

MS-141: Socialist Feminist Conference Records

Collection Number: MS-141

Title: Socialist Feminist Conference Records

Dates: 1974-1975

Creator: Socialist Feminist Conference (1975: Yellow Springs, Ohio)

Summary/Abstract:

Records in this collection document the planning and organization of a national Socialist Feminist conference held in July, 1975, at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Materials include organizational papers, steering committee minutes, correspondence, working papers, registration details, women's movement pamphlets, and printed materials relating to the conference. Nine socialist-feminist organizations sponsored this event.

Quantity/Physical Description: 0.5 linear feet

Language(s): English

Repository:

Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University, Dayton, OH 45435-0001, (937) 775-2092

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Preferred Citation:

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Acquisition: Records of the Socialist Feminist Conference held July 4-6, 1975 were accessioned into the Wright State Department of Archives and Special Collections on September 30, 1983 (accession 83-17). Robin Suits, a member of the Dayton Socialist Feminist Group instrumental in planning the conference, donated the materials.

Other Finding Aid:

The finding aid is available on the Special Collections & Archives, Wright State University Libraries web site at <https://libraries.wright.edu/special/collectionguides/files/ms141.pdf>. It is also available in the OhioLINK Finding Aid Repository at <http://ead.ohiolink.edu/xtf-ead/>.

Related Material:

Kristen R. Yount Collection on socialist feminism, 1973-1975, undated, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/yountkristenr/#>

Processed by: Linda Rinehart, Spring 1984.

Revisions: Finding aid updated according to DACS standard by Alyssa Stark and Toni Vanden Bos, December, 2018.

Arrangement:

The collection is arranged into 7 series:

Series I: Background and Fostering of Socialist Feminist Conference, 1974-1975

Series II: Steering Committee Details, 1974-1975

Series III: Members of Conference Planning Committee, 1974-1975

Series IV: Conference Registration Details, 1975

Series V: Post Conference, 1975

Series VI: Printed Materials, 1974-1975

Series VII: Audiocassette Tapes, 1975

Historical Note:

The Socialist Feminist Conference was held July 4-6, 1975 at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. It brought together activist women in one of the most significant political events in Dayton area history. The Dayton Socialist Group of the New American Movement was instrumental in bringing the conference to Yellow Springs. Robin Suits and Julia Reichert of the Dayton group spearheaded the organization of the conference. The conference was planned to bring together and build a unified broad based movement for socialist feminism.

The conference was open to any woman who agreed with the goals of socialist feminism. The conference was not open to men. The planning committee agreed on four principles for unity:

- I. We recognize the need for and support the existence of the autonomous women's movement throughout the revolutionary process;
- II. We agree that all oppression, whether based on race, class, sex, or lesbianism, is inter-related and the fight for liberation from oppression must be simultaneous and cooperative; and
- III. We agree that socialist feminism is a strategy for revolution,

- IV. We take our movement seriously; discussions at conference should be in the spirit of struggle and unity, to move socialist feminism forward.

The conference was designed to provide equal time on theory, strategy, and practice. Music, dance, drama, and art accompanied the discussions. Small group discussions were planned that included such topics as women in prison, abortion, Jewish lesbians, self-defense, the family under capitalism, and others. Most of the work for the weekend conference was planned to involve work place organizing, community organizing, and building a Socialist Feminist Movement. Third World members dealt with oppressed racial and national minorities. A Third World Women's Caucus was held. Culture was an integral part of the three day event. A play, *Lady in the Corner*, was presented by the Circle of the Witch theater group, a collective feminist theatre from Minneapolis. A party was held with a women's band. Women's films were shown and places were provided to display photographs, art, and other works of the women.

The conference was attended by over 1,600 women with differing viewpoints in all the topics. There were struggles during the meetings. The purpose of the conference was to build and unify a solid women's movement; however, indications are that it split and disillusioned some. Discussions and workshops were dominated by strong viewpoints. The conference for women was climatic in that it seemed to be the high point in the activist women's movement. The conference was a success in what they were planning to do, but after the conference many women left the movement and within a year most of the groups that had organized the conference had disbanded. One group that did not disband is the Radical Women, which went on to grow from a Seattle, Washington based group to an international organization (website at www.RadicalWomen.org). Shortly after the conference, the Dayton Socialist Feminist Group split with the New American Movement, and it was not long thereafter that the Dayton Socialist Feminist Group became extinct.

Information for this historical sketch was taken from the "Socialist Feminist Conference" publication located in File 20 of this collection and from a personal interview with Mrs. Robin Suits on June 4, 1984.

Scope and Content Note:

The records and correspondence pertaining to the Socialist Feminist Conference provide insight into a significant women's movement. The collection includes correspondence relating to the "birth" of the conference, as well as correspondence pertaining to planning the actual conference. Letters to and from the major members of the planning committee provide ideas of the political thinking of the day. The collection is arranged into six series.

Series I, Background and Fostering of the Socialist Feminist Conference, includes general correspondence from women across the country who urged the planning of the conference. Letters from the Third World Alliance, Black Women's Caucus, and other third world "sisters" are incorporated into one file.

Series II, Steering Committee Details, contains records of the steering committee meetings held in various areas of the country. Notes from meetings in November 1974, February 1975, March 1975, April 1975, and May 1975 are included. Very specific ideas for the conference and

workshops are included in the minutes of the meetings. Rough drafts of the agenda and procedures for the conference are in papers in File 4. A policy paper written by Barbara Ehrenreich for presentation at the conference is in File 5.

The files in Series III, Members of Conference Planning Committee, contain correspondence and papers of the nine major organizers of the conference: The Dayton Socialist Feminist Group, The Boston Area Socialist Feminist Organization, Chicago Women's Liberation Union, C.P. Gilman, Lexington (Kentucky) Socialist/Feminist Union, New York Women's Union, Radical Women, Twin City Union, and Valley Women's Union. Several files include position papers of the various organizations. The Dayton group's papers deal mainly with the New American Movement and requests for that group to endorse and coordinate the conference. The Lexington file has a rough draft of the symbol used at the conference and the Radical Women file includes reprints available at that time.

Series IV, Conference Registration Details, has three files that are informal requests for conference information, conference applications listed alphabetically, and a rough draft list of conference attendees. Please note that while it was estimated that the conference was attended by 1600 women, this number of conference applications is not included in the collection. One can get an idea of the number from the rough draft list in File 17.

Series V is a file of Post Conference Press Releases. Among these are "Saskatoon Women's Liberation News Letter" and "What She Wants."

Series VI is Printed Materials including various reprints, pamphlets, booklets, and articles pertaining to issues of the women's movement. In the last file, is a copy of the Socialist Feminist Conference leaflet mailed to women to provide conference information and application procedures. All the printed matter gives a look into the topics of issue at conference time.

Series VII consists of audiocassette tape recordings of the plenary sessions and workshops at the conference. The tapes were in the possession of Robin Suits prior to donation.

All correspondence is arranged chronologically within each file. The undated letters are to the back of each file.

Subject Terms

Persons/Families

Suits, Robin
Reichert, Julia

Organizations/Corporate Names

Dayton New American Movement (Organization)
Dayton Socialist Feminist Group

Meeting Name

Socialist Feminist Conference (1975: Yellow Springs, Ohio)

Places

Yellow Springs (Ohio)

Subjects (General)

Socialist feminism – United States

Women and socialism

Feminism

Material Types

Audiocassettes

Correspondence

Minutes (administrative)

Pamphlets

Collection Inventory

<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
Series I: Background and Fostering of Socialist Feminist Conference			1974-1975
1	1	General Correspondence	1974 September-1975 June
1	2	Third World Contacts	1974 October-1975 June
Series II: Steering Committee Details			1974-1975
<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	3	Steering Committee Minutes	1974 November-1975 May
1	4	Rough Draft Agenda Items and Correspondence	1975
1	5	Agenda, Procedure, Evaluation Forms, and Position Papers	1975
Series III: Members of Conference Planning Committee			1974-1975
<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	6	Dayton Socialist Feminist Group	1974 September-1975 April
1	7	Boston Area Socialist Feminist Organization	1974 October-1975 May
1	8	Chicago Women's Liberation Union	Undated
1	9	C. P. Gilman	1974 November-1975 April
1	10	Lexington Socialist/Feminist Union	1974 September-1975 May
1	11	New York Women's Union	undated
1	12	Radical Women Seattle	1974 October-1975 October
1	13	Twin City Union Minneapolis	1974 November-1975 October

<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	14	Valley Women's Union Massachusetts	1974 October-1975 March
Series IV: Conference Registration Details			1975
<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	15	Request for Conference Information	1975
1	16	Conference Applications	1975
1	17	Conference Registration Lists	undated
Series V: Post Conference			1975
<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	18	Post Conference Press Releases	1975
Series: VI: Printed Materials			1974-1975
<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	19	Women's Movements – Pamphlets and Reprints	1974-1975
1	20	Socialist Feminist Conference Mailing Leaflet	1975
Series VII: Audiocassette Tapes			1975
<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
2	1	Third World Panel Conference Critique	1975
2	2	Conference Criticism	1975
2	3	Day Care Workers Union Organizing	1975
2	4	Building the Movement	1975
2	5	H. Wyloff	1975
2	6	Health	1975
2	7	Sterilization	1975
2	8	How to redefine working women's history from a Socialist perspective	1975
2	9	Theory Panel	1975
2	10	Third World Panel	1975
2	11	Women in Vietnam; Women in Prison	1975
2	12	Community organizing panel; Economy	1975