

Rank and file victory at Hispanic Feminist Conference

BY SARA MARSH

The twin themes of internationalism and solidarity among the oppressed prevailed when women from all over the western hemisphere convened March 29-31 in San Jose, California, for the first-ever National Hispanic Feminist Conference.

Decisively linking the subjugation of women to other freedom struggles, the more than 500 feminists from Cuba, Mexico, Central America and the U.S. passed resolutions on issues ranging from the Equal Rights Amendment, Puerto Rican independence and migrant workers' rights to Clara Fraser's sex and political ideology case.

On the eve of the meeting, a last-minute conflict erupted over the conference site, and this issue became the catalyst that radically broadened the scope of the meeting. Conference planners, steeped in single-issue chauvinism, located workshops to be held outside the Convention Center at the Park Plaza Holiday Inn, callously ignoring a 5-year boycott of the hotel by Native Americans. The Park Plaza is built on Ohlone burial grounds.

Boycott joined

Challenged by conference participants at the opening General Session on Friday night, conference leaders denounced the boycott as a "split" issue that should not be supported because the American Indian Movement (AIM), a boycott sponsor, does not support the ERA. But two wrongs don't make a right, said the rank and file delegates; only hours after arriving in San Jose, they voted to remove all workshops from the Holiday Inn.

Said Janie Perez of San Jose, a founding member of Mujer, a Chicana feminist organization, "The issue here is the boycott, not feminism or the Chicana conference." Perez and many other Chicanas, sensitive to the erosion of the land base of sovereign Indian nations, joined the picket line outside the Holiday Inn.

Tension between conference organizers and the more political participants mounted as inquiries arose about how conference money was spent, why community women were excluded from the organizing nucleus,



"The issue here is the Holiday Inn boycott and supporting the Native Americans. If we don't stand up for their rights, who will stand up for ours?"
—Janie Perez

and what forums were available for different tendencies to express their opinions. Subsequently, many workshops passed resolutions addressing these concerns.

Chicana militance

One workshop, "Chicanas in the Movement: As Working Women, As Feminists, As Socialists," drew a crowd of 100. For the first time, there was open discussion, which allowed participants to introduce a variety of resolutions. Commitment was expressed to feminism, undocumented workers, and Latin American revolutions.

Panelist Rosa Morales, a militant in the struggle for race, labor, and sex freedom, described sexism in the Chicano movement and racism in the women's movement. Chicanas, she said, are demanding a voice in both movements.

Yolanda Alaniz of Seattle Radical Women and the Freedom Socialist Party explained how socialist feminism connects the movements.

Challenging the charge that the Holiday Inn boycott supporters were "splitting unity," Alaniz decried liberalism, with its single-issue approach to unity, an approach which is blind to the real differences within a movement. "Working women," she said, "have more in common with Native Americans than with middleclass feminists. There is a class division in the Hispanic movement, just like there is in any other movement. We can be united on issues, but economically there are differences. We need multi-issue politics and a united front strategy to win."

Lesbian vanguard

A triumphantly successful resolution presented by the lesbian caucus

set the tone of Sunday's General Assembly.

It called for the conference name to be changed to Mujeres Indio Afro Latinas Americanas.

It criticized conference organizers for their homophobia, and proposed 20% open-lesbian representation on next year's planning committee.

It expressed solidarity with Native American struggles and specifically supported the Park Plaza boycott.

The resolution passed with a large majority despite attempts by conference bureaucrats to forestall a vote. The hall rang with shouts of victory, and women lined up at the microphones to propose, and pass, 35 more resolutions!

The conference provided great opportunities for feminists to share information and develop an international network. But even more important, militant Chicanas stood firm against the reformists at a time of severe economic crisis when increasing rightwing attacks send the liberal feminists scurrying back to the safety of single-issue politics.

And it was no coincidence that those who led the way face the multiple oppression of sexism, racism, homophobia and low wages on a daily basis. Working women of color are providing bold revolutionary leadership, and the Chicana feminists of Las Mujeres Latinas deserve an enthusiastic salute.

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