Reflections on the Convention

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By Christine Grella

Looking back at the Convention, I find myself exhilarated — but also confronted with issues and questions that were raised. Would our differences divide us irreparably, or would they be our source of strength? Could we attain our stated purpose of encompassing the needs of diverse groups: community educators, elementary and secondary school teachers, staff, students, community and four-year college instructors — each with different experiences of women's studies?

From discussions at dinner, to sharing our music and poetry, we exchanged ideas and impressions. Socialist-novelist Meridel Le Sueur spun her incredible life for us, embodying so many of the themes I felt at the Convention — the legacy of her own mother's struggle as a suffragist, the importance of form and language in shaping and changing our realities. In "Feminist Psychology," I saw women active in the field I intend to pursue in graduate school next year. I sensed a commitment to helping women grow and a challenge to this discipline, which is often used to control women. In "International Women's Studies," a South African woman spoke of progress for women in her country — but with no mention of which women. We denounced her, we denounced each other for not responding quickly enough, we denounced AID's presence at the Convention, we denounced the Convention for not having more women attending the panel confirmed our feeling that Indians are, in general, a mystery to most people. Disappointing as that realization always is, we concluded that the panel offered a much-needed general education about Indian people to a receptive audience.

In short, the Convention and our participation in it had several positive effects. It galvanized our own network and outlined tasks that will contribute to a needed revision of the scholarship on Indian women. It underlined a clear need for our presence and involvement in contexts which require and are amenable to changed views of Indian women, as subjects of research and as scholars. While most of the women in our group felt a real distance between their goals of activist commitment and their work within a non-Indian scholarly Association representing the women's studies movement, they did feel an enormous potential in NWSA. While they felt that the women they talked with at Lawrence needed to be educated about Indian people, they also sensed a willingness to learn. We determined to explore that willingness next year with increased participation in the NWSA Convention in Bloomington.

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