

International Women's Day Committee newsletter

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 1983

Once again the March 8th Coalition is well and on its way to organizing an even bigger and better International Women's Day for 1983. Every Wednesday evening since January 12th, over 75 women have been meeting in the Metro Central Library, both as individuals and as representatives of a wide range of groups, including women's organizations, lesbian groups, trade unions, immigrant women's groups, third world solidarity groups, cultural groups, peace and anti-nuclear groups, political organizations and student groups. Our coalition is even stronger this year and represents an even broader range of the women's movement in this city.

As always, planning such an important event with so many different women is exciting and the momentum is building. The decision has been made to celebrate IWD on Saturday, March 5th this year with three themes that reflect important struggles currently going on in Toronto. Women's Right to a Job focuses on the fight against wage controls and the demand for full employment rights. Women's Right to Choose, in addition to recognizing all the various things we need to make choices about how we live our lives, highlights the struggle being waged here for the legalization of free-standing abortion clinics. Women's Right to Peace links the struggle for disarmament with that for Third World liberation., including the demand No to the Cruise!

For this year's event we are doing something quite new. The rally and demonstration will be, as usual, on the Saturday, starting from Convocation Hall. But instead of ending up with an afternoon packed full of workshops and other activities, in which there is never enough time to do everything, the march will end with an information fair, cultural events, and food. In order to discuss the politics of our day and help build for the demonstration we are planning three forums, focusing on the three themes, in the week preceding March 5th. On Monday, February 28th there will be a forum on "Women's Liberation and Abortion". On Tuesday, March 1st will be the forum on "Women's Liberation and the Fight Against Wage Controls, Concessions and Unemployment." The third forum, on Thursday, March 3rd, will be on "Women's Liberation and Disarmament and Imperialism."

We are hoping that by doing the forums in this way, we will encourage the participation of women in all the different constituencies, who generally are not directly involved in the building of IWD in Toronto.

Another new development we're all looking forward to is an additional dance. On Friday, February 25th, a mixed (men and women) dance will kick off the week of events. This dance, sponsored by Action Daycare, will be a benefit for the striking Mini Skool workers. Of course, the traditional women-only dance (without which IWD would be incomplete) will take place as usual on the night of the demonstration, March 5th.

The organizing is proceeding well, and we hope that IWD 1983 will be a more successful event than ever before. See you there!



ABORTION CLINICS

A Major Issue for 1983

Since our report in the November newsletter, the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (OCAC) has been hard at work building support for the legalization of free-standing abortion clinics. The ad that appeared in the Globe and Mail on November 12 brought in badly needed dollars for our on-going operating expenses. Our heart-felt thanks to all who responded to the call for funds. On November 18, we sponsored a very successful public meeting at OISE. Almost 1,000 people came to hear Jeanne St. Amour from a free-standing clinic in Quebec, Constanza Allevato from Women Working with Immigrant Women, a representative from the Sudbury Women's Centre, Dr. Henry Morgentaler, Louis Lenkinski from the Ontario Federation of Labour, and others speak about the issue.

OCAC is a broad-based coalition whose strategy thus far has reflected this diversity. A mass action approach has been demonstrated by the organizing of public meetings and outreach to various groups, including Labour. But also, legislative lobbying is considered essential by some members of the coalition and to this end, a major lobbying campaign has been implemented. The overall strategy has several components: outreach to various Toronto groups, to Ontario organizations and to Labour; building another public meeting with the March 8 Coalition; lobbying the Ontario legislature and encouraging groups and individuals to show their support for the issue by signing a petition to the government of Ontario and sending letters to Grossman, McMurtry and MPP's.

The Outreach committees have been collecting endorsements for the demand to legalize free-standing abortion clinics. Throughout our contacts, we've found that many, many individuals support the issue but some feel that the organizations they represent will not necessarily endorse it because of its "highly sensitive and political nature". Education of individuals and encouragement to bring the question forward and fight for it within their groups has been a significant part of OCAC's outreach work.

One of our biggest successes so far, however, is the endorsement obtained at the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) annual convention in November. Free-standing abortion clinics became a major issue at the convention along with affirmative action and wage restraints. The endorsement has had far-reaching effects. Trade unionists all over Ontario are discussing the issue in their locals. This wide-spread discussion likely contributed

to thwarting the efforts of an anti-choice group in Sudbury. The group was lobbying the Steelworkers' Local 6500 to support their efforts to prevent abortions from being provided at Sudbury General Hospital. They bussed in supporters to a union meeting where union representatives voted to table the motion indefinitely.

More recently, at its January conference where OCAC presented a workshop, the ONDP Women's Committee voted overwhelmingly to endorse the legalization of free-standing clinics providing medically-insured abortions and to publicly defend health care workers working in such clinics in the event that they faced prosecution. The OFL Women's Committee played a major role in the adoption of this position.



As many of you know, the right to choose is one of three major themes of the March 8 Coalition preparing for IWD '83. From this broader issue, the demand for legalizing free-standing abortion clinics will be highlighted. OCAC and the Women's Movement Committee of the March 8 Coalition are planning a public meeting--"Abortion and Women's Liberation"--to be held the Monday before the march.

And finally, we are continuing with our petition and letter writing campaigns. We've planned a petition day for February 5 to collect names on a petition to the government at various shopping centres in the city. We see the petition as an excellent means of discussing the issues with the general public and the event itself as a way to get media coverage for OCAC. Letters to the Health Minister, Larry Grossman, Attorney General Roy McMurtry and MPP's continue to be distributed. Larry Grossman has the power to designate free-standing clinics as public hospitals but so far he has refused to do so. The Lobby Committee of OCAC has also been focusing its work on the legislature in an effort to build support for the issue among MPP's.

Meanwhile, the women organizing the clinic continue the search for suitable premises. Their work has been consistently bogged down by the city's zoning bureaucracy but it is expected that a location will be found shortly.

OCAC itself still needs help. People interested can still join the coalition which meets every other Tuesday at Trinity Church (Bloor and Robert Sts.) at 7:30 pm. The next meeting is on February 15. Also, please continue supporting the coalition in these ways:

WHY PEACE NOW?

For the first time, the issues raised by the peace movement have a prominent place in International Women's Day. "Women's Right to Peace" is one of the three main themes for the day, along with women's right to a job and women's right to choose; and the leaflet put out by the Coalition explains in some detail that militarism and imperialism are very important issues for women everywhere.

People have been asking why the Coalition has decided to adopt this new issue. There have always been women, notably from Voice of Women, who have raised the need to highlight the issue of peace, but this is the first time that a consensus to include it as a major theme has emerged. The reasons for this new development are not completely clear, in part because many of us have different analyses of why this issue is so important right now. What I'll try to do here is to give some personal reflections about why this change has occurred.

The peace movement has acquired a great deal of strength and visibility over the past couple of years. In Canada, there have been massive demonstrations against the construction and testing of the Cruise Missile, and hundreds of people have been arrested in non-violent civil disobedience actions at Litton industries. Many of the activists involved in these events have been women; a good number of them are explicitly feminist. Indeed, among the 40 groups that are active around these issues in the Toronto area, there are three or four that are all-women groups; and at least two of them, the Voice of Women and Women's Action for Peace, are feminist in orientation. It seems only appropriate that a Coalition for International Women's Day should include the concerns of these groups.

Perhaps more importantly, social activists in every field have become more sensitized to the issues of the peace movement. Reagan's blatant war-mongering has caused a lot of people to be concerned about the

possibility of nuclear war; and those who struggle against U.S. imperialism have pointed to the connection between the nuclear arms build-up and the policy of aggressive war using "conventional" weapons.

A third reason for this strengthening of links between two important popular movements is, in my opinion, that the peace movement itself has changed. A feminist who has long been active in the peace movement said to me that they are coming to grips with the issue of rightful armed struggle, for instance in El Salvador. Many peace activists, even if they are committed to a strategy of non-violence for struggle against the Canadian state, have been convinced that armed struggle may make sense in some circumstances; they might remain personally committed to pacifism, but they do not stand in judgement to condemn the various ways in which other people struggle for justice. Now, since the March 8 Coalition has traditionally taken a strong stand in favour of national liberation and self-determination for oppressed peoples, the issue of pacifism was a barrier to forming firmer links with feminists in peace groups. This barrier is in the process of being overcome; and, even if many differences about tactics, about the moral question of violence, etc., still remain, a strong solidarity can still develop-- which is what I think is happening.

Another way of saying the same thing would be to say that the peace movement is now dealing with very concrete issues, such as the testing of the Cruise in Alberta, or the imperialist war in Central America. In taking up these issues, peace activists, feminists and socialists have found a great deal of common ground, even if there are many different points of view and analyses about the larger theoretical questions.

A final note: Feminists in the peace movement often point to violence such as rape as an example of the same patriarchal system which glorifies war. Socialist feminists have not yet said very much about this analysis of the link between 'everyday' male violence and militarism. A socialist-feminist perspective would have to include an analysis of how the state and the class structure of our society relate both to militarism and to violence against women; the dialogue that is now going on in and around the March 8 Coalition will no doubt help us to develop our politics and our theory in this area.

The discussions now being held among the women who are organizing for March 8 will culminate in a public forum on "Women's Liberation and the Struggle for Disarmament and Against Imperialism". This forum will allow clarification of those issues, and --I hope--will pave the way for future cooperation among feminist, anti-imperialist, and peace activists.

ABORTION CLINICS (continued)

- Write to Larry Grossman and your MPP urging the legalization of free-standing abortion clinics.
- Write to Roy McMurtry urging him not to take action against doctors and others involved in such clinics.
- Donations to OCAC would be much appreciated.

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-- Mariana Valverde

IWDC was shocked by the Broadside editorial "IWD--It Used to be Join Us" (February, 1983). This editorial merges IWDC and the March 8 Coalition into one organization, labels this organization "SOCIALIST-feminist", and attacks it for being exclusionary. On all three points, the editorial is incorrect.

First. IWDC and the March 8 Coalition (which is also called the International Women's Day Coalition--hence the confusion) are two different groups. IWDC is a member of the larger Coalition. We initiate it yearly and play an important role in it but we do so as one of many organizations with various political orientations. This Coalition does not define itself as socialist. Its political basis of unity is expressed in the statement of issues and demands it puts forward each year at this time. We are amazed that Broadside in particular should confuse the work and membership of the two organizations after running an article last March that was aimed precisely at dispelling this confusion ("A Committee for All Seasons", March 1982).

Second: the issue of "SOCIALIST-feminist". This mistake is just silly. Yes, IWDC is a socialist-feminist organization; we have described ourselves as such since 1979. The description of us as "SOCIALIST-feminist" however, comes from a misreading of our newsletter. In a paragraph about IWDC, we make use of a common stylistic format where all the letters in the first line are capitalized. It so happens that the word "feminist" begins the second line. It never occurred to us that someone with a literal mind would see that as a statement of political priority and use it to accuse us of being more socialist than feminist.

Which brings us to inaccuracy number three. The editorial claims that a socialist-feminist Coalition excludes non-socialist women. We hope we have made it clear that the Coalition is not socialist. Here we take issue with the assertion that socialist-feminism as practiced by IWDC is exclusionary. While it is true that we ask women joining IWDC (the group not the Coalition) to agree with a general socialist-feminist basis of unity, within which there is room for a diversity of socialist and feminist opinion, we regularly initiate and/or participate in coalitions of feminist and progressive groups. In fact, mass action and coalition building constitute the cornerstone of our politics and practice. We are open to criticism and political discussion about our work as a group and in coalitions, but a blanket dismissal of our work as

"exclusionary" is simplistic and disproved by past history.

We are particularly dismayed at Broadside's statement that socialist-feminism excludes lesbian-feminists. This position renders invisible the lesbian-feminists in IWDC who do find socialist-feminism compatible with their identity as lesbians. Over the past years, lesbians and heterosexual women in IWDC have been struggling to develop a socialist-feminism that understands and fights heterosexism and lesbian oppression.

We are left with unsettling questions. Why did Broadside print this editorial? Do the editors really not understand the distinction between IWDC and the March 8 Coalition? We find that hard to believe. What did they hope to accomplish? They claim that they "want International Women's Day to grow and be as successful as possible." But what they are really doing in this editorial is scaring women away from the Coalition with a bogeywoman of exclusionary "SOCIALIST-feminism". We consider this highly irresponsible journalism, dangerous and divisive in its unfounded hostility.

-- The Newsletter Committee

MINI SKOOLS ARE STILL OUT

Daycare workers at the Cawthra Mini Skool are still on strike. They have been joined by their sisters at the Tuxedo Court Mini Skool in Scarborough which reopened in January with scab labour. These women are members of OPSEU. Other Mini Skool workers in Brampton and Willowdale (who are organized by SEIU) settled in December, accepting the offer that caused the walk-out in October.

Solidarity support is needed, especially on the Monday morning picket lines. For information and rides call OPSEU at 482-7423.

CONFERENCE: Community Forum and the Union of Ontario Indians are sponsoring a day-long session to hear Native spokespeople talk about aboriginal rights, land claims, and self-government. 10am-5pm, Saturday, Feb. 26, Medical Science Auditorium, U of T. For childcare and information call 361-0466.

Are you on our mailing list? If you'd like to receive our newsletters and other IWDC announcements, send your name and address and \$5.00 to IWDC, Box 70, Station F, Toronto, M4Y 2L4.