

PPR - THE FOUNDING CONFERENCE (JULY 1994)

Ian Parker

Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology

The Manchester Metropolitan University

Manchester

Psychology Politics Resistance (PPR) held its founding conference in Manchester on 2 July 1994. This event, which brought together around 150 activists working in and against professional and academic psychology, is the culmination of national workshops and meetings over the last decade. Over three hundred people involved in psychology had already written in over the previous year supporting a founding statement for the new organization which declared its opposition to the many abuses of power in psychology, and support for initiatives to build a network of individuals and groups prepared to challenge these abuses. The five morning workshops on 2 July were designed to bridge the gap between the inside and the outside of the discipline and brought together psychologists and users of psychology services. Discussion in these workshops focussed on Institutional Abuse, the Law and Prisons, Eurocentrism and Racism, Sexuality, and Women and Psychology. This attention to different domains of abuse encouraged people to think of ways that the various existing resources could be connected in a network. The afternoon workshops looked at practical initiatives and future activities of **PPR**.

Over the course of the day, four guest speakers from different struggles connected with psychology contributed their experiences to the plenary sessions. The first speaker was Snezana Frzina, an Educational Psychologist from Sarajevo now in exile in Manchester. She spoke of the difficulties facing children traumatised by the war in the former Yugoslavia, and the role psychological propaganda has played in the dividing of communities along ethnic lines. Snezana's moving account also drew sharp attention to the context of psychology, and to the importance of radical psychologists taking a political stand in the wider international sphere. (A collection during the day for Workers Aid for Bosnia raised 144.51.) Pep Garcia-Bores, who teaches at the Universitat de Barcelona and has been carrying out emancipatory research in the prison system, was the second speaker after the lunch break. His work has been around support for the different forms of resistance in the prison system and against the role of prison psychology in Catalunya in actively colluding with oppressive practices. He spoke of the role that **PPR** could play in linking psychologists and prisoners, and in developing a progressive politics.

The final plenary session, which dealt with the difficult issue of constitution and organization of **PPR**, was preceded by a powerful intervention by Ron Coleman from

the Hearing Voices Network and Asylum (the magazine for democratic psychiatry). Ron, who hears voices, was diagnosed and treated as psychotic by psychiatry, and had seen psychological treatments and psychotherapy as progressive alternatives until it became quickly apparent that clinical psychology's collusion with drug funded research made it often not much of an alternative at all. This was a necessary perspective from someone involved in psychiatry and psychology services, and now actively involved in trying to change them. The final contribution at the end of the day was from Don Foster, who teaches at the University of Cape Town and has been actively involved in the struggle against apartheid, in exposing torture by the South African security forces, and latterly in mobilising radical psychologists to build a new anti-racist professional association. Don briefly sketched the history of the complicity of psychology with apartheid, from the early segregation in mental hospitals at the turn of the century to the mania for testing different races. Contact with psychologists in South Africa would have been unthinkable during the boycott years, and rightly so, but it is now a matter of urgency that international links with them in this still difficult time are forged.

Psychology Politics Resistance is not formally constituted as an international organization but the messages of support to the conference from different countries and the list of initial signatories to the founding statement which includes groupings of people from South Africa, North and South America, Eastern and Southern Europe gives to the group an internationalist identity. A document on practical initiatives was circulated on the day with suggestions for responding to the demands of the disempowered, influencing the public agenda, and exchanging information and providing support within the network. A detailed database questionnaire was also circulated, and this, to be circulated now among the many people who have been in contact with us over the years and the many more who learn of **PPR**, will be the basis for a resource network. This resource network will help break the isolation of radical psychologists from one another, the isolation of users of services who often see psychology as a monolithic abusive discipline, and the isolation of professionals from those they claim to help.

You can contact PPR by writing to Ian Parker, Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Hathersage Road, Manchester M13 0JA, England.

or

Steve Reicher, Department of Psychology, University of Exeter, Exeter EX4 4QG, England.