

This speech was given by Dorothy Kidd on May 1, 1976 in Regent Park (Toronto) at one of a series of rallies held by the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee. Women were listening with special attention.

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I'm speaking today as a member of Wages Due Lesbians. We're also active in the Wages for Housework Committee, and the Family Allowance Protest.

Lesbian women, like all women, are always short of money. We too are feeling the pressure of the latest government attacks on women's standard of living and independence. And we feel the weight of these cutbacks in particular ways as lesbians.

Many of us have been forced to support ourselves entirely on the low wages of women's jobs. The promise and fanfare of International Women's Year might have been a good deal for Reynolds Advertising Company, who made the commercials. But for most of us it was just another media lie.

Now only one year later, as our jobs start to disappear, with the cutbacks in social services, health care, and some industries, we're threatened with losing even those small paycheques. As lesbians we've always had to face that threat. Most of us constantly have to hide who we are, because we could be fired for being lesbian. We have fought these firings. We don't accept being attracted to men as part of the job.

And we can all feel the pinch on women's money at home too. Rent, taxes, food prices, TTC fares... everything's going up. And that makes it even harder for us to be lesbian. Right now a lot of lesbians and other single women find themselves being forced to look for a man. Women who would like to come out as lesbians can't afford to abandon what little security marriage offers. Why should we have to depend on a man? None of us, straight or lesbian, want to be pushed into relationships because we can't afford to be on our own.

But even before this latest round of cutbacks, we knew the difference money made to our friendships with other women. As long as women don't have independent incomes, our friendships with each other are looked at as trivial, always secondary to the men and our families. When a man's job moves, his wife has to follow his pay cheque and no one thinks much of the ties she has to break. But we know that whether or not we are lesbian, other women understand us better than anyone else.

There are many mothers here today. Many lesbian women are mothers too, struggling to bring up our children either without a man, or hanging on inside a marriage until the children are grown up. If there's a separation, we often lose the children. If there's a legal battle, the Judge doesn't have to say he's denying us custody because we are lesbian and unfit to be mothers. More than likely the reason we're called unfit mothers is that we are



women, with smaller incomes than our husbands. For the courts often give custody to the parent with the larger income. And for the exact same reason when there isn't a court case, we're often forced to leave the kids. Only the men have the money to support them. If we keep them, our already low standard of living drops even lower.

And now all levels of government are once again asking mothers to lead the way in self-sacrifice. The provincial government is telling us they want us to stop sitting around and go to work. As if housework and raising children isn't already work! And the federal government has frozen the Family Allowance, the only money mothers get in recognition of our work, and that we can call our own. A lot of us are single women who would like to have children. But we can't even afford to when we are growing poorer everyday.

That's why Wages Due Lesbians is actively organizing in the Family Allowance Protest, speaking as lesbian women as widely as possible. We've spoken publicly at rallies, on the media, and to groups of women. We've had a very positive response everywhere. There have been only a very few who don't want to know we exist. Most women haven't said a lot, except "Of course", "Why not?"; or as one woman said, "That makes sense. We women are all the same; it's the same floor we have to scrub."

So let's see some money for all those dirty floors. We demand the Baby Bonus increase and wages for all our work, for all of us.

We refuse to hide our lesbianism any longer.

We know there are millions more of us. As our buttons say, we are, and will be, "COMING OUT WITH WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK!"