

## **“INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY 1978**

### **DEMONSTRATION/CELEBRATION”**

#### **Toronto, 1978<sup>5</sup>**

Since 1910, International Women’s Day has commemorated through protest and celebrations the struggles of women in the workplace, in the home and in society the world over. It is a day of activity for English Canadian and Quebecois women, and an opportunity to renew our solidarity with women all over the world in their struggles against sexism, political, economic and social oppression.

In Toronto, there will be a demonstration/celebration organized by the International Women’s Day Committee on Saturday, March 11<sup>th</sup>. Saturday was chosen because we felt that more working women could come on a weekend than during a work day. Similar actions are now being organized in British Columbia, Edmonton, Winnipeg and Montreal, creating the possibility for the first real cross-country International Women’s Day ever. Other Toronto activities include a feminist feast, rally and parade at 4:00 pm on the afternoon of March the 8<sup>th</sup>, organized by Women Against Violence Against Women, and a concert at Convocation Hall organized by Sappho Sound in the evening. All these events are being organized simultaneously with women in every major European country, women who are building for a co-ordinated continent-wide mobilization.

#### **Why we are organizing on International Women’s Day 1978**

No matter what area of our experience we examine, the evidence points to the need for women to take action. While control of our bodies has always been an essential feminist demand, we do not yet have safe effective birth control, and antiquated abortion laws are used to deny many women access to safe abortion. In the past few months we have become increasingly aware of another abuse of our bodies—rape and wife-battering. Though child rearing has always been considered ‘women’s work’, our needs as mothers have been almost wholly ignored. We still have no quality childcare, the schools will not heed our demands for non-sexist education and because of

the economic situation it is becoming increasingly impossible for many working women and welfare recipients even to have the children we want to have.

Indeed, the economic crisis is making all of our problems more severe. Life in the workforce is deteriorating. We are being hit extraordinarily hard by unemployment, the wage gap between men and women is widening, the Anti-Inflation Board rolls back hard won equal pay increases. Job ghettoization is still the order of the day. Of course, native, immigrant and black women suffer an even greater burden.

Our bodies, our children, our work—our rights to all three are being eroded and attacked. Many of us have been working to strengthen and extend these rights for many years. We are organizing around the issues which follow. They are issues basic to the women's movement, they range through all aspects of women's experience, and they have been brought into sharp relief by the economic crisis.

## **Issues**

1        Control of our Bodies: We must have the right to make decisions about our reproduction. We need safe, reliable, available contraception, abortions freely available to all who need them, an end to all forced sterilizations and a guarantee that the full cost of abortions will be covered by government health services. Prostitution must be decriminalized.

2        Childcare: In 1975, one-third of all Canadian children under 15 had working mothers, but there were childcare spaces for only 3.2% of children under three, and 8.18% for those between 3 and 5 years. In spite of this, provincial and municipal governments are planning serious cutbacks in childcare spending, which will result in the closing of many centres. The quality of existing childcare is also being threatened by government moves to increase family home care and private profit centres. This coupled with the failure of the government to expand services in order to meet real needs, continues to ensure that women, especially those who work shifts, do not have adequate childcare. Governments must fund quality, community daycare for all those who need and want it.

3        Cutbacks in Social Services and Education: When social services are cut back it is women who have to pick up the burden dropped by institutions and agencies. We need an end to

cutbacks in social services and an extension of these services to meet real needs. Childcare centres, old age homes and hospitals, for example, are crucial to us, but it is also important that government fund the many new and necessary services pioneered by women—from pre- and post-natal care for single mothers to crisis centres to good mental health facilities.

The value of the contribution made by women in the home must be recognized. Women have already protested and overturned the Family Allowance freeze, and we oppose any future “baby bonus” cuts. We protest the fact that welfare payments and old-age pensions are far below official poverty levels.

4     Employment: Forty per cent of all Canadian women over 14 work for wages. They do not work for luxuries, but because they have to support themselves and their families. Sixty per cent of single parent families are headed by women. And yet, as things get tougher, a propaganda campaign is being launched to tell us that women are taking jobs away from men, and that our demands for equal pay are contributing to the crisis. We all need the right to work and the right to a living wage. The ghettoization of women in jobs which are undervalued and underpaid must end. We need equal pay for work of equal value, and an end to restrictive quotas on jobs and training programs of all sorts. Because wage controls based on percentage increases widen the absolute wage differential between men and women, wage controls must end.

5     Lesbian Rights: We must all be free to express ourselves sexually and not be harassed or discriminated against for a lesbian orientation. Lesbian women need basic legal protection in the Human Rights Code. We demand an end to harassment and forced concealment on the job, in housing and in the courts. Lesbian mothers must have the right to legal custody of children. We refuse to be penalized for our lesbianism by forced separation from our children, and by being denied the right to adopt children.

6     Native, Immigrant and Black Women: Minority women encounter many severe problems. They are almost completely unorganized, have the worst working conditions and wages, and often face the worst sexual assault on the job. It is hard for them to fight back lest they bring on heavy reprisals from employers and governments who are ready to fire and even deport at the drop of a hat. We need full native rights for native women, regardless of their marital status. Bill C-24, with its discriminatory clauses against women, must be repealed. The

deportation of Jamaican women must stop. Immigrant women must have full social, trade union and political rights.

7 Violence against Women: Because of the deeply embedded anti-woman sentiment in society, violence against women pervades all areas of life. While the many faces of this violence cannot be eradicated overnight, there are important measures that can be taken to help the women who are its victims. We need government funded hostels and transition houses, such as Nellie's, as well as more rape crisis centres. We need an end to rape laws which put the woman on trial and subject her to humiliating procedures in and out of court. We strongly object to the fact that many women, especially poor women, become special victims of the system through forced confinement in psychiatric hospitals and prisons, where they are further victimized and oppressed. And finally, we demand an end to police harassment and victimization of prostitutes, strippers, body-rub parlour workers and topless waitresses.

These are the basic issues around which the Committee is organizing. However, amendment and ordering are still open to discussion within the committee. Other issues which will be discussed include: family law reform, nuclear power, the position of Francophone and Quebecois women. A schedule of the general meetings is included. In addition, many subcommittees are working to make this week, and the demonstration, the largest action of the women's movement to date. We need your help, in the discussions, in the activities and at the demonstration.

<sup>5</sup> Flyer, International Women's Day Committee, 1978. CWMA: file "March 8 Coalition 1978 Toronto—General File."