

## The Black Women's Collective of Toronto

### Proposal to March 8th Coalition for IWD 1989

The Black Women's Collective of Toronto with the with the support of the Coalition of Visible Minority Women, and the Toronto chapter of the Congress of Black Women suggest *WOMEN AND POVERTY* as the central theme for the 1989 International Women's Day celebrations.

It is apparent across this country that poverty has far reaching negative effects on women's lives and is the primary cause of most social dilemmas which the majority of women face daily. For this reason, we would like to see workshops organized on the following sub-themes focussing on how poverty affects women differentially according to their race and class.

#### Housing

The lack of affordable housing in Metro Toronto affects women most. Working women --the majority of whom are poor-- and unemployed women constitute the largest percentage of applicants for Metro housing.

#### Shelter

Similarly, the shortage of women's shelters means that women are forced to tolerate all kinds of spousal abuse in the home without escape.

#### Daycare

Often, when women do manage to obtain housing, the lack of affordable, accessible daycare severely restricts their ability to gain employment, and leaves them confined to a cycle of poverty.

#### Healthcare

Likewise, the problems women face with healthcare, particularly access to abortion are most often due to their status of poverty within the socio-economic hierarchy. Usually, the women who need these servies most are the ones who can least afford them.

#### Welfare

It is no accident that the majority of welfare recipients in this country are women. Again, this is a direct result of women having very little economic control over their lives. The Social Assistance Review Board recently put out the 'Thompson Report' which

- Women & Against Poverty - women say NO TO POVERTY
- NO TO Racial Violence
- Immediate Recognition of Aboriginal People

assessed the social assistance programmes in the province. The report recommends among other things that the welfare subsidy be increased. We in the BWC feel that all women's groups should push for the implementation of this recommendation.

The Toronto Black Women's Collective regards the issue of poverty as the number one cause of most social ills which befall the vast majority of women. The Collective is committed to the struggle of all working class women internationally, though the most immediate focus of our practical work is with Black women in Canada. Our work has afforded us the insight necessary to appreciate how poverty affects women, particularly Black women. Hence, the term *poverty* is not at all problematic for us because we clearly understand the debilitating effects of the *reality of the condition*.

As pointed out above, it is *poverty* which prevents women access to decent housing. It is *poverty* which forces women to put up with physical, sexual, psychological and other forms of abuse in the home. If they had the means they would surely leave instead. In fact, it is *poverty* which causes many women to enter a household unit of economic dependence on a man in the first place. *Poverty* prevents access to all kinds necessary resources for a decent life. *Poverty* creates powerlessness which prevents women autonomy over their lives. Indeed, it is *poverty* and that resultant powerlessness which has created what has become known as a 'Third World'. Clearly, *poverty* has personal, national and international implications for women. *Jend.*

It is evident to us therefore that improvement to women's lives *must* be addressed from the standpoint of *women and poverty*.