

# Wages for Housework Campaign Bulletin



Toronto, Canada

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## Housework makes headlines!

by Judith Ramirez

### MICHELLE TRIOLA MARVIN

From 1964 to 1970 Michelle cooked, cleaned, soothed, and gave up a singing career for actor Lee Marvin. Though they never married, she had her name legally changed to his. When it was all over the question became: how much was all her work worth? Nothing said Lee. 1.8 million dollars said Michelle in a lawsuit.

In 1976, the California Supreme Court made the historic MARVIN decision which established that a vow to share property between unmarried partners may be just as binding as that between spouses.

When Michelle was finally awarded \$104,000 last April, after seven years of litigation, she called it "a victory for all women". It comes, after all, to \$17,350 for each year of hidden unpaid work while with Marvin. And that's \$17,350 more than he was intending to pay her!



### BETTY FORD

While the ever-popular Betty Ford was still in the White House, she was asked by *Good Housekeeping* what could be done to upgrade the

status of the housewife in today's society. "There should absolutely be some financial consideration, other than her husband's," said Betty. "He may take off and marry a young chick. It happens," she added. Asked about a study by the Social Security Office of Research and Statistics which placed a housewives average monetary worth at about \$6,000 per year, Betty replied that a more accurate estimate would be "at least \$30,000 per year"!



### FLORENCE SIMS

One of three co-ordinators of Ontario's popular welfare guide *Taking What's Ours*, Florence Sims considers welfare a right, not a privilege, "because it's money that mothers *earn* by raising society's children". Recently she told the *Toronto Star*, "I decided to go on Mothers' Allowance so I could stay home and raise my child during her early years. It was a difficult decision, but I thought it was better for me to be home with her".

Funded by PLURA, a coalition of churches, *Taking What's Ours* is full of helpful hints on how to collect everything you're entitled to.

"We wanted women on welfare to stand up and claim what's their's. We're tired of being considered 'charity cases', we work like everybody else", says Florence, an activist with Black Women for Wages for Housework.

Groups all over the province are buying and distributing it, "and hundreds of women have phoned or written in," added Florence. The National Action Committee on the Status of Women has hailed *Taking What's Ours* as an example to be copied in other provinces throughout Canada. (more on page 3).



### HERTA TUTTLE

A Philadelphia housewife, Herta Tuttle, is fighting a Family Court order which requires her to seek employment in order to "contribute equally" to the support of her two children, ages nine and ten.

Deserted by her policeman husband two years ago, Mrs. Tuttle receives \$100.00 weekly from him in child support, or \$5,200 of his \$22,000 yearly salary. She is demanding that the court recognize the dollar value of her work in the home and claims that unless it does it is impossible to "equally divide" the responsibility of support between the two spouses, as the court has tried to do, citing the state's Equal Rights Amendment.

"I want my work valued and put in dollars and cents, just like his support is put in dollars and cents," Mrs. Tuttle told an interviewer recently.

Says Mary Hawryshkiw, of the Philadelphia Wages for Housework Campaign, which is organizing public support for the case, "We feel Mrs. Tuttle's case bridges the gap between the Lee Marvin case and the fights of welfare mothers. What all these women are fighting for is recognition — and compensation — for their housework". Herta Tuttle plans to take her fight to the state Supreme Court if necessary.

### MAGGIE TRUDEAU

Representing Canada at a seminar of Commonwealth leaders' wives in Jamaica, in 1975, Margaret Trudeau brought the audience to its feet when she issued "a universal plea for the housewife".

She took issue with the women's liberation movement for demeaning the role of the mother: "They downgrade the work that women are doing in the home," said Margaret. "Many housewives also hold down paying jobs to earn extra money for the family, but are still expected to do all the traditional female chores," she noted. "They end up doing twice the work", concluded Margaret to prolonged applause.

Statistics Canada has since released a study on housework which estimated that every woman over the age of 16 in Canada performs approximately \$120 worth of housework per week!



### MARGARET PRESCOD-ROBERTS

Margaret Prescod-Roberts, of Black Women for Wages for Housework (USA), recently told a Toronto audience of a meeting with Sarah Weddington, President Carter's special assistant on women's affairs. On the agenda for discussion were government estimates on the value of housework and increases in welfare payments.

Weddington agreed that the issue of wages for housework is a bread and butter one and indicated that she is studying various approaches to the problem. Margaret described the meeting as "very productive" and added that, "When government economists admit the value of housework in the US is worth 350 billion dollars and Sarah Weddington talks publicly of formulating a system to pay housewives, then welfare has got to be viewed in an entirely different light".

Margaret was a delegate from New York to the National Women's Conference, in Houston, Texas. She led the large Wages for Housework delegation which helped re-formulate the official resolution on welfare calling on the Carter Administration to recognize welfare "as a wage and not a charity".



## Winnipeg Women for Welfare

A new welfare group in Winnipeg has made national news with two important victories for women across the country. Led by a large number of Indian women, Women for Welfare was formed in February of this year to fight for immediate increases in welfare benefits and an end to harassment of welfare mothers. They hailed their birth as "the first time in Manitoba, Indian women, white women, welfare mothers, social workers and single women have come together."

Their first move was to demand that the province and other agencies keep their hands off the Child Tax Credit. (The new tax refund of \$200.00 maximum per child for parents with combined incomes of less than \$18,000.00.) The local Housing Authority had already tried to seize this money from mothers in rent arrears. Other government authorities had not yet decided whether they would follow suit and deduct the amount of the tax credit from welfare payments.

Within less than a week the group's protest was taken up in Ottawa, by no less than Federal Minister of Welfare, Monique Begin. Mme. Begin came out strongly against the Housing Authority's plan, echoing Women for Welfare that it was "a form of blackmail" and "illegal".

The group had won the first round in keeping the tax credit in mothers' hands, as one of the only universal wages for raising children.

By the middle of March, within one month of their birth, the group had won commitments from both the City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba to exclude the child tax credit as income in calculating social assistance benefits. The other provinces have also done the same. Women for Welfare had given notice that women will not allow the government to undervalue our work, and will fight for all the money owing us for that work.

— Dorothy Kidd

Contact:  
Winnipeg Women for Welfare  
c/o The Women's Building  
730 Alexander Street  
Winnipeg Manitoba R3E 1H9

Return to: WFH  
Box 38, Stn. E.,  
Toronto, Ont. M6H 4E1



# AS THE WORLD TURNS...

## Women are not for burning

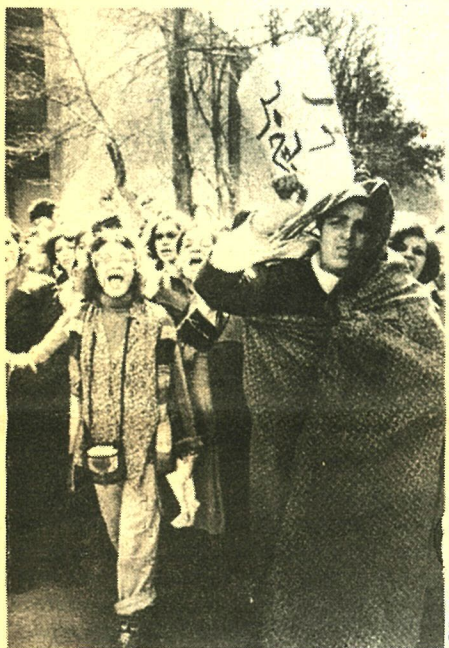
**INDIA** — Women in India are taking to the streets again. The last time was to help bring down Indira Gandhi's regime that was forcing women and men with more than two children to be sterilized or face up to two years' imprisonment.

Now they are fighting against the new government's lack of enforcement of the Anti-Dowry Law. The law states that it is illegal for a man and his family to demand a dowry from his future wife, but imposes only a small fine and sentence as punishment. The protesters say that the law is so weak, that *hundreds* of women are murdered each year by their husbands or husbands' families when they aren't satisfied with what the wife has to offer.

A woman who was burned to death recently in such an incident told police shortly before she died that her family had already given a dowry worth thousands, and more was being demanded.

The government says it has been "considering" making the penalty for breaking the law tougher, but with women once again in the streets, and memories of Gandhi's downfall fresh in their minds, they will doubtless have to move more quickly to abolish this modern-day slave trade.

## Up against the veil



CP Laserphoto

"Death to despotism under any cover."

"NO man — not the Shah, not Khomeini, and not anyone else — will ever make me dress as he pleases."

**IRAN** — What would make 20,000 women take over the streets of Tehran for a week in March, braving the bullets of army troops and the stones and knives of pro-government thugs?

When the Shah of Iran was deposed and the Moslem leader Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile to lead the government, it was supposed to spell an end to dictatorship. But the Ayatollah's plan, to take the country back to the traditional practices of Islam, involved returning the woman to the family with virtually no rights, and no money of her own.

She would not be allowed to travel or take a job outside her home without her husband's permission (who would now be able to take a second wife without agreement from the first). She

## Wages for Schoolwork

To make up for the poverty of Mother's Allowance, some youth in Regent Park, Toronto, have begun to organize in their own right. They are publicizing the little-known "attendance bursary", available for high school students from the Toronto Board of Education. One student per low-income family is eligible for \$20 per month, while the other students in the family receive car fare and school supplies. In their leaflet, the teens urge, "This is your money! You've earned it! Go get it! Right on!"

The Regent Park Teens Association has been circulating a petition in several inner-city schools in Toronto. Among the demands are that:

1. The bursary be raised to \$50 per month. It's been fixed at \$20 a month since 1958, while the cost of living has risen about 150%.
2. The bursary not be restricted to one student per family because this creates divisions between brothers and sisters.
3. All students in Toronto high schools should be eligible.

Using the incomes of parents as a guideline means that students are not independent. Also, a recent study by the Board of Education reported that 51% of students in inner-city schools are living below the poverty line.



AP Laserphoto

**HOUSEWIVES PROTEST**, April 17, 1979. Some 800 New Delhi housewives, including slum dwellers and spouses of two cabinet ministers, got together to stage a street protest of a proposed national budget which would raise taxes on such household staples as soap, processed food, cooking gas, and kerosene. Many of the women carried signs. Other flourished their rolling pins.

would have no right to begin divorce proceedings, while her husband could divorce her simply by saying he wanted to. Upon her husband's death she would inherit merely 1/8 of his estate, while daughters inherit only half of what the sons would. The government was also insisting that women go back to wearing the chador, the traditional Muslim long black cloak. (It must be hoped that by forcing women to go back to the traditional forms of dress they'll go back to the "traditional" way of thinking too).

The Iranian women haven't won yet, but like women everywhere who have tasted power, they aren't about to give up the fight.

(Information taken from *Kinesis*, April 1979).

## Salario al lavoro domestico

**ITALY** — The Wages for Housework campaign has become very popular in Italy, where it is known as *Salario Al Lavoro Domestico*. Italy has the worst economy in Western Europe, and women have little choice but to get married in order to survive. Only one in five women (nineteen per cent) are in the regular work force, and one in fifteen (about seven per cent) work as prostitutes. Italy has neither unemployment insurance nor welfare, a contributing factor in the high percentage of women involved in prostitution.

Thousands of women took part in demonstrations organized by Wages, supporting prostitutes and asking for money for themselves. Future demonstrations are planned to support abortions for poor women, and to protest the actions of the Pope, who has been guilt-tripping Catholic doctors into refusing to perform the newly legalized procedure. As a result of papal pressure, Catholic doctors have been refusing to perform abortions in hospitals, where they are legal and relatively inexpensive, and performing them illegally in their private practice for inflated prices.

Excerpts from *Coyote Howls*, Vol. 6 No. 1

For more information contact:  
Comitato per il salario al lavoro domestico  
c/o Centro delle Donne  
Piazza Eremitani, 26  
Padova 35100, Italy

**Speech by Amer Mullen, Regent Park Teens Association, at a meeting to launch the publication of Taking What's Ours, held at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in December, 1978.**

"First, I'd like to tell everyone that I have been working with students from Contact High School and other areas to help them get their \$20 a month education fee for low-income students. We went through a great difficulty organizing students and teens as to their rights in obtaining this fee. After a long struggle, I am happy to announce that because of my hard work and the support of Housewives Initiative and Payday, there were 20% more students this year, than last year, who applied for the attendance bursary. (Applause)

In England, students receive a wage to attend school, and 81,000 students are on strike in Quebec, striking for a living wage. (Applause)

Because I am from a low-income family and have ambition and drive, I feel that I should have as much right as anyone to a decent education, and not treated like a second class citizen. (Applause)."

For more information contact Regent Park Teens, c/o PAYDAY, Box 515, Station C, Toronto M6J 3P6 (366-5002 evenings).

## Welfare demonstrations

**TORONTO** — With songs, skits, speeches and placards, a lively crowd of 150 welfare mothers and supporters demonstrated in front of Queen's Park in Toronto in June. They met to demand a 36% increase for mothers on Family Benefits, more support for those returning to work or school, and other changes. Marchers came from as far away as Montreal and Kingston.

The protest was organized by the Family Benefits Work Group, a coalition of Family Benefits mothers, social service workers and supporters to strengthen their recent meetings with the Ontario government.

The most important victory was a commitment by the government to allow mothers who are not legally separated to get Family Benefits. Previously, they were only eligible for the smaller welfare assistance. The Work Group is continuing to pressure for immediate increases in all welfare payments.

For more information, call Pat Davies at 537-1196 or Brenda Parris at 924-4646.

—Dorothy Kidd

**OTTAWA** — Community and Social Services Minister Keith Norton tried to sneak in through the back door to a banquet he was attending in order to avoid the demonstration organized in support of the FBWG by the Ottawa Tenants Council in May. The demonstrators succeeded in catching him, and presented him with the same demands as those in Toronto.

Irene Sauve, Vice-President of the OTC told him, "Women on government support have always been low-rated and told that the job we do is useless. We do not agree. We do an important job, for we are raising tomorrow's adults, besides providing work for all the services which depend on our existence. We are not abusers of the system, but a vital part of it."

Contact the Ottawa Tenants Council at 346 Frank Street, Ottawa K2P 0Y1 232-2677.

## Kiss and tell

**USA** — Kiss and tell. That's the new name of "the game", according to the National Task Force on Prostitution. According to Margo St. James, the Task Force is asking all prostitutes to expose the names of any politicians who leave a prostitute's bed to go to the legislature to vote against decriminalization of prostitution, the Equal Rights Amendment, and other laws of importance to women.

**BRITAIN** — Using the threat of "Kissing and Telling", prostitutes wrote a new page in women's herstory in March when the Protection of Prostitutes Bill passed First Reading in Parliament by 130 to 50 votes.

The Bill would abolish jail terms and fines for soliciting as well as the term "common prostitute", which police have used indiscriminately to charge women with soliciting.

The evening before the Bill was passed, the English Collective of Prostitutes, Prostitutes Laws are Nonsense (PLAN), and Black Women for Wages for Housework (USA) representing the San Francisco-based COYOTE, held a meeting in none other than the House of Commons! They spoke to a packed hall about how prostitution "is the welfare the State does not provide, which is why so many single mothers are forced to go on the game." At the same time as prostitutes are under the gun for being paid for sex, they said, welfare women suspected of having a man around the house are being cut off because the State expects their boyfriends to pay for "services rendered".

Read Zara Silverwoman's "Helpful notes on prostitution for the worker and the wanderer". Available at the Toronto Women's Bookstore and Androgyny Bookstore in Montreal.



The Painted Ladies Theatre Group performed at the opening of the 1st National Women's Building in Winnipeg Feb. 21, 1979. The play was also a smash hit at the Bi-National Lesbian Conference in Toronto in June.



## Maids on the march

Ontario's first domestic rights group has been set up and is already marching in the streets. Mirijana Tenebaum, founder of Labour Rights for Domestic Servants, marched with co-workers and many supporters, including the Wages for Housework Campaign, outside the home of her former Rosedale employer to protest her firing. The demonstrators called for a \$3.00 minimum wage, a 44-hour work week, overtime and vacation pay, and pay for statutory holidays.

Domestic work is not covered by provincial labour standards legislation, and only Newfoundland includes domestics in its minimum wage legislation. Montreal's Household Workers Association, the first organization for domestics in Canada or Quebec, says that current rates of pay average about \$50 a week plus room and board for 60 hours work.

The federal government asks employers of women coming from other countries to sign forms saying they will pay \$75 plus room and board for a 45 hour week. However, this "contract" is not legally enforceable, and the only recourse a woman has is to quit, then face deportation.

According to a report released recently by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Employment and Immigration Commission has changed their policy over the last 5 years to meet the demand for live-in domestics. An increasing number of Third World women are being allowed into Canada to work temporarily as domestics. The women are given specific work permits which do not allow them to change their type of employment. In fact, they cannot even switch jobs without government permission, and can never become permanent residents. Therefore they are not eligible for U.I.C. or welfare.

Speaking for immigrant women in Toronto, Judith Ramirez recently told the Toronto Star, "Immigrant domestics are modern day slaves. . . They have no protection under the law. . . (and) because domestic work is invisible to the public eye the employer can make any kind of arbitrary demands he wants."

Sheila Arnopoulos, author of *Problems of Immigrant Women in the Canadian Labour Force*, told a CBC interviewer, "The pay for domestics is so low because housework is a low-status job in our society. There are millions of housewives doing it for nothing, so the women who do it for pay get practically nothing for it."

Labour Rights for Domestic Servants is circulating a petition among immigrants, women's and labour groups calling for the inclusion of domestic work in minimum wage law.

More demonstrations are planned in the future and the organization is eager to hear from other domestics, to give or receive support. To contact them, phone 961-0386 (evenings) or Anna Menozzi, Employment Services for Immigrant Women at 922-8017 (days).

— Paula Fajnst

**FLASH!!** The Household Workers Association just announced that the Quebec government has passed legislation establishing a minimum wage for domestics, as well as working hours, statutory holidays, and vacations. A major victory!



Judith Ramirez, Toronto Wages for Housework Committee, on Parliament Hill.

## Maggie Trudeau: Housewife of the Year

The following is the Press Release sent out by the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee in March that released a storm of media coverage from across North America to as far away as Australia!

When Mrs. Margaret Trudeau left 24 Sussex Drive with the words, "I don't want to be a rose in my husband's lapel", millions of housewives throughout the country silently applauded her courage.

"Spoiled brat", "neurotic", "selfish", were only some of the labels the public conferred on Margaret for standing up and saying that women want independence, respect, and lives of our own.

The ultimate blackmail of "unfit mother" was not spared her either. No woman should have to suffer the agony of choosing between herself and her children. But as long as our work in the home is considered worthless, many mothers will be thrown into that crisis.

With the publication of her book *Beyond Reason*, a new storm of criticism has erupted around Margaret. But we women are always being told that our expectations and demands are

"beyond reason". Government is cutting back daycare, funds for women's services, our Baby Bonus. And welfare — the first wage for our work in the home — is kept way below the poverty line. Meantime the Stag Party in Parliament spends millions on new airplanes and subsidies to Big Business because such expenditures are, of course, "within reason". They are, in fact, the reason.

Margaret recently told an interviewer that she wrote her book because she's broke. "I wouldn't take a penny from Pierre. Take a man's money and you become his creature to be told what to do." Even housewives with the most comfortable life styles seldom have money of our own. Women everywhere are "rug-ranked" according to the men we marry. Margaret Trudeau has again stood up for women's financial independence and dignity.

On Friday, March 23rd at 3:00 p.m., a delegation of women from Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Montreal will gather on the steps of Parliament to salute Margaret's courage and declare her "Housewife of the Year". We will carry red roses and throw them at the doors of Parliament in defiance of a government which wants to keep women poor and dependent.

## Psst! Here's facts on welfare

If you were applying for welfare, would you know enough to hit the office early in the morning?

Would you be ready to wait three months to a year before seeing any money, whether from municipal welfare or provincial family benefits?

Are you aware of your right to privacy when fielding questions from the welfare or social worker?

Would you know most supermarkets will cash your welfare cheque before the due date — if you agree to spend 15 per cent there?

Would you know enough to ask for winter blankets (available under special circumstances) during the summer, to beat the winter rush?

These are facts of life about the welfare system, included in a new 36-page handbook released yesterday by a grass-roots coalition of Toronto women's groups.

There are tips for the welfare mother who wants to upgrade her marketability by going back to school but can't cut through the red tape of applying for a student loan.

"The handbook is a collection of information you wouldn't normally find in one place," said one of the handbook co-ordinators, Dorothy Kidd.

— By Louise Brown  
Toronto Star, Dec. 8, 1978

## TAKING WHAT'S OURS everywoman's guide to welfare and student aid

"Thanks. The booklet has really been well written and put together." — M.B., Scarborough.

"We thought your pamphlet was fantastic!" — B.E., New York

"It is most informative, and interesting, bringing to light many of the many very important unknown facts. It is easy to read and understand, no matter what your educational background." — J.N., Toronto

"May you continue until you are no longer needed, and that day will come!" — P.B., Don Mills

Published by:  
Housewives' Initiative &  
Women's Action Group  
Box 38, Station E  
Toronto, Ontario M6H 4E1  
(\$1 each. Orders of 5 or more 75 cents each)



Robin Tyler in concert.

Lynnie Johnston

## Gay moms' update

★ Winnipeg-born Robin Tyler, favourite comic of women across Canada and the USA, gave a fantastic benefit performance for the Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund and the Winnipeg Women's Building on May 18th in Toronto! As she wove her deep concern for gay pride and custody rights for lesbian mothers into her act, the audience of 250 understood why Robin Tyler has become a leading spokeswoman for the gay movement and the ERA in the US. Her new solo album "Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Groom" (Olivia Records) is now available at most women's bookstores.

★ The LMDF turned out in force for the May 18-21 National Lesbian Conference, organized by the Lesbian Organization of Toronto. Women there rallied around our request for more space in *The Body Politic* for lesbians. On the final day of the conference TBP responded by offering to give women the entire October issue, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of women in Canada being declared "persons". A Special Issue Committee is collecting articles, poems, graphics and news before the August 15th final deadline. Please send your contributions on any subject — sports, health, jobs, etc. — to the LMDF or to the Special Issue Committee, c/o The Body Politic, P.O. Box 7289, Station A, Toronto M5W 1X9.

★ Francie Wyland, LMDF co-ordinator, addressed this year's conference of the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada on June 30th. She was part of a panel made up of spokespeople from all the gay defence committees now active in the country, and was later interviewed by the *Ottawa Citizen*. And on July 8th, Francie was the featured speaker at a public meeting in Boston sponsored by the Gay Parents Project there. The visibility of lesbian mothers is growing every day! Write to us for copies of our new newsletter "The Grapevine" at: LMDF, P.O. Box 38, Stn. E, Toronto, Ontario M6H 4E1.

## BOOK REVIEW

### Beyond Reason

"Frankly, I just wasn't interested in dental hospitals, or zoos, or centres for adult education. They bored me almost to tears. They bored all the other wives too. I cannot see a picture of a prime minister's wife opening a new hospital or civic centre today without conjuring up for myself the murderous thoughts that must be going through her head under the wide-brimmed hat."

In 1975, a group of Canadian diplomats' wives held a meeting in Ottawa to discuss their demand for a wage from the Canadian government for all the responsibilities they were expected to take on in the line of (their husbands') duty. Moving every year or two, entertaining continually, being expected to put aside all their own interests for the sake of their husbands' careers. . . .

Many women across Canada may have wondered how those women could find cause for complaint. After all, weren't they married to important men? Didn't they have lots of money, get the chance to travel all over the world, and never have to touch a dirty dish? Anybody with such questions should read Margaret Trudeau's autobiography *Beyond Reason*.

It is obvious from her book that Margaret was certainly not your average housewife. No woman with eight servants and a charge account at Creed's could be called "average". But she was a housewife nonetheless. Not only to Pierre, but even more so to Canada.

The amount of work involved in being wife to the state is mindboggling to read about. It was "an ivory tower that wasn't an ivory tower at all . . . just an awful load of responsibilities". First, there was all the protocol to be learned which, according to the Governor-General's wife who tried to teach her, ". . . is learning all the things that you have to do, however much you find them unnatural and trying".

Then the state visits and receptions for important people, with no help from the Prime Minister's Office who thought of her as a pretty fixture and never bothered to brief her before official events. Not to mention the constant police protection (which Margaret called "surveillance"), so that the minute she walked out of her bedroom she literally could not be alone.

And then there was Pierre, who Margaret found increasingly distant. Queen Alia of Jordan graciously gave Margaret her recipe for saving a marriage. "Don't overload him, try to control yourself and when he is away, rage, break, scream and cry and get everything out."

But the most striking aspect of the book, and one which almost every housewife can identify with at one time or another, is the sense of imprisonment.

"The moment I became Mrs. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, a glass panel was gently lowered into place around me, like a patient in a mental hospital who is no longer considered able to make decisions and who cannot be exposed to harsh light. For five years I lived in cotton wool, struggling to grow up, to shape my own life, uncertain about whom exactly I was fighting against, but increasingly convinced that this artificial life was slowly crushing me to death. With so much civility around, whom to attack? With so much comfort, how dare I complain?"

Margaret eventually did dare to complain, and made a break to regain her independence. She is only one of thousands of women who have done that. The difference is that she was living in a fishbowl. And perhaps the only way to get out of one is to shatter the glass.

— Frances Gregory



# "Let them eat cake!"

The limits to sisterhood were clearly spelled out at the National Action Committee (NAC) annual conference in Ottawa last month when some 20 representatives of lower income women's groups were prevented from registering as observers. The objective was to exclude them from the entire proceedings and the message came wrapped in a not unfamiliar package of tokenism and elitism. The difference was that this time it wasn't men doing it to women but women doing it to women.

At the NAC conference the main target of NAC's displeasure was a Toronto group known as Wages for Housework composed mainly of single mothers on welfare. The other groups seem to have got caught in the cross-fire but this didn't seem to have bothered NAC. Some of the reasons for NAC's aversion to this group were explained to the Ottawa Tenants' Council and to members of the Ottawa Women's Lobby (OWL) before the conference. These were that Wages for Housework women were being manipulated by international left-wing elements, that their objective of ensuring an income for women who stay at home was contrary to NAC policy, and that they could not be relied on to behave with the decorum usually observed at NAC meetings and might disrupt the proceedings.

The main questions that all this seems to raise are whether NAC has the moral right to say it represents several million Canadian women and be so exclusive; whether it can say that there is only one true feminist political philosophy and that it has been carved in stone and is called The Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (an admirable document in its time, but the women's movement has developed and changed a great deal in the past 10 years since that report was written.); whether NAC can exclude women on the basis that they use non-ladylike tactics (would they have admitted Nellie McClung or the Pankhursts?); whether they are not seeking to impose rigid middle-class values and behaviours on an organization which at this time seems to have the potential for acting as a catalyst which could unify all Canadian women in a widespread movement for social change.

Wages for Housework will speak for itself but we should be aware that it is part of a developing cross-Canada network of lower income women's groups. Consequently, the Ottawa Tenants Council, also part of that network, were not very



Sharon Barkley

Cora Feveright (l.) with fellow Winnipegger Anne Marie Gray, said: "Everywhere we go, Indian women have to bang the door down."

impressed with NAC's arguments. Neither for that matter were some members of OWL nor the representatives of the Immigrant Women's Centre from Toronto nor the representatives of Women Against Violence from Winnipeg. All of these NAC suddenly found they could not accommodate or register as observers on the Friday morning preceding the conference.

Louis the XVI and Marie Antoinette confronted by the mob were not more indignant than the NAC executive when these women had the sheer effrontery to turn up at the opening session the following day.

The lower income women's groups, however, had a few good reasons for being there and for thinking that the NAC conference had something to offer them and vice-versa. They pointed out that the worsening economic situation has hit them more severely than anyone else and that many low income women and their children are now having to do without food and that they are desperate to make their plight known.

Besides, Judith Ramirez, the president of Wages for Housework, had been invited to be a resource person repre-

senting the Immigrant Women's Centre (of which she is also a board member). In addition, Dorothy O'Connell, the president of the Ottawa Tenants' Council, had been invited to speak on women and poverty in the opening panel.

Dorothy O'Connell's friends were not, however, to be allowed to hear her speak. By a strange coincidence the two members of OWL who had raised awkward questions earlier in the week were also kept out.

At the opening session of the conference tight-lipped NAC representatives guarded the main doors. Folding doors cutting off a third of the conference hall were being kept firmly and forcibly shut by male hotel employees while a few of the excluded women were trying to open them. Presumably this reducing of the space available by screening it off was meant to give credence to the claim that there was no room for these extra women who wanted to enter.

It was an unedifying spectacle to say the least and the situation might have deteriorated had it not been for the intervention of Ottawa Mayor Marion Dewar, who made a plea for the floor for some evidence of sisterhood and for the doors dividing the room to be opened so that there would be room for all. Several votes were taken and eventually common sense prevailed. The doors were opened. There was plenty of room and all those who wished heard most of the morning panel.

So was this event a storm in a teacup? A combination of misunderstanding, mismanagement and sheer bad luck, or does it have greater significance?

The NAC executive will probably prefer to forget the whole incident and pretend it never happened.

For some of us, however, it was a sad lesson that tokenism is not the prerogative of men and a sharp reminder of the deep differences in the economic situations of Canadian women and the basic lack of understanding of those who have not by those who have.

This incident should not be swept under the carpet. It's time there was a little fresh air and open debate into the way that the women's movement is evolving in Canada and particularly into why there is so little grass roots involvement.

— Kathleen Macleod Jamieson

(Reproduced in abridged form, from *Upstream*, May 1979)

## The Grassroots at NAC:

### "You can't mow us down!"



Sharon Barkley

Preparing the welfare resolution. From l. to r.: Claire Beland, Dorothy O'Connell, Lynn Markle of Ottawa Tenants Council; Renate Flor, Centro Donne — Mtl.; Judith Ramirez, WFH — Tor.

"We call on NAC to make it a priority to pressure all levels of government for improvements in the welfare system by a major increase in welfare payments, and quarterly raises indexed to the cost of living, bringing payments at least to the level of the poverty line as determined by the Senate Committee on poverty."

The above resolution was passed unanimously by the several hundred delegates to the annual conference of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, after the NAC executive put every possible obstacle in the path of the grass-roots women who came to promote it (see "Let Them Eat Cake").

The welfare-identified groups, brought together through their networking with the Wages for Housework Campaign, included the Ottawa Tenants Council, the Employment Services for Immigrant Women (Toronto), the Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund (Toronto), the Committee Against Violence Towards Women (Winn.), The Immigrant Women's Centre (Tor.), Winnipeg Women for Welfare, and Centro Donne (Montreal).

Angry with the constant glorification of work outside the home, these groups were determined to put NAC, as the only national women's organization, on record as supporting an immediate substantial increase in the pay welfare mothers receive for raising their families. The official resolution calls for an increase of \$5,000 per year for a mother with

three children — from the present \$6,789 to the Senate Committee's figure of \$12,000. This is a real victory for all the women and children whose survival depends on welfare, and for the growing number of women who are "only a man or a job from welfare". It strengthens local campaigns to raise welfare rates and gives the grass-roots another tool with which to confront government.

Following Ottawa Mayor Marion Dewar's plea for sisterhood at the opening plenary, the "income maintenance" workshop was opened to all the grass-roots women who had not been allowed to register. It was known by then that the Mayor had offered us City Hall as alternative meeting space and that our main interest in this conference on "economic realities for women" was not verbal battles on wages for housework (contrary to the NAC executive's hysteria) but the passage of a strong resolution for higher welfare.

Judith Ramirez was on the "income maintenance" panel, speaking about immigrant women and poverty, and she put forward the case for welfare as "the only economic insurance policy for all women". In the debate that followed, the resolution was re-worked several times. At one point, Dorothy O'Connell, from the Ottawa Tenants Council, prevented a watered down version, which tied welfare increases to the much lower Statistics Canada figures, from passing. However, two additional clauses which called for an end to the harassment of Indian women in welfare offices, and the recognition of welfare as a wage and not a charity, were ruled "out of order" by the chair.

In her speech at the opening plenary, Dorothy O'Connell had put her finger on the underlying political tension which riddled the entire conference:

"It is really too bad that all women don't share a common philosophy. There are very few feminists among poor women, and the reason for that is that is the feminist movement, by playing up the right to work, and the right to leave the home, have downgraded even more those who don't choose to work or who can't, and the contempt for women in the home has grown, even among other women.

Poor women have always had to work, but it

is not a choice. The kinds of jobs they get are strictly no-status jobs, with long hours, low pay, and terrible working conditions...

And what about those women who stay at home on welfare? Living in the lap of luxury on someone else's money... The assumption is that the woman on welfare is getting "something for nothing."

Prior to the conference, the NAC executive had adamantly refused membership status to Wages for Housework on the grounds that it is "contrary to stated NAC policy" to promote payment for housework. When pressed about which policy, in a two-hour meeting, the NAC executive had no clear-cut answer. Since the conference, they have issued a statement on wages for housework which is a classic of the "something for nothing" prejudice against work in the home which plagues so many "feminist" organizations cut off from the grass-roots.

NAC's actions, before, during, and after the conference, have prompted many letters of protest from feminist lawyers, women in government, and community activists who feel strongly that NAC's role, as the only national women's organization in Canada, is to be a vehicle for all groups promoting women's rights, not a tribunal deciding who is "in" and who is "out". UPSTREAM, Canada's national women's magazine, has come out editorially against NAC and called for a "discussion on the direction of the women's movement in Canada" in its pages.

It is a sad commentary on NAC that it should go to such lengths to block discussion on wages for housework at the very moment that it is becoming a key issue for the courts, government economists, and women's groups, internationally. In the past year alone, the United Nations has called on all countries to include housework in their Gross National Products, the Federal Advisory Council on the Status of Women has issued Canada's first comprehensive report on the value of housework; and welfare mothers across the country have stepped up their demands to be recognized as legitimate workers.

And what an irony, that NAC has become a focal point for the very discussion it wants to prevent!

## EDITORIAL

### Campaign Addresses

**In Canada**  
Toronto: WFH Committee  
PO Box 38, Stn. E.  
M6H 4E1

Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund  
(same)

**Winnipeg:**  
WFH Committee  
Women's Building  
730 Alexander Ave.  
Winnipeg R3E 1H9

**Montreal:**  
c/o Patrice Simister Degardeas  
4111 Laval Ave.  
Montreal, P.Q. H2W 2J4

**In the USA**  
New York:  
Black Women for WFH  
P.O. Box 830  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201

**Philadelphia:**  
WFH Action Group  
4736 Hazel Ave. Apt. 2B  
Philadelphia, Pa. 19143

**San Francisco**  
WFH Group  
Box 14512  
SF 94114

**Boston:**  
WFH Committee  
PO Box 94  
Brighton, Ma. 01235

**In England**  
London:  
WFH Committee  
c/o 74 Princess Rd.  
London NW6  
Black Women for WFH  
94 Richmond Rd.  
Montpelier Bristol BS6 5EP

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Typesetting: Linda Lounsberry  
Layout: Ellen Agger & Dorothy Kidd

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Wages for Housework Committee  
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Toronto, Canada M6H 4E1