

## Conference Final Evaluation Session

The main *criticism* of the organisation of the conference was that we tried to do too much—there were too many papers, and too many workshops and many people found they could not keep up with the pace. The morning plenaries were felt to be a mistake. Third World participants could have made more of a contribution to the theoretical discussions if empirical work had been discussed first. A short plenary session each evening to summarise each day's discussion and to bring up main points and recommendations would have made the final coordination and synthesis easier.

A criticism of the substance of the conference was that there was an over-emphasis on economic themes at the expense of feminist politics, the nature of the family and questions of sexuality.

The way in which women experience their sexuality was felt to be as important an issue for women in the Third World as in the First World. Sexual exploitation, prostitution, rape and physical abuse of women were topics which came up in several workshops, as well as the question of socially sanctioned male control over female sexuality. Many participants thought that the ignoring of sexuality as a crucial issue in the analysis of women's subordination vitiates any attempt to understand either the grosser or more subtle deteriorations in women's position with the development of marked economic hierarchy.

Many participants commented favourably upon the *good relations* that had been established in the conference between First World and Third World

participants—in marked contrast to some earlier conferences held elsewhere on this topic that some participants had attended. In part establishing close relations was felt to stem from a shared basic perspective in which the problems of women in the Third World were seen in the context of imperialism—a perspective which had not been shared by participants in the notorious Mexico Conference. Nonetheless important differences of interest and power between the participants were left in the background rather than openly explored.

Another important contributory factor was the *collective organisation* of the conference, and the cooperative rather than competitive spirit that prevailed in discussions. Participants felt that this was one of the most important differences between this conference and others they had been to—as one participant put it “there was a solidarity and sharing on a day to day basis not usually found in conferences”.

Participants felt they had gained both in terms of the development of conceptual tools, and in terms of their knowledge of the situations of women in other countries. For some the former, for some the latter, had been most important. For some the critical debates which took place in some sessions had been important in clarifying issues. For others these had not been of such interest, particularly when the terminology used was unfamiliar, and they had gained more from sessions devoted to case studies and practical experience of forms of organisation. It was felt that the choice of participants had been very important in enabling a good balance to be struck between theory and practice,

and enabling the discussion of practice to take place at the level of grass-roots organisation as well as government policy. A wider range of experience was represented than was common at international conferences. Several participants spoke of having gained new ideas and new enthusiasms for their practical activities.

The view was widely expressed that one of the most important aspects of the Conference was the opportunity it had given participants to look at the situation of women in Britain and the work of several organisations combating sexism in its various manifestations. This had helped all the participants to see the similarities as well as the differences in the problems of women in different countries. As one participant expressed it: “We have learnt that the reality of women is one throughout the world”.

Warm thanks were expressed for the crèche—participants hoped that such provision would continue to be made at IDS conferences, since it is the most important practical step in enabling women to participate more fully in such activities. Thanks were also expressed to those responsible for the smooth running of the conference—in particular to Carol Wolkowitz for her tireless work, to Anita Hall, Conference Secretary, to Sara Crowley who had dealt with complex travel arrangements with patience and good humour, and to Fiona Pearson who had coped so well with the many letters and queries, and in getting into order so many handwritten texts. To all involved, the Conference participants and the members of the Subordination of Women Workshop extended their warmest thanks.