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In Defense of AID

By Kathleen A. Staudt

The trashing of the Agency for International Development and the public scapegoating by my "sisters" at the National Women's Studies Association Convention is an experience which must, I feel, be noted in the annals of the conference.

Recognizing that U.S. women's studies programs tend to be relatively parochial, AID's and, in particular, the Women in Development office's concern was to bring an international development dimension, including the participation of Third World women, to the wide array of panels. On one panel — "U.S. and Third World Women: What Are the Connections?" — were researchers who discussed women in multinational corporations, the changing sex division of labor in agricultural economies, female-headed households, and the decolonialization of research on women. The second panel — "Broadening Women's Studies: Developing World Dimensions" — built on the first, with participants discussing models of existing international women's studies programs both inside and outside the U.S., and resources available for networking among women within and across campuses. As with all other panels, our proposal was approved by the Convention Coordinators. Both panels were well received by the attendees, partly because, as chair, I structured presentations and discussion toward content, to avoid disruption.

However, in other panels and elsewhere at the Convention, an overgeneralized, late 1960s-style critique was made of the agency. Simplistic and single-minded attacks were made that the agency was an "oppressor," "enslaver," and "forcible sterilizer of millions of women." Scare-tactic stories circulated about giant IUD insertions and about "pushing women into the marketplace." The hostility directed against this convenient symbol — the agency (and me, the scapegoat) — was something I had not witnessed for a decade. The international women were personally harassed — attacked as being "coopted" and working as "agents." Our photographic display of women around the world was nearly trashed. A resolution was referred to the NWSA Coordinating Council recommending that AID's participation be banned from future conferences. Nevertheless, our research panel contained papers with a complex and sophisticated consideration of the inequitable international

economic order and the position of women within it. Ironically, an international issues taskforce and an international panels committee for next year's Convention were both set up.

As I returned home to reflect on this painful experience, I wondered: are people completely unaware that the Women in Development office was set up to lessen the damage done to women in the development process, and to ensure more access for women in the projects designed? Do people not know about new directions in foreign aid emphasizing basic human needs with rural health clinics, water, and small farmer credit projects, among others? Do people realize that Congress sets overall agency priorities and budgets? Aren't people aware of the day-to-day frustrations of working within a massive bureaucracy — not only male-dominated, but beset with a myriad of regulations which make change difficult? Are people so unaware of Third World women's work in some areas, where a tradition of "marketplace" activities has existed for centuries (and in part accounts for the greater sexual egalitarianism of those societies compared to ours)? I am not oblivious, of course, to the criticisms that could and should be made of this agency, other government agencies, universities, and women's studies programs, for that matter. Working within any institution requires some accommodation and retreat from ideological purity. Is the only acceptable option a withdrawal from those institutions capable of fostering change?

At the abstract level, I realize that the Association is a *new* one, bound to have a good deal of political volatility as groups jockey for power within it. I also recognize the pattern of relatively powerless people directing their power against one another in social movement-type organizations. What I personally feel and remember, however, is that women directed that power against other women and against me, and I am very alienated from it all.

Kathleen A. Staudt, University of Texas at El Paso, is currently on leave, under the Intergovernmental Personnel Act, with the Office of Women in Development, U.S. Agency for International Development. Views represent those of the author, and not those of the Agency for International Development.

Impressions of Kansas

By MaryJo Wagner

Those of us involved in the machinery and politics of the Convention and of our regions were the ones to whom complaints were registered. We were the ones who heard the concerns of caucuses, the ones who listened anxiously to angry voices at the

microphones during the Delegate Assembly, the ones who took notes at the final evaluation session. Distressed by the anger we heard and exhausted from the hectic pace, we reacted defensively. After all, we had worked hard. We deserved strokes, not