



FED UP WITH STEREOTYPED ROLES OF GIRLS IN THE PACKAGING OF TOYS, MEMBERS OF NOW PICKETED THE TOYS R US STORE IN ADELPHI, MARYLAND

## national women's political caucus

Thesis  
A Women's Liberation Movement  
Antithesis  
Political Power in Electoral Politics  
Synthesis  
The National Women's Political Caucus

Some dialectic. Ever since the coming out party of the National Women's Political Caucus this summer I've had nightmares of political mutants--Betty Friedan's head on Mayor Richard Daley's torso--Hubert Humphrey's face under Gloria Steinem's hair and sunglasses.

The most reliable gossip available on the Caucus says that there was a lot of elbowing to get there first with the public announcement of a national coalition aiming to put women in 53% of the elected offices in the nation. Betty Friedan, who in many ways got there before anybody when she published "The Feminine Mystique" in 1963 wanted credit for and of course some control of the potentially powerful force of a feminist voting bloc. She was partially deflected from her goal by Congresswoman Bella Abzug and others who feared Friedan would sell out on issues in order to suck in a wider range of women. Friedan was being quoted everywhere as seeing herself "understanding the suburban housewife in the midwest". This past humid July with everybody privately claiming to be mother, a birth rite was held for the Caucus at the Statler Hilton here in Washington, D.C.

There were 300 women there from 26 states including two of us from off our backs. We went wanting to believe in something besides air conditioning. After hassling over the \$20 they wanted to collect from us as press and the sheet we had to sign agreeing to restrict our coverage to the speeches given that morning, we were beyond conversion. Paula Page of the National Student Association gave a terrific speech. Congresswoman Bella Abzug wasn't bad and everyone else was. Lunch was not included in the \$10 conference fee. An additional \$16 got you lunch in a Hilton tea room within belching distance of the celebrities. We ate the turkey special around the corner at a cafeteria with other bemused conference participants who were wishing

they'd stayed in their home towns and gone fishing.

Sometime after that weekend I get a letter on California Senator Mervyn Dymally's stationery from one Mari Goldman saying, "...it was a pleasure to meet you at the recent National Women's Political Caucus in Washington, albeit briefly." Then there was some ladylike jive about the Caucus, ending in "...all the parties will listen to us next year and we shall elect many more women to political office". She signs this Mari. My Aunt Doris would say she had beautiful handwriting. Underneath her signature is her full name in capital letters and underneath that her title--Executive Assistant. Last on the page are the initials lmc, her secretary maybe or Dymally's or maybe a Kelly Girl brought into type letters to all 300 of those other women Goldman didn't meet.

Another letter almost as wonderful as Mari Goldman's arrived at the oob office soliciting support of Linda Jenness' campaign for President of the United States as the candidate of the Socialist Workers Party. Her argument for herself was pretty dull. The SWP was neither Republican nor Democratic and therefore not responsible for all the evils in America as were those others. She ended with a terrific pitch for unity. As the Dems are not at all democratic one doubted if the SWP was so socialist or worker. Even Richard Nixon was going to "bring us together". In American politics consensus has always meant somebody got sold out.

I wish I'd get on somebody's mailing list who wants to make the nation safe for social deviants.

Marginally re-inspired by the morning paper's account of Gloria Steinem's speech to the Virginia Women's Political Caucus, I went to the National Caucus headquarters at 707 Warner Building here in the District, and opened the door on a reassuringly messy office that housed a large black dog, a globe, some flowers and two women who didn't mind being quoted in off our backs but asked to be anonymous.

They believe the Caucus will be able to out muscle the Republican and Democratic

male elite and elect good women as delegates to the state and national party convention.

They think Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm's entrance in state primary races for the Democratic presidential nomination will benefit feminist and black delegate hopefuls and force other presidential candidates to face issues around race and sex that they would otherwise ignore or deal with superficially.

One painted this hopeful picture, "Women are more direct and honest. They haven't whored on Capitol Hill like a lot of Congressmen so their lobbying efforts are more effective. They don't owe anybody any favors."

They were angry that Nixon hadn't made a serious attempt to name a woman to the Supreme Court, "Even the D.A.R. wanted a woman on the Court," said one of them.

The phone rang a lot. Neither of them appeared to have all the answers and often referred callers to other women at other phone numbers. They said they were computerizing the volunteer list and worried that they hadn't been able to stay on top of the mail that came in to the office asking to help the Caucus in some way or just wanting to know more about it. One of them thought many of the women who've become involved in the Caucus at local levels were the sort who a year ago would have contacted a Women's Liberation group but this year can't find one.

For some months we've known we were shirking our responsibility to our readers in not reporting on the National Women's Political Caucus, one of the more visible feminist phenomena this year. Since its appearance half the mass media coverage of the women's movement has focused on aspects of the Caucus. Our resources for nationwide research are pretty limited and we don't pretend to be presenting a final evaluation of the Caucus here. We'd be happy to print responses to this article and all news and announcements of local and national Caucus meetings, projects, conferences, whatever if you'll just phone or mail it in to us.

by onka dekkers