

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY SPEECH, 1986.

Thirty years ago December, a Black woman on a bus in Alabama refused to give up her seat to a white person. Her name was Rosa Parkes, and she was the spark that ignited the Civil Rights Movement--- a movement that built a tradition. And International Women's Day, as we've been celebrating it here in Toronto, is a part of that tradition. It's a tradition of taking to the streets to fight for justice and for our rights.

And now, thirty years later, the March 8 Coalition is calling on all women's organizations to make 1986 another historic year - to make it the year when women in Toronto begin to build a new women's movement - a women's movement which will integrate the fight against racism and the fight against sexism, as they are already integrated in the struggles - and in the very lives - of our sisters of colour.

We know that it won't be easy to build this movement. It's just like Faith was singing in that song: they've divided and ruled us for so long that it isn't easy to come together. It wasn't even easy for us to get here together today. But we ARE here. We're here to vow that this is only a beginning and that any problems we've had are nothing but the birthing pangs of a new anti-racist women's movement.

And, White women, we're here to say to you that the fight against racism is your fight, too. Because, whether we talk about fighting racism or whether we talk about fighting sexism, we're talking about changing the very nature of the political and economic system under which we live. And that brings us up against some strong and well-organized enemies.

Have you ever noticed, for example, that the Corporations which use women as a reserve pool of cheap labour to be hired last and fired first are the very same Corporations which use all people of colour in exactly the same way?

And the Corporations which profit from paying women just two-thirds of men's wages - aren't they the very same Corporations which profit even more from paying women of colour only about two-thirds of that two-thirds?

And the Corporations which create problems such as falling wages and unemployment - aren't they the very same Corporations which profit when White workers unfairly blame those problems on women of colour and immigrant women? Saying "No to racism" means identifying our real enemies and fighting them together.

And let's talk about Governments. When Governments refuse to pass effective Affirmative Action and Equal Pay legislation for women, don't they refuse it to people of colour, too?

Women of colour and immigrant women are now leading many struggles to organize in the workplace, and their participation can only make our unions stronger. We've heard about some of these struggles today - the garment workers, the cleaners at First Canadian Place, the Superplastics workers. Women of colour, who are now in the process of organizing into unions, are the most affected by the lack of first contract and anti-scab legislation which would benefit us all.

And aren't women of colour the most likely to suffer under a health care system which denies access to abortion to most working-class women, which forces many women of colour and immigrant women to undergo involuntary sterilization, and which - if the Ontario Medical Association has its way (that bastion of White male privilege) - will deny full access to health care of their choice to all poor and working-class women?

And the Government which refuses daycare to most women is the very same Government

which forcibly deprives native women of their children.

And let's not forget that the Government we're up against is the very same Government which refuses to implement full economic and political sanctions against racist South Africa. The Corporations which profit from keeping women in their place here in Canada are the very same ones which reap even greater profits from the stinking apartheid system.

Now, here's some news we've just heard: one of the Toronto radio stations - CFNY - has decided to celebrate International Women's Day by presenting a full day of all-women disc jockeys. But don't applaud: that programme is being sponsored by the Carling-O'Keefe Company who have investments in apartheid. Well, we're here to say to CFNY and to say to Carling-O'Keefe that that's not what International Women's Day means. International Women's Day doesn't mean putting a few female disc jockeys on the air while you're massacring our sisters in South Africa.

So, you see, saying "No to racism" could be expensive for some people. And it's generally the very same people who consider that it's just not cost-effective to say "No to sexism" either. We're talking here about our bosses and their Government. The enemies of people of colour are the enemies of all women, and they are powerful and well-organized. That's why we're here today to say, "White women, we shall never win our struggle against sexism unless we win it as part of a broader and stronger movement which includes not only the participation but the leadership of our sisters of colour."

In a few minutes, we're going to ask you to take a first step toward building such a movement. We're going to ask you to take to the streets together and tell the world just exactly what it is that women are saying No to. So let's practice a bit. If we shout it loud enough, they'll hear us all the way to Queen's Park, saying:

No, no, we say No! Racism has got to go!  
Apartheid  
Union-busting  
Sexism  
White privilege  
Racism

And it's going - because right here in this room you are building a new anti-racist women's movement. And now Sherona's going to ask you to take out your pocket-books, and then the marshalls are going to tell us how to take this movement to the streets. And take a message to Queen's Park and take a message to the American and South African Consulates, and take a message to the Department of Native Affairs. And the message which the racists will be hearing from us today is the very same message they've been hearing from our sisters in South Africa, and it is this:

Now that you have touched the women,  
You have struck a rock!