping out.

Q: In other countries, Scandinavian women have a reputation for being sexually "liberated" and I've heard that it has been difficult for Chilean women not to perceive of Danish women as being unfair when they flirt with their husbands. Is that true?

A: Yes, I do think it is unfair of Danish women to do that, not in general, but in certain places, in the Chile Committee, for instance. They know that we have problems, that Latin American women don't have the same chances of finding a man as Danish women.

Latin American women are very passive sexually. When a Chilean man meets a Danish woman, he is surprised, but also afraid. He won't leave his wife because she understands him better than Danish women do. He feels more confident as the man of the house than with a Danish woman. Then he is able to play the role of the man with the mistress, which he is familiar with from Latin America, and with which we, the women, are also familiar. But we don't like it because it is so out in the open here. We think, why doesn't she keep her hands off or do it more discreetly so we won't have to feel so emotionally unstable.

Q: Is it humiliating?

A: Yes.

Q: Often ideas are different from reality. Perhaps Chilean women's ideas about Danish women's sexual behavior are more influenced by myths than reality.

A: Yes, but the entire economic, political and cultural development is different here and you know more about yourselves as women and that offers greater possibilities—sexually too.

Q: I realize that it creates insecurity to be in a foreign country; you don't understand the ways and feel isolated...



A: We don't feel that we're able to compete because the picture of the "beautiful woman" we were brought up with in Chile is what you see everyday in the streets here. The women are all beautiful, tall, slender, blond, blue-eyed. We are small, dark and are forced to say, OK, I'm out of the race, I can't compete with her, she has everything.

Q: You feel subject to the Western European ideal of a woman?

A: Yes, it is awful. Many I know of develop inferiority complexes. It takes a long time before you can stop thinking about it and spending time on it.

The Chilean women react in two ways. One way is doing what I have done, by getting a divorce. The other way is passively, by saying that men are not satisfied with only one woman and there is nothing you can do about it. But most women choose to get a divorce.

But I think perhaps we approach the problem in the wrong way because we say: better to leave than discuss anything. We are not used to discussing our own sexual

problems, they're too intimate. But if you don't talk about them, you won't get the information you need. Many women still have problems concerning sexuality—they feel there is something they don't understand and don't know about and they react to this in different ways. Some become what is termed hysterical, others get psoriasis, others become envious of Danish women. They don't want to be with them and more or less hate them. There are many different kinds of reactions, but you can't go to the doctor or a psychologist and talk about it, because of language problems and, among other things, we can't get together and talk about it. It's impossible, it's too much of a taboo. I think I've only talked the way I'm talking to you now about three times with my Chilean girlfriends during the six years I've lived here.

I think it would be a good thing if you started some counseling, for instance, with doctors and psychologists and interpreters, where women could go and talk about these problems, because I don't think we can get started ourselves. We need out-

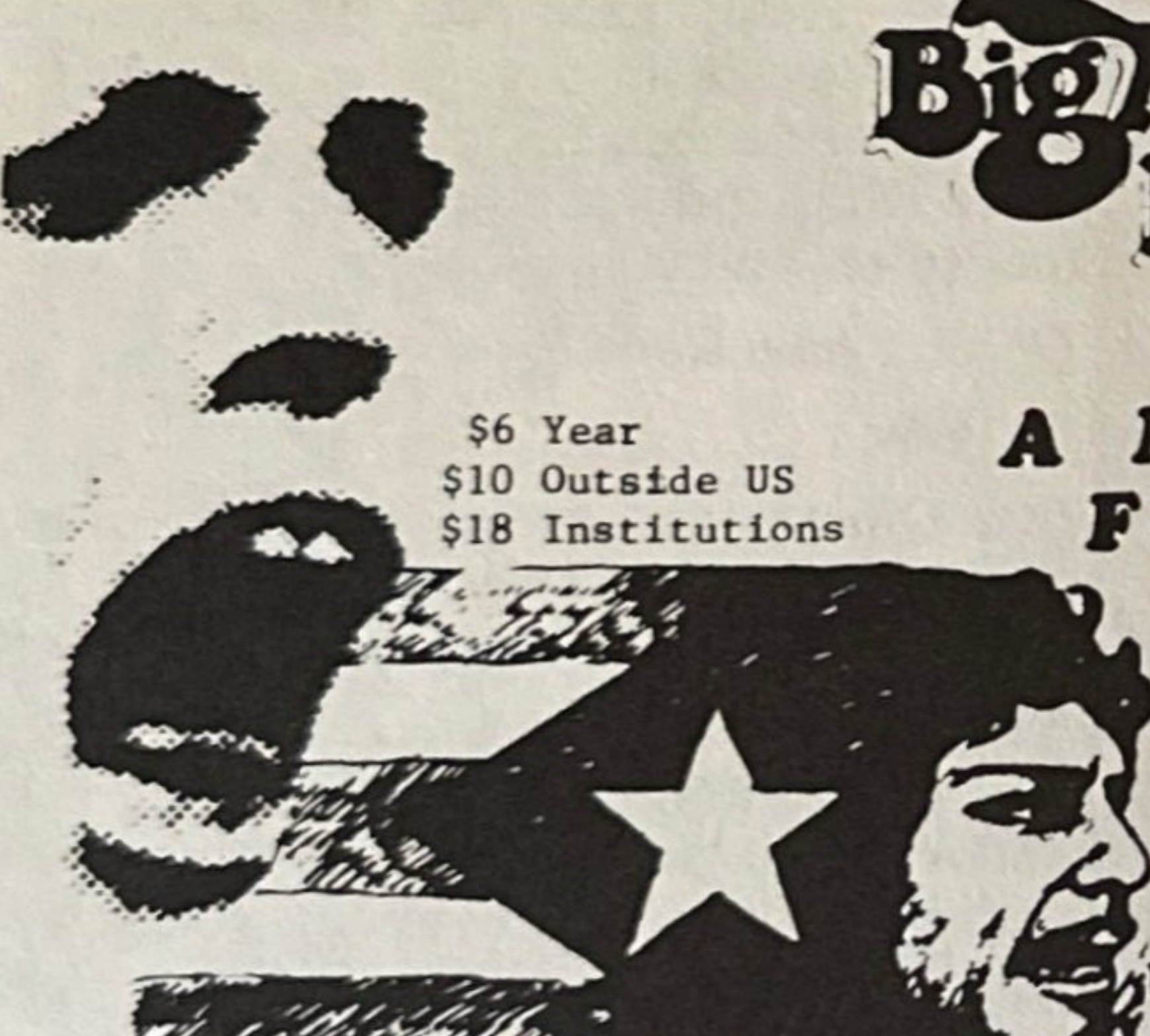
side help.

The Association of Danish-Latin American Women was established in 1977 by Danish and Latin American women. The purpose of the association is to discuss the women's struggle/class struggle in Denmark and Latin America; to provide information about the situation of women in Latin America, and to increase solidarity among the oppressed women of Latin America.

The Association consists of groups working on: 1) publishing a pamphlet about women in Chile; 2) adopting political refugees; 3) supporting childfeeding programs in Chile; 4) supporting women in Chile who are doing work supporting political prisoners; and, 5) producing a book of interviews with refugee women from Chile living in Denmark. Contact:

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Bredgade 35
1260 Copenhagen K.
Denmark

Issue No.2, focusing on "Women Refugees," will be published September 21, 1981.



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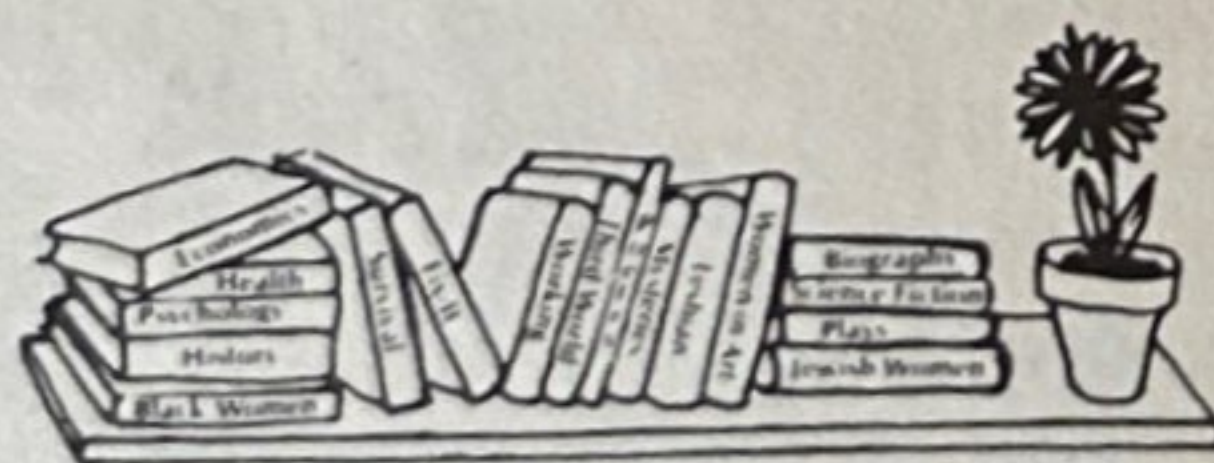
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Sami Women Defend their Land



Courage

A Sami Woman (Lapplander)

(From WISE, English-language anti-nuclear newsletter, February 7, 1981; and *International Feminist Network*, irregular English-language newsletter, February 4, 1981.)

On February 7, 1981 at five in the morning, 13 Sami women were forcibly removed from the Prime Minister's official

conference room in Oslo, Norway. The women were occupying the room to protest Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland's lack of concern for Sami rights and her failure to take action against the Alta-Kautokeino hydro dam project in Northern Norway. The police staged the removal of the protestors at a time when the press would not be present. They were afraid that pictures showing the women being carried away, some of them almost 80 years old, would cause public outcry. One woman had her arm broken in the disturbance.

The Sami population of Northern Norway is fighting for its existence as a people. The damming up of the Alta-Kautokeino waterway would greatly effect the Sami lifestyle. The river runs through Sami villages, over reindeer grazing areas and along farmland. The river is a great source of fish, especially salmon. Sami women of all ages are working to safeguard the future of their people and are asking for support. Letters of protest can be sent to:

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Oslo-Dep
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ILIS Conference

Lesbians of the World Unite

(From *Gay News*, British bi-weekly, January 22-February 4, 1981.)

On December 27, 1980, more than seventy lesbians converged on Amsterdam for five days of hard listening, talking, thinking, and planning. We made our various ways from sixteen countries—Scandinavia, Western Europe, Britain, Eire, Yugoslavia, and the USA—for the first-ever international lesbian conference, organized by the eight Dutch women who run ILIS (the International Lesbian Information Secretariat of the International Gay Association).

We were a very mixed bag. Some of us were lesbian separatists and others of us worked in mixed male and female groups, like the Spanish women involved in the post-Franco struggle for gay civil rights, or the women from Paris planning the big April 4 march demanding the repeal of France's anti-homosexual laws. Committed atheists would be meeting an Irish member of Britain's Catholic Lesbian Sisterhood and the exiled Spaniard who works in Paris for the Centre du Christ Libérateur, founded by a Belgian priest to help members of sexual minorities. Some of us claimed we had been lesbians from the age of two and a half, although it had taken us a little longer to discover feminism. Others of us, we seemed to remember, had emerged from our mothers' wombs crying "Rights for women!" but only became lesbians last year. The rest of us had taken our time but even-

tually got to one or another—or both—of them.

In our various countries, we were running telephone help-lines, offering legal advice to paedophiles (child-lovers), organizing alcoholic self-help groups, working on lesbian and gay publications, running lesbian Sado-Masochism (S-M) groups, gathering information on lesbian custody, helping to start and maintain women's schools and universities, working with transsexuals, and discovering how to make genuinely collective households work. (Some of us were even finding time for frivolous things—friends, lovers, and children.)

Travel costs kept away many women who were desperate to come. Knowing how little money most women have, the organizers had been determined to keep conference fees as low as possible. With a grant from the Dutch government and the help of two New Zealand gay men who closed their London restaurant during the conference and undertook all the catering, we were fed and housed (in a youth hostel, which we had entirely to ourselves) for four days and five nights for a staggering \$50.

It soon became clear that most of the women were at the conference to work. With the New Zealand men taking care of the food (helped by gay men from Amsterdam who also typed up many of the workshop reports), our time was free for the ambitious program which had been planned by our Dutch hosts and which was

constantly expanded by the delegates.

The workshops—attended by an average of 90% of the women—ranged as widely as the delegates themselves, who brought special knowledge and experience to each. Paedophilia, S-M, women and health, lesbians and education, women and violence, racism and classism both inside and outside the lesbian movement, political action, lesbians and motherhood, custody, lesbians and the law, female sexuality, lesbians and the media, alcoholism—just some of the topics under discussion, with theory constantly tested or affirmed by personal experience.

The education workshop (and later the whole conference) considered particularly the plight of Elaine Morissens—a 53 year old Belgian teacher recently suspended indefinitely without pay for coming out on a television program. A group on women and violence learned that in Italy a man who shot a lesbian in the head was recently acquitted because the court ruled that a lesbian represents an automatic threat to a man. The defendant therefore acted in self-defense.

No matter how diverse the topics or how wide-ranging the discussion, most of the workshops observed a basic and very practical three-point plan. First, there was an exchange of information about conditions in the various nations represented; second, a discussion of any change required; and third, a consideration of the

ways in which lesbians in each country might offer practical support internationally.

With such enormous differences of political position, personal experience, and national background, disagreement was inevitable. Anyone could have predicted it. What no one could have predicted was how we would overcome it. For five days, over seventy women worked constantly to understand each other's point of view. For me, who can reckon up the number of gay conferences I've attended by counting the battle scars on my soul, it was this determination to *listen* which made the Amsterdam conference unique. Repeatedly, I watched women with seemingly irreconcilable political positions really *working* to find practical solutions to their difficulties without forcing unsatisfactory compromises on anyone. Time and again I heard women playing devil's advocate for points of view they profoundly disagreed with but which they knew were held by women unable to attend and whose voices would otherwise have gone unheard. As far as I could see there was no political intriguing, no game-playing. The conference was remarkable for its openness and lack of pettiness—the mood set largely by our hosts who refused to be flustered by any of the numerous crises which faced them.

There were small crises, and larger ones like the final plenary session in which ILIS's future was debated. ILIS is a part of the International Association of Gay Men and Women (IGA). Many of the delegates at this first international lesbian conference were lesbian separatists with bitter experiences of working in mixed male-female

organizations. Yet they had been willing to make the long journey to Amsterdam to see if there was any way in which they and ILIS might work together. The Dutch women who run ILIS (and many other delegates at the conference) are committed to working with men on an international level. But they are also committed to making ILIS's services available to *all* homosexual women who may wish to use or add to its resources. Often the last plenary session was tense, and sometimes it seemed as though the goodwill of the previous four days might break down.

Language was a constant problem. The very name, International *Gay* Association, was an affront to many of the lesbians there. How could they believe they'd receive equal treatment from a group whose name excluded them? Other women were equally passionate in identifying themselves as "gay": for them the word conveyed their primary allegiance to the mixed homosexual movement rather than the women's movement. It soon became clear that although the words "homosexual," "gay," and "lesbian" are important words used in many nations, they convey very different things in each. Each word set up deeply emotional responses, and discussion often became violently impassioned. Yet, remarkably, by the conference's end the plenary *had* reached agreement—a fitting close to five memorable days. □

MAIN PROPOSALS FROM THE ILIS CONFERENCE

That ILIS should remain a part of the IGA but that it should have autonomy to

make decisions on topics specifically relevant to lesbians and women. It should be free to make statements and initiate actions in the name of ILIS without waiting for clearance from the IGA's annual conference.

That ILIS should work to develop ways in which both gay men and lesbian separatists can work on issues which affect both gay women and men.

That in order to reflect ILIS's amended role, its name should now be the International Lesbian Information Service.

In order to avoid clashes between mixed workshops and women-only workshops, the annual IGA conference should be immediately preceded by a three-day ILIS conference so that lesbian separatists and women from mixed groups can work together. Women staying on for the IGA conference will then be able to convey decisions reached by ILIS workshops and plenaries. The new system should be implemented in Turin this Easter. If three days proves impossible, two will do—this time!

That ILIS should collect and disseminate information about: the legal situation of lesbians; custody; gay/lesbian media; the effects of racism and classism inside and outside the lesbian movement; lesbians and health services; lesbians and trades unions; lesbians and alcoholism. (Individual women or national groups have already begun to coordinate aspects of this work.) □



Bus Tour through Berlin

Once Upon a Time...



(Translated from *Courage*, West German feminist monthly, July 1980; and *Quotidiano Donna*, Italian feminist monthly, February 13, 1981.)

In the period between 1850 and the rise of Fascism in 1933, Berlin witnessed the flowering of numerous women's organizations and enterprises. The Schoeneberg neighborhood, in particular, bustled with projects and activities. Today we can rediscover the remaining traces of Germany's first women's movement on a "Lesbian City Tour" conducted by Gudrun, the woman who developed the idea. One beautiful morning in April, sixty of us were loaded onto a double-decker bus to investigate our past.

The tour started from the Blocksberg, a women's restaurant named after the mountain where the witches meet. From there we went to one of the main streets of town to visit the cooperative "Women's Housing" where single women of marriageable age lived. The women here had insisted on being called "Miss" rather than "Mrs.," the proper title for women their age. They felt that the title "Mrs." reduced their rights. Moreover, calling themselves "Miss" hinted that the women who lived there were lesbians.

Nearby in an old mansion was Miss Ludwig's "Society for Women's Housing" which rented flats for women to share. Also

housed here was an organization that owned buildings where women could get inexpensive food and lodging. If women came to Berlin by themselves they could find a female "companion" there. Besides the shared households, there were whole "villages" for women. In the Potsdam and Mariendorf districts there were huge apartment buildings occupied solely by women.

Some of these apartments and buildings were financed by a women's bank which was supported by a wide range of women's organizations. In their paper *Frauenkapital* (Women's Capital), these women clearly indicated that they wanted power and money. They had a utopian dream of creating a women's state in the Luenenburger Heide, a rural area in Northern Germany. The bank project, however, suffered legal harassment and a defamatory campaign in the male press. By 1915, after four years of operation, it was forced to declare bankruptcy.

As we drove from one stop to another, Gudrun told us about the women who had populated the neighborhood. We learned of Elvira Castner who founded and ran a horticultural cooperative and school. Henriette Schrader Breyman founded an academy for German women, today commemorated with a street—named after her husband. Journalist and feminist, Anna Gebser, acted as editor-in-chief of *Frauenzeitung* (Women's Newspaper), published

from 1904 to 1912. We were surprised to learn of the many dance bars for women. They were known as "Subs" because they were part of a subculture. During the twenties, there were at least sixty of these bars. In a salute to our heritage, we uncorked champagne and listened to the songs of Claire Waldoff, a cabaret singer of the twenties. She was persecuted by the Nazis for writing an anti-Goering song.

At another stop we were permitted to look around a nursery school which formerly was a women's hospital run by the "Society of Women Physicians." Close-by is the Salomon House, a women's school founded in 1908 by Alice Salomon to train teachers in a method of childhood education similar to Montessori's. The house, built by women architects, had a roof garden. While the bombs of World War II destroyed most of the buildings in the neighborhood, this one survived because the incendiary bombs got stuck in the earth on top of the building.

One of the last stops was what had been the clubhouse of the "Society for Human Rights," an organization for homosexual men and women with 50,000 members. They produced five publications, including one called *Die Freundin* (The Girlfriend). This organization incorporated such groups as the "Bund fuer Frauenrechte" (Society for Women's Rights) and a



number of women's clubs. Here, as at every leg of the tour, we stopped to put up a commemorative plaque. Though made only of paper, the plaques had attracted anger and threats from some passers-by. They claimed that we were defacing the walls with our memorial tablets. We posted our tributes nevertheless. The last one could only be attached to a wire fence because the street had been completely destroyed during the war and was never rebuilt.

The fate of all these attempts by women to create alternative structures was similar. With the advent of national socialism, the projects were either destroyed by the Nazis or shut down by the women themselves. They did not want to submit to the new law that allowed only Aryans to organize. After the war, at least one of the buildings confiscated by the Nazis was turned over to the German government. As we ended our tour and returned to the Blocksberg for coffee, we discussed taking back that mansion as the legitimate property of women. □

Issue No.3, focusing on "Lesbians Worldwide," will be published December 21, 1981.



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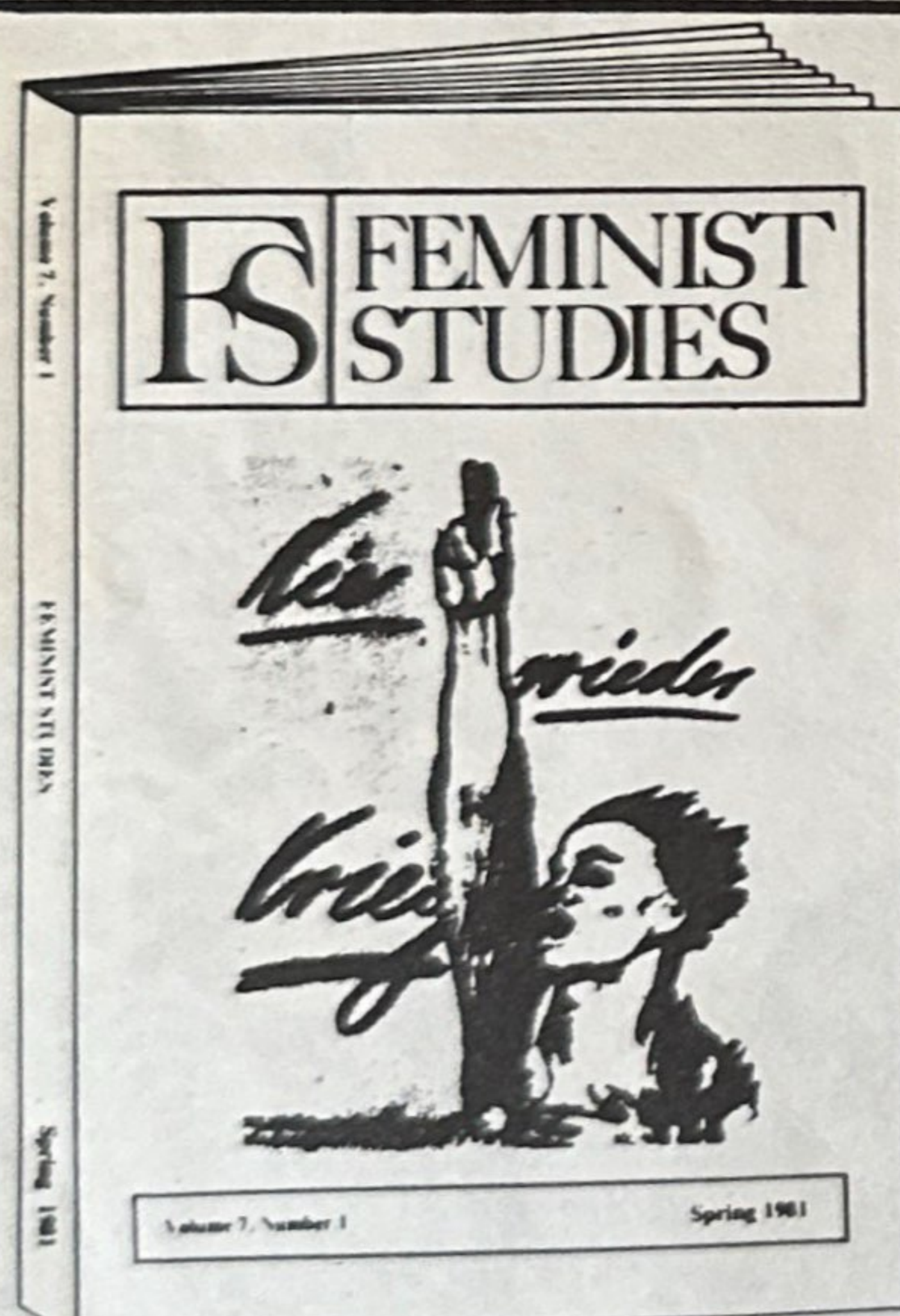
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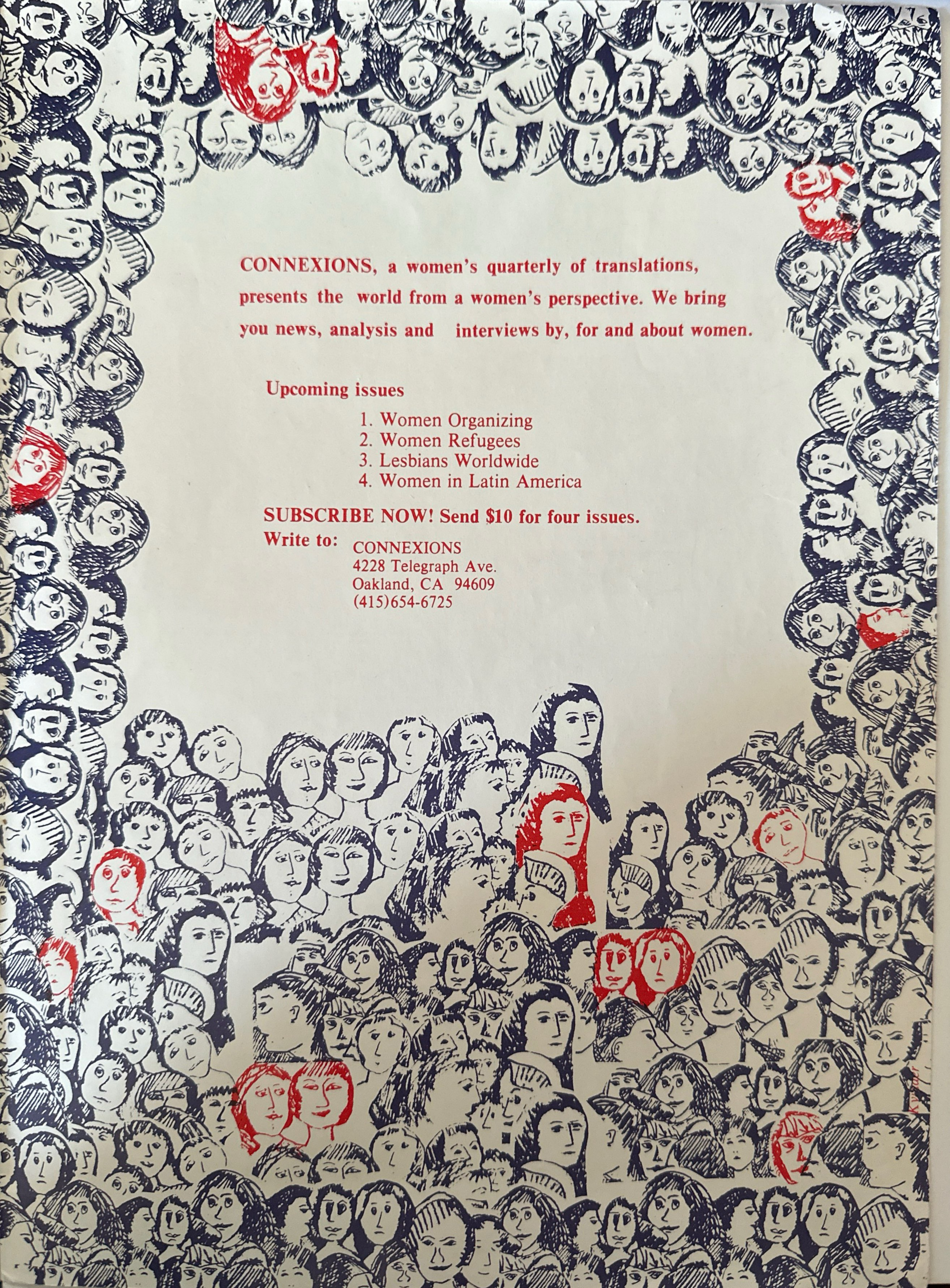
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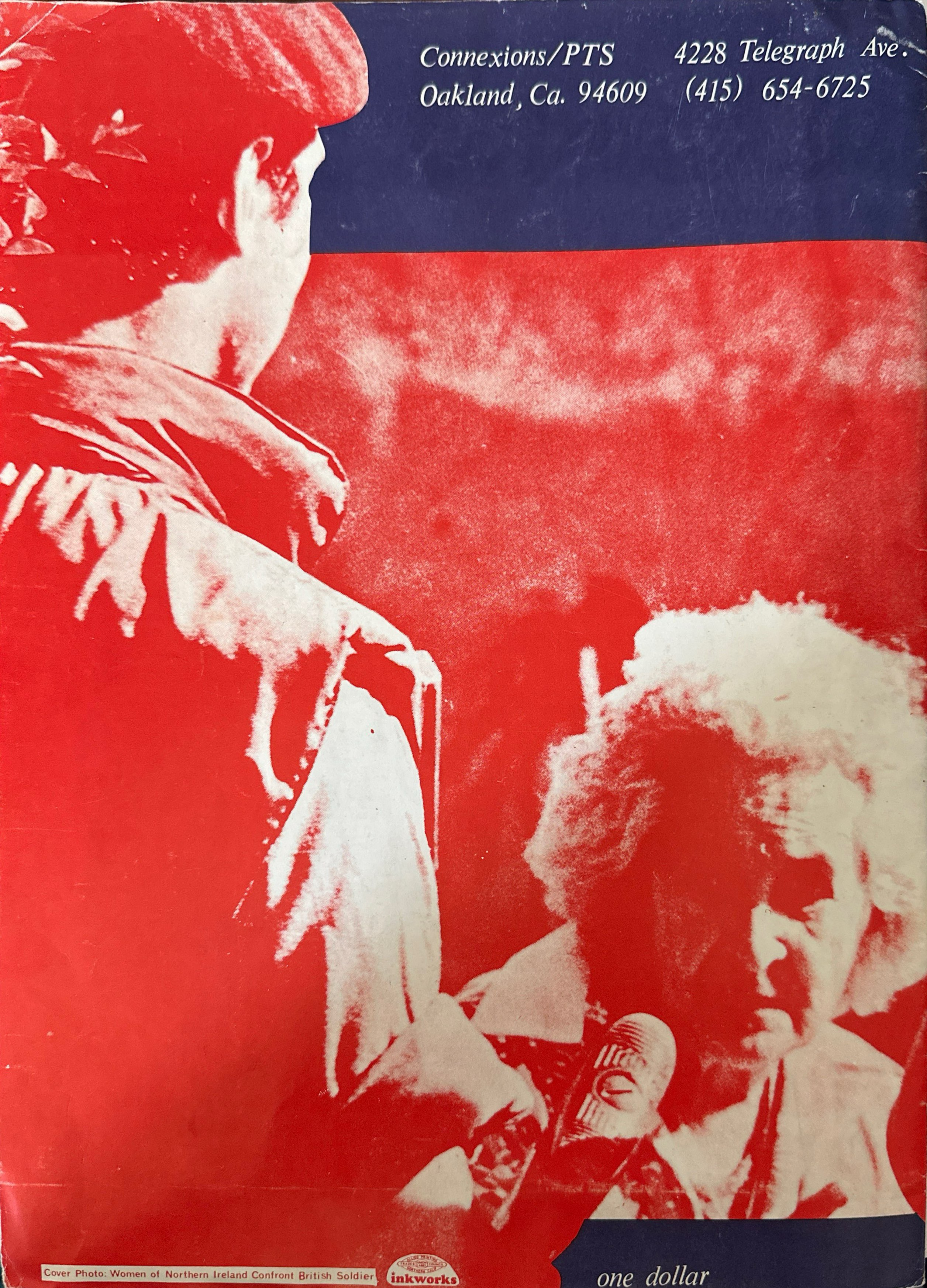
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