

History of the meetings

From the historic feminine assemblies of the French Revolution, where women stood up with Olympe de Gournay leading them to fight for their position as citizens, to the Seneca Falls Convention in July 1848 which gave birth to Anglo-Saxon feminism, the line is unbroken. Throughout the ages, successive feminist conclaves have formed part of political history.

Feminist congresses in the first decades of this century in Argentina, Columbia, Mexico and Puerto Rico could be considered predecessors of this continent's Feminist Meetings. There, the suffragettes' rebellion was enough reason to celebrate and to cooperate across borders. With the arrival at the beginning of the seventies of "second feminism", we could no longer put off our joint need to look at the distance we had covered.

"La Conjura" Take Action

The first to launch the challenge were the

Venezuelans. In August 1979 the feminists of the Caracas group "La Conjura" spoke out: "It's time for feminists from all over Latin America to get together!" The idea of a Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meeting began to gather strength. The Caracas feminists initially fixed a date, May 1989, which was later put off to December. Then they started talking of Columbia as a possible location as economic reasons made it impossible to hold a meeting in Venezuela. So it was that after a year, and during the U.N. "Conference of the Second Half of the Women's Decade" in Copenhagen, those



Latin American women present decided by a majority to hold the First Feminist Meeting in 1981 (July 18-21) in Bogota. Two hundred and seventy women from Brazil, Columbia, Curazao, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Panama, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Canada, the U.S.A., Italy, Switzerland, Holland, Spain and France attended the Meeting.

In Bogota the basis of autonomous feminism was laid. The organizers, from the group "Mujeres en Lucha", had fought a long and hard battle a year and a half before against a party political takeover. The demand of the Bogota '81 Meeting was the need to win space for feminism as a transforming political movement. Also in Bogota, guidelines for following Meetings were established. Firstly, they would be feminist. Participation would be individual and not by delegates. It would be a meeting, not a congress or conference, where we could decide by majority voting on "what was the correct line feminism should take". Finally, out of Bogota came the mandate to mount a campaign throughout the continent every year against sexist violence, by declaring November 25 to be "The Day of No More Violence Against Women."

The Lima Meeting

The Second Meeting took place two years later (July 19-22) in Lima. Six hundred women took part. The organization was in the hands of a collective made up of seven women from the different groups of the Feminist Coordinating Body.

If Bogota was the joy of discovery, Lima was a time for reflection and analysis. Also it differed from the 1981 Meeting in that it had a formal structure of workshops around a central idea: Patriarchy. This gave cause for disagreement, controversy and a rethink on how to run future meetings. Points of note from the Lima Meeting: the lesbians came out of the

closet. This could be seen in an enormous workshop held after their quite legitimate complaint that they had not been considered by the organizers. Neither had black women. Both omissions would be more than compensated for, particularly in Brazil in 1985.

From Bertioga to the Present

The concentration of 950 women in the holiday resort of Bertioga (Sao Paulo) was evidence of a challenge and at the same time a continuum of the strength initiated in 1981.

In Bertioga one felt for the first time the presence of not one but several feminisms. A heterogeneous gathering made explicit something which two years ago in Lima had not been possible: the rapprochement of women from partisan, union and social organizations. In Bertioga and later in Mexico in 1987, this was a sign that the feminist scope was widening. The women were not only party militants or representatives from unions; the participants at Taxco included women committed to human rights organizations and to Central American struggles for liberation. "We have come to turn ourselves into feminists!" shouted a Honduran woman at the Taxco Meeting in '87.

In Taxco, as in Brazil, the Fourth Meeting finished with a multitudinous march through the streets of Mexico City.

This feminism of different shades and colours met again in San Bernardo, Argentina, in November 1990. This time the Meeting coincided with November 25, which meant that almost all of the three thousand women who came from different parts of the continent, went chanting slogans and singing through the streets of Buenos Aires as an extension of the Fifth Meeting.

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