

Forum 29/10/2017

Minutes of the second Women's Campaign forum of Michaelmas term, hosted in the Grad Union lounge at 7:30pm on 29th October 2017 by Lola Olufemi, the Women's Officer.

Committee present: Alex Rowe (Open Portfolio Campaigner), Anna Pick (Media & Outreach officer), Miriam Gauntlett (Secretary), Flic Kersting (LGBT+ Rep)

Agenda points:

1. Yarls Wood Demo & the Women's Campaign's association with Movement for Justice

Lola: Movement for Justice (MFJ) = ostensibly migrant led movement aims to end detention centres in UK and end borders. Support migrants + asylum seekers. Big protest at Yarls Wood (a detention centre in Bedford) organised by MFJ – lots of groups, femsocs, societies go from across the country. WomCam signed up on a coach.

Lola: A week ago, MFJ social media taken over by people claiming that organisation is undemocratic, abusive, coercive in the way it treats migrants. Unfollow MFJ blog and twitter. I went through the blog: people alleging that organisation undemocratic, run by group of old men, who use migrants + asylum seekers as font for other organisation. A lot of migrant voices shut down in terms of internal organisation of group. Voices aren't heard, are suppressed. Incidents of people sharing info without their consent, forcing people to do things they didn't want to do. No formal accountability procedures.

Lola: Main point is that organisation is not what it appears to be, uses pictures of black + brown people on their promo materials but decisions not made by consensus, voices of migrants are sidelined.

Lola: Concerned as WO that until accountability procedures made clearer, we should cut ties with them. Spoken to Hareem Ghani (NUS Women's Officer) about NUS national women's movement position. She is cutting ties with them until response provided to these allegations.

Lola: So far MFJ released an email flat out denying everything, not acknowledging claims as anything worth engaging with. Regional reps – Cambridge MFJ rep, have been in conversation with her. General point of meeting to decide whether we still want to go to Yarls Wood. Person who booked coach = Carmen, pHD student, their own money is down for the deposit. If we used coach it would be as an independent organisation.

Thoughts?

- No doubt in my mind that we should go. Demo is really important. If we aren't associated with MFJ what's the problem?
- Betraying people on the inside rather than supporting them if we don't go.
- Visceral protest that is for women on inside. Not really about internal politics of organisation if not under MFJ banner. Putting our bodies in places where the women inside can see you supporting them.
- Internal politics need to put migrants and asylum seekers at the front. If we go, need WomCam statement about things going on, explaining our position, cutting ties, saying why the protest is important.

Miriam: The Unfollow MFJ blog poster called for a reclamation of the Yarl's Wood demo to make it a truly migrant-led protest, asking for organisations to come together independently from MFJ. Would be good if WomCam could be a part of that, maybe a better organisation will come out of the whole incident that centers voices of migrants and asylum speakers.

Alex: Logistics of actual protest – it is MFJ that organise the audio system so people can speak and women inside can be called. Would we have to separate from that?

Lola: I asked Hareem what other independent delegations were going. NUS, Kings College London intersectional FemSoc are going as independent organisations, so can contact them and ask if we can protest with them as a collective

- Are people that have been organising under MFJ banner sticking with MFJ e.g. the migrants we see speaking for MFJ?

Lola: I've spoken to Cambridge rep. A lot of people shaken by allegations. Up to individual's discretion whether they stay in the group. Organisation so scattered that there's a lot of good work being done in diff regions, hard to tar whole thing with one brush. When I spoke to Karen (who is great!) she said that some people were sticking with org to make it better and improve accountability but some are cutting ties.

- On the ground will it be bad to say to people that we don't want to associate with them? We don't know what reasons might lead someone to stay in the group

Lola: Won't be as divisive as that. We need to be aware of complex reasons but also support those people making the allegations.

Anna: Is there a reason why they haven't responded?

Lola: What's worrying for me is that nothing's been refuted let alone responded to.

- MFJ email passed it off as a hack. Very convincing. People aren't going to know about the real problem.

Lola: Everybody vote on whether we should attend the protest, not under the MFJ banner, but also make a statement about why we are going and why we think it's important to still attend the protest?

Vote: Yes

Lola: Should we organise a second coach to the protest?

Vote: Yes

Lola: Statement from Carmen: from the conversations she has been having with Ayesha, who is a migrant herself involved with MFJ, MFJ needs to be clearer about the democratic processes and who's making the decisions. Going to ask for them to release a public statement and say something. Individual people have own experiences of working within organisation, more complex than saying we are never going to work with people involved in this organisation again.

End of agenda points