

POLITICAL CAUCUS MOVES AHEAD

By Erin VanBronkhorst

The Washington State Women's Political Caucus has established itself officially, after struggling through more than four hours of rules and by-laws at a recent meeting in Seattle.

The all-day gathering at the Seattle Center was attended by 200 women from all parts of the state. There were several black women, a caucus of Chicanas, and a generous sprinkling of women over age 60. Young women and radical feminists were underrepresented, however.

The purpose of the meeting was to establish the caucus as an official organization. And, as caucus coordinator, Ernesta Barnes, suggested in opening the meeting, the women did not discuss specific issues or candidates.

A general platform modeled on the National Women's Political Caucus was adopted in the last 20 minutes of the meeting. The platform pledges to rally support for women candidates on all levels who promise to fight for women, reform party structures to give women equal representation, raise women's issues in every election, and draft and support legislation to meet women's needs.

The National Caucus' first priority for 1972 is securing equal representation for women in delegations to the national conventions of both major parties. Other 1972 goals include supporting adequate funding for child care for people of all income levels; supporting welfare programs which guarantee an annual income, and monitoring and publicizing legislators' voting records on women's issues. The delegates also voted to endorse both the Federal and the State Equal Rights Amendment.

The day's proceedings were keynoted in a morning speech by Myrlie Evers, a black woman who is a member of the policy council of the National Women's Political Caucus. She urged women to organize in order to make the system respond to their needs.

"I feel this caucus will be able to be a force in this country, not only in this election year but in every year after, when women will no longer be taken lightly, when women will no longer be second

class citizens," she said.

"We have the power to have the people who are representing us, the system, if you will, respond to our needs, instead of us responding to them."

She urged the caucus to make its issues relevant to all segments of the population.

"This should not be just a caucus of one party; it has to be able to pull in people from all ethnic groups, racial groups, and ages, so as to represent all women," she said.

Evers said she has been challenged by those who believe a black woman's activities for women detract from the black movement.

"I have my priorities as a black woman, but I have one overwhelming priority and that is the survival of all of us, and it will take black and white women working together to accomplish that," she said.

"Let's not sleep on our rights, let's organize to go out, and continue to build," she concluded. "It's the only way to let this country benefit from the knowledge and resources we have to offer."

Workshops included the topics of women and the law, education, and child care.

A brisk discussion took place at one workshop on the Equal Rights Amendment. Several women present op-

posed the Amendment, partly because they believe it would mean women would be drafted. (An analysis of the ERA's effect will be published in a later issue of PANDORA.)

A Bellevue Councilwoman, a Superior Court judge, a Bainbridge Island school board member, and several Socialist Workers' Party candidates were among the participants in a workshop on women candidates, and ideas flew thick and fast.

Nancy Rising, Bellevue city councilwoman, related her experiences as the only woman in the council. "It's like the closed Senate men's club, nobody took me seriously."

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Psychiatry: Cure or Crippler?

By Margaret Paul

"This lady must be a masochist. She married a man who thinks all she needs is a good kick in the ass." This statement was made by a psychiatrist as part of a discussion which followed a brief interview of a female patient just admitted to a mental institution on the East Coast.

As I look back on my experiences at this institution as a student in the summer of 1970, I view it as the most frustrating experience of my life. This article will be a brief account of some of the people and situations I encountered there

The hospital is an old brick building located well inside the city, and consists of three in-patient services, a day hospital, a children's service and an out-patient service (approximately 225-275 people in all). I worked in the day hospital.

At that time my knowledge of how women's liberation related to psychiatry was somewhat shaky as I had not read anything on that specific subject. However, I was willing to trust my own feelings where women were concerned.

The woman mentioned above was in her early 30's, married and the mother of two children. She was very well educated and articulate, and had been trying to live up to the expectations of her parents, husband and society of being a good wife and mother. She had not been able to achieve



this and had sought psychiatric help because she had been physically abusing her children.

The staff reacted to this by describing her not only as a masochist but as a person who had manipulated people into controlling her life.

During the discussion I just sat there feeling totally helpless. It was obvious to me that their perceptions were completely distorted -- but they were so confident!

I found that some of the psychiatrists seemed to get a lot of rewards from focusing on the sexual conflicts and problems of female patients. One woman had had a particularly bad sexual experience and often they referred to how she had gotten herself raped. She was strikingly beautiful and people related to her in terms of her ap-

pearance inside as well as outside the hospital. Her apparent seductiveness was mentioned frequently.

Another young woman came to the hospital because of an inability to structure her own life and make her own decisions about what she wanted to do. Her supposed inability to accept sexual feelings was constantly focused upon and issues of her independence were almost entirely neglected. I have often wondered what she was really like. I only saw her in a heavily drugged state, speech slurred, fidgeting, shuffling around with eyes half closed.

Very soon after starting work at the hospital I became aware of a "subtle" hierarchy of professionals, with psychiatrists having the most authority. That is, certain people

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