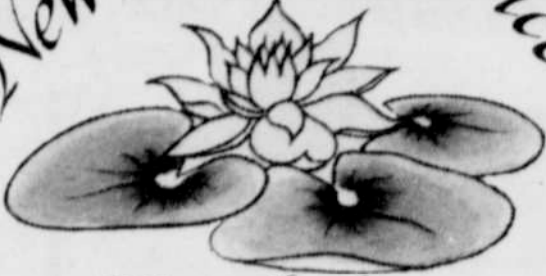


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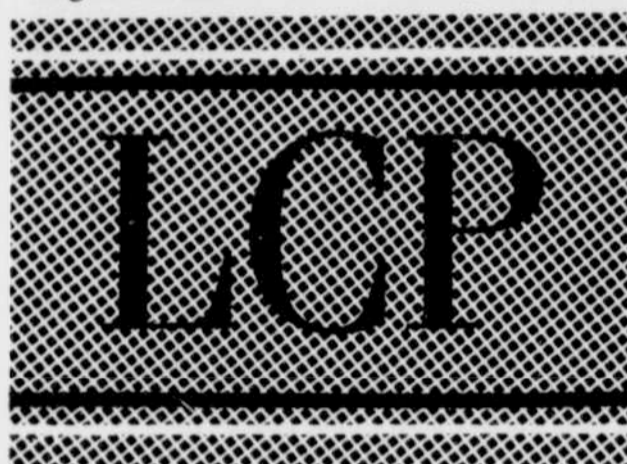
## Latin American Lesbian Conference

*One of the issues discussed was whether the North American Latina groups should be allowed to vote in the organization*

BY LINDA ROEGNER

In an effort to support Latinas, Latin America and lesbians internationally through improving communications, three Portland women attended the first Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Lesbian Conference in Cuernavaca, Mexico, last October.

Adriana Cardenas, Jean Dodier and Cindy Rodriguez gathered with more than 300 other lesbians to discuss an effective means for networking Latina lesbian groups. The week-long conference included workshops on AIDS,



witch medicine, lesbian mothers, sexuality roles, martial arts, and Latina art and culture.

Cardenas, who recently joined the Lesbian Community Project board, said that the primary purpose of the conference was to begin networking Latina groups, decide who the groups would include, and set standards for an international organization.

Cardenas said that of the estimated 300 Latin American women, most were from Central and South America and the Caribbean. Of the 50 women representing the North American hispanic groups, almost half were from the Pacific Northwest, 12 from the East Coast, six from Texas and another 15 from other states.

In Cuernavaca, the women were told that the conference was known by the community as a "Christian" women's conference because of strong homophobia.

The conference was the first of its kind, and organizational problems caused much of the programming to be slowed down. Cardenas said that when political networking was being discussed, many of the lesbian subgroups spent the time arguing amongst themselves. "There wasn't a coordinator, and everyone wanted to say something," she said.

One of the issues discussed was whether or not to allow the North American Latina groups to be voting members in the forming organization. Cardenas said that a small minority of the women felt threatened by the United States becoming too dominant.

"They were concerned about control and with us having more money," Cardenas said. "They wondered about bringing this into the network."

She added, "I can understand their concerns to a certain extent. However, we responded that

they didn't appreciate our concerns in the United States, such as racism and the language barrier. We don't really fit in here, but to them we were just too Americanized."

Dodier said she was startled by the concerns about North American Latinas. "So often we are considered different here; so it was sad when we went there and we were still considered different," she said.

The North American hispanic groups were, in the end, allowed a voting member in the organization. "Hispanics in the United States do have a lot in common with other hispanics," Cardenas commented, "especially with the human rights struggles."

One goal Cardenas wants to strive toward is to provide more educational programs on how Chicanos are viewed in the United States. "We don't want to control or dominate, but we do have a lot more resources available to us. It's just a matter of being sensitive and not coming across as the 'rich white sisters.'"

Aside from the organizational problems, Cardenas felt the most rewarding aspects were the workshops. She was also amazed that this was the first time that some women were able to talk about being lesbian.

In Mexico, male and female roles are strictly defined. Cardenas said women have a definite secondary role and that gays do undergo harassment by the government. She described an incident in which the military broke into a lesbian bar in Peru. They called the women names and arrested everyone. The military, however, waited until the news media came on the scene to film the entire arrest. The film was aired twice on news channels.

Cardenas said the reason for the harassment is not that gays and lesbians present a political threat, but rather just homophobia. "They don't have the freedoms to fight this — they don't have a voice," she said.

According to Cardenas, there was a good blend of economic diversity and varied backgrounds of women at the conference. She said the availability of financial assistance for women traveling to the conference allowed indigent women to attend.

The conference helped Cardenas to become re-connected to a culture she has missed since she moved to Oregon from Texas. Hispanic groups in Texas are more prominent than in Oregon. She estimates that about two-thirds of the population in Texas is hispanic.

Also, Cardenas said that the gathering in Cuernavaca of U.S. groups has enabled them to network here as well. She said a Los Angeles group invited them down for a "Women's Retreat" last December, which she attended.

The next international Latina conference is set for 1989 in Peru.

Cardenas and the others have a 140-slide presentation about their trip and are available to any groups seeking to hear more about the work being done for Latina groups internationally. •

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