

International Women's Day, 1979

Dear Sisters,

For millions of women across the country, unemployment and social service cutbacks are harsh daily realities. There is no doubt that the economic crisis is hitting us very hard. Proposed changes in UIC regulations and cutbacks in social services will make it even more difficult to survive. Lack of government funding specifically threatens the network of women's services which we have already established in Toronto, ie. WREC, Times Change, Rape Crisis Centre, Nellies, Interval House.

March 8, 1979, International Women's Day, is close at hand. Last year thousands of women from feminist groups, unions, the NDP, lesbian groups and community organizations, gathered to protest the increasing denial of our rights. In Toronto, our demonstration of 2,000, was highly-spirited and united.

In its initial discussion this year, the International Women's Day Committee (IWDC) posed the question: What are the issues which strongly affect most women? We came up with four: unemployment, cutbacks in social services, control of our bodies, and lesbian rights. The IWDC feels that we should unite around these four issues.

These issues represent the central lines of attack against all women. They can go beyond a description of the condition of women, to reveal a clear understanding of the real roots of our oppression. We can use these issues to focus our anger against the government, the media and big business.

The economic situation affects all aspects of women's lives. It has the direct effect of pushing women back into the home, forcing us to perform more unpaid domestic labour. It makes it harder for us to earn a living wage, benefits, decent working conditions and the right to meaningful work. It restricts our ability to organize ourselves into unions and break through the job ghettos and sex-stereotyping. It deprives women of the necessary services, referral agencies and community resources we need to deal with our lives, in order to have the time and energy to fight back collectively.

Along with the economic attacks come a barrage of 'moral commandments' for women. Lesbians are sick; abortion is not right; women's place is in the home. The limited gains we have made are being quickly eroded. We are denied the right to free, accessible abortion; the right to bear the children we wish; the right to determine our own sexuality, free from violence and coercion. Available contraception is a joke. Lesbian rights is an issue for all women, striking at the heart of our ability to control our bodies and our sexuality.

Given the nature of the attack, it is obvious that we need massive public action. In addition to a large demonstration, we propose a tribunal where we will put government and big business on trial for crimes against women.

Time is short! We are proposing a series of planning meetings for everyone to come together and discuss the issues and character of an action on International Women's Day. The first one is planned for January 24, at the Odgen Public School gymnasium, on Phoebe Street (1 block north of Queen, east of Spadina). The next two meetings are scheduled for January 31 and February 7, both in the auditorium at University Settlement House. All meetings are at 7:30 pm. In order to facilitate decision making, we ask that individuals who are members of a group have a discussion on this proposal in their group prior to the public planning meetings. We hope these planning meetings will encourage effective participation of all women.

In Sisterhood,
The IWDC