

COG's Organizational Sum-up of the Labor Day Conference

Background: COG is a young organization that had no group experience in organizing conferences. However, we realized that you learn through doing and that it would facilitate the conference by having it in a central location. We also thought that the burden of the conference should be shared by as many groups as possible. In addition, we hoped that by having the conference in town, more people than just our delegates would have been exposed to the OCIC. We are writing this summary so that other groups might learn from our experience.

Who was in charge: A member of the steering committee of the OCIC had ultimate organizational and political responsibility for the conference. In practice, the organizational responsibility was almost completely delegated to Chicago. Two women from COG were put in charge of the conference. They were selected because of some previous experience, but also because they were temporarily unemployed and had the time to do the work. At the time of their selection we did not realize that there would be a conflict between either of them being selected as delegates and having organizational responsibility. This was an error.

Logistics: We felt that having the conference in a downtown location, in the same building where delegates slept and could eat worked out really well. It eliminated the need to chauffeur back and forth from the airport and bus terminals and enabled delegates to keep within the lunch and dinner break times allotted to them. Unfortunately, the building where the conference was is being torn down and similar arrangements in Chicago will be much more expensive in the future. We also felt the building, due to the multi-national nature of its tenants, was a good place to hold a multi-national conference.

Security: We will comment on the security procedures at the midwest regional sum-up of the conference.

Childcare: It was our organization of childcare that caused our biggest headache and made the conference exhausting for our members. There were two sources for this mismanagement: external and internal.

External--Primarily, we see the main error being made by our local region. At a regional SC meeting, the region had agreed to provide material support for the conference.

Early in our planning, we had realized we were not going to have enough people to carry out our organizational responsibilities. This was especially true after we found out we had to have childcare in two locations (there was a nursing baby who had to stay with her mother-delegate) and also a handicapped child who required full-time attention. Five helpers were promised to us for the whole weekend. At the last week before the conference approached, it became clear that most people were backing out. Frantic phone calls to other cities received no affirmative responses, especially after these organizations or local centers were told the help would be for childcare. We were told it was not "worth it" to come into town "just" for childcare. The result was that 2 comrades from Cincinnati and one from Detroit put in limited hours over the weekend. Ironically, if our help had materialized, all childcare workers would have had big blocks of time to attend the conference.

Furthermore, bad planning by the SC led to long extensions of meetings where childcare had not been planned, further creating burdens for already over-worked childcare workers and the children themselves.

Internal--COG, as a young organization, is undeveloped in its theoretical and practical understanding of how to do childcare. We have only one child in our organization and most of our members are single adults. Childcare within the organization is still handled haphazardly and seen as taking care of the baby during meeting hours. Besides having little collective experience in actually taking care of kids, we have few resources in terms of babysitting lists, toys, etc.

These internal weaknesses became crucial when our external help failed to materialize.

Where do these internal and external weaknesses come from?

Firstly, the region did not take up the conference as a collective responsibility but reacted in a localist fashion to requests for help.

Secondly, there was a lack of seriousness about the need for childcare and an unwillingness to provide it. Childcare was seen as a burden rather than an enriching experience for the kids by both the region and some COG members. There was no effort to bring the politics of the conference into the childcare. COG recognizes its weakness in this area and will be taking up the question of childcare.

ERA: Two weeks before the conference, COG realized that we were holding the conference in a non-ERA ratified state. As comrades know, the women's movement has called for a conference and convention boycott of all non-ERA states. We raised this self-criticism and criticism of the OCIC to several individuals in the OCIC before we raised it to the body as a whole. Their response was that communist party-building activities were more important than the boycott, especially given the situation that our delegates were not dropping a bundle in Chicago. We think this is a specious argument. Does buying one head of lettuce really have a great effect on the California growers? Obviously not. In general, we felt this criticism met with a lukewarm reaction at the conference. To us, this showed an insensitivity to those who are trying to explain and promote the OCIC within the women's movement. We also think this kind of response belittles women's rights.

In general, we think that the errors in childcare and the handling of the ERA question indicate the OCIC has a long way to go in taking up the particular demands of women and the need to struggle against sexism.

The party: When it became impossible to hold the Saturday night party in the conference building, COG informed the SC that logistically, it was going to be hard to have the party. We were told to have it anyway. The party turned out to be a failure from our point of view. Not enough people attended to have made it worth all the hassle (transportation, childcare, etc.) and expense in planning it.

In general, we think it foolish to have a party if meetings are to be extended past late afternoon.

In summation, we feel most of these problems stem from the SC dividing the political and organizational preparatory work for the conference. In several instances, which we omit here, proper security precautions were not taken. Although we were informed at first that the Regional SC would have both political and organizational responsibilities, it became clear they didn't. Though we were never informed of it, the organizational responsibilities were COG's alone.

Questions of security and childcare, location of the meeting place, etc., are political questions that we were left to fend with ourselves. We should have sent somebody to Detroit, which has experience in planning conferences, or vice versa.

The SC person was supposed to come in early to discuss these questions. She came in the day of the SC meeting and that was the last we saw of her. Clearly she was overburdened. The SC meeting went late into the night and she had no time to meet with us. Again, we see this as a general error on the SC's part, seeing the organizational questions as simply technical arrangements.

In general, we feel we have learned a lot from this organizational experience. We certainly would be more than glad to share it with comrades in the future.