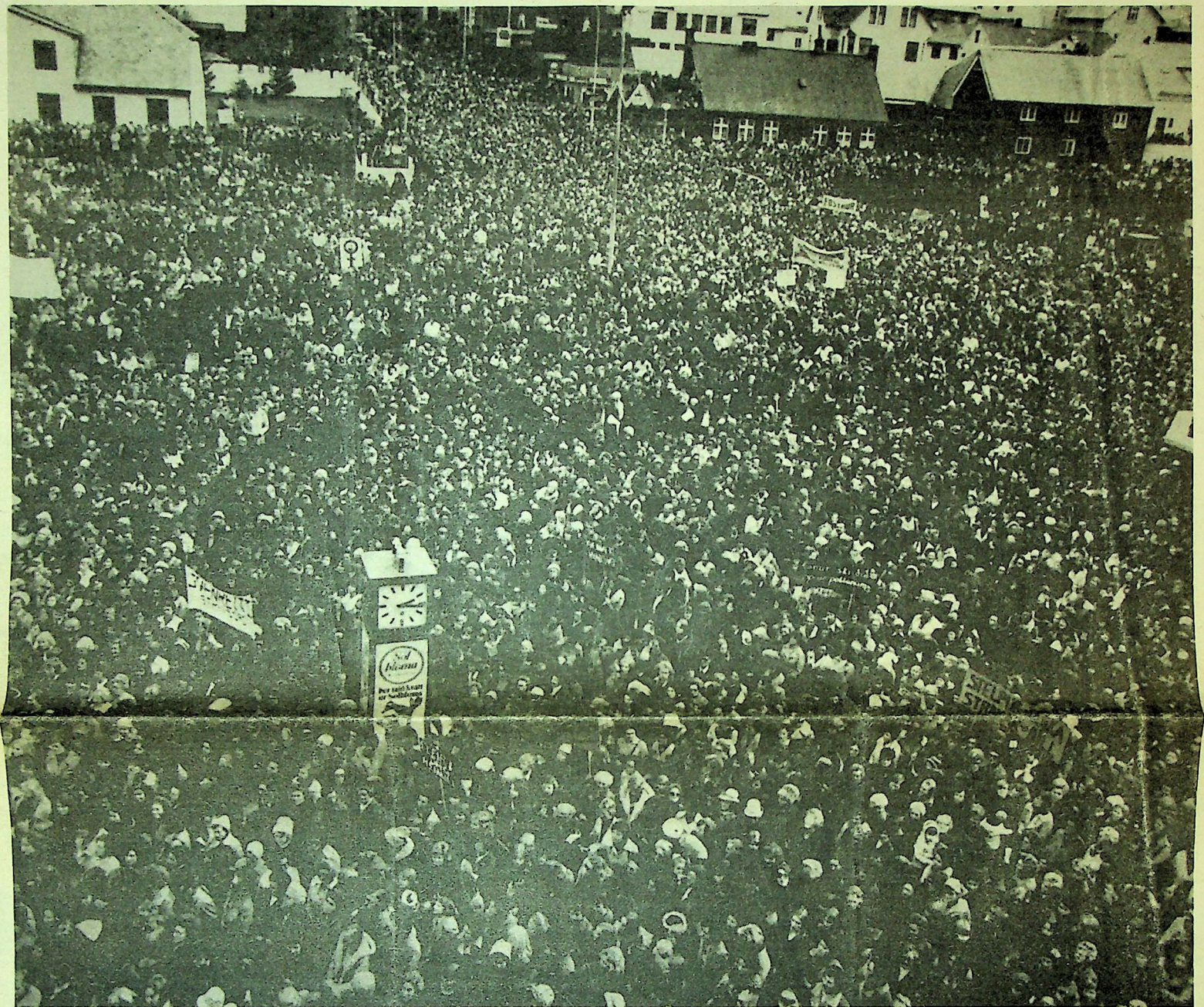


the Wages for Housework

Campaign Bulletin

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GENERAL STRIKE OF WOMEN. REYKJAVIK, ICELAND. OCTOBER 24, 1975.

When Women Stop, Everything Stops!

A general strike of women? Yes. One year ago the women pulled the rug out from under Iceland.

In a massive show of strength, women all over the country banded together to stop work for one day. Full-time housewives led the way by walking out on unwashed dishes and unmade beds. With inflation running close to 50% last year, it's no wonder. How far can you stretch a man's paycheque to keep ahead of the game without putting your nerves on the line?

School children got a holiday because 65% of teachers in Iceland are women. All nursery schools were shut. Restaurants were empty and laundromats lay idle. Women in industry walked out.

Communications stopped dead because, as we all know, telephone operators are women. The only news that got typeset that day was news of the strike. The female typesetters went in early to do it and left immediately afterwards!

The strike was called as part of International Women's Year to show that without women's work, society can't function: industry, government, schools etc. only hang together be-

cause women work for nothing in the home and next to nothing outside.

What about the men? Well, someone had to look after the kids, and you can't really run an assembly line while you're changing diapers, so many were at home. And it wasn't exactly business as usual with no secretaries in the offices or tellers in the banks either. Even theatres were closed because actresses were on strike!

In Reykjavik alone, over 25,000 women demonstrated in the heart of the city, causing the biggest traffic jam on record. Everywhere women spoke out against the poverty and dependence to which "women's work" condemns us. The wage gap between men and women in Iceland is high, as in Canada, and most women are trapped in the revolving door of unpaid work in the home and low-paid, dead-end jobs outside.

The strike was declared a total success. It dramatized just how dependent society is on women's work. We are everywhere. Without women, no one else can work and the whole economy stops dead. That day, for 24 hours, all the work that women do ground to a halt. And so did Iceland.

Editorial : What Joe Morris could learn from his mother

Did you know that there are more full-time housewives in Canada than unionized workers? 3.9 million as compared to 2.7 million to be exact. And that 2/3 of all waged workers don't belong to unions? Rather glaring gaps in any union-led "general" strike -- which might explain why Joe Morris, President of the Canadian Labour Congress, prefers to call October 14 a "Day of Protest".

Trudeau, of course, made a general attack on all workers, waged and unwaged, in unions or not. He knows his business. While wage controls take aim at more powerful workers in government and large industry, the heart of the austerity program is the cutbacks in spending which hit the wageless hardest -- students, the elderly, and women in the home.

Together, these form a single strategy to lower our standard of living and "...accomplish nothing less than a wrenching adjustment of expectations". They call it fighting inflation, but what the hell is inflation if not a lowered standard of living?

Because wage controls are only half the government's attack, the CLC has -- at best -- only half a strategy to fight the government. The unions are calling on the "unorganized" to support October 14. No wonder. But what do non-union workers, old age pensioners, and welfare mothers have to gain from a strategy that excludes them?

When have the unions even recognized that wage controls are also an attack on male workers' wives? With inflation still over 7%, a wage rollback means, first and foremost, more unpaid housework -- longer hours shopping for bargains, cooking tougher meat, and soothing family tensions.

We heard but a whimper from the unions when Trudeau cut \$221 million from the Family Allowance, the only money that many women can call their own. It was the largest federal cutback and it picked the pockets of 3 1/2 million mothers, many of whom can't afford a new jacket or new boots for their kids this year. Unlike the unions, many of their members have supported a petition which demands

the scheduled Baby Bonus increase and money for all our work in the home. They know that by taking money away from their wives, Trudeau is also getting at them.

Have women in the paid labour force fared any better? Hardly. Over the past decade, the number of women in the Canadian labour force grew by 88% and the number of women in unions grew by 150%. In spite of this, waged women are going backwards. The concentration of women in clerical, sales, and service jobs has increased by 10%. They now account for 2/3 of all waged women and these jobs, of course, are at the bottom of the wage scale.

The fact that 4/5 of all women in the paid labour force still remain outside unions and that most unions won't go near them because their wages are too low explains a lot. The way most unions negotiate settlements explains the rest. By going after percentage increases rather than the same raise for all, those who "have" get more, and those who "have not" get less.

Not surprisingly, the wage gap between men and women is growing. In 1971, men earned 44% more than women, and by 1973, it rose to 45%. This in spite of the fact that women workers are, on the average, better educated than male workers! In Ontario alone, waged women earn \$1 billion less per year than men and, even though the Anti-Inflation Board exempts wage increases that rectify sex discrimination from the 12% ceiling, there isn't a single union settlement that takes advantage of this!

The unions have always divided those with more money from those with less, and both of these from people with no money at all. They themselves are to blame for the fact that many waged workers are not in unions and that most workers, like housewives, are wageless altogether. The CLC is in no position to call a general strike because they can't stop the economy without the "unorganized".

In fact, Iceland demonstrates that we women are the only workers who can really pull off a general strike. That means everyone else will have to support us to win anything for themselves.

The Family Allowance Protest Continues!

The Wages for Housework Campaign is nearing the goal of 10,000 signatures on the petition which protests Trudeau's freeze in the Baby Bonus and demands wages for housework for all women from the government. Women -- and men! -- are circulating the petition in factories, supermarkets, welfare offices, bingo halls, and fall fairs! Women are using it to tell one another how much we need the Baby Bonus -- little as it is -- and that we are defending what is ours and fighting for more.

A delegation of women will go to Ottawa to present it to government officials. If you want to take part, just let us know -- no delegation is too large!

Letters...

"I'm also interested in the (Wages for Housework) Committee as I'm on Mothers Allowance raising two small children alone and am concerned about recent statements which would send us out of the home, undermining the importance of motherhood, the fact that we do work at home...."

- Orillia

"Wages for Housework sounds like my kind of movement. All the "Women's Liberation Movement" has done is add more exploitation onto women by telling them to join the labour force."
- Thunder Bay

Protest News...

ONTARIO -- Wages Due Lesbians has been speaking to groups of lesbian women about the Family Allowance Protest in Ottawa, Kingston, Kitchener, Hamilton, and Toronto. The group also held a very successful conference on Lesbians and the Wages for Housework Campaign on July 24-25 in Toronto, attended by 80 women from Canada, the U.S., and England.

QUEBEC -- Dozens of petitions in French keep coming in from all over. In a Gallup Poll taken last year, 61% of Quebec respondents favoured a government-paid wage for housewives compared to 49% nationally! Many French petitions are coming in from New Brunswick too.



Nellie's Delegation at Queen's Park.

TORONTO -- Staff and residents at Nellie's Women's Hostel have endorsed the Family Allowance petition as have other community based services fighting for survival, like Hassle-Free Clinic.

The Campaign Bulletin is put out periodically by the TORONTO WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK COMMITTEE SUITE 301, 745 DANFORTH AVENUE TORONTO, ONTARIO (416)466-7457 OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAY AND THURSDAY 12:00-NOON TO 4:00 PM Please do not reprint any portion of the bulletin without our permission.

Write in for your copy of the petition & don't forget to send it back



Photo by M. Thornton

Born a housewife

Besides the Queen of England and Jackie Onassis, how many women do you know who don't do any housework? Like it or not, most of us are trained from birth to cook, clean, and look after others. We're even told it's our "natural destiny" -- so we don't get any ideas about not doing it.

Why? Because industry and government need the home as a re-fueling station for workers, children, the sick and the elderly. Housework forms an invisible layer of work on which our whole society rests. And who pays for this comfortable cushion? Women do.

We pay in the home with isolation and long hours. Even women who have a second (paid) job do an average of four hours housework per day! And we pay outside the home with low wages and dead-end jobs because our time is considered to be worth nothing in the home. Those very jobs are invariably extensions of unpaid housework: nursing, teaching, service work, waitressing etc. And what do secretaries do but "keep house" for the boss at the office?

Because we aren't paid for it, housework runs our lives. We carry it around everywhere, like a second skin. Housework is so much a part of "being female" that even when we refuse to do it everyone around us expects us to! It stamps our personalities and it keeps us poor and dependent.

In a society where money is power, being poor means being weak. We hear a lot about women being powerless

because our "consciousness" is low or because we aren't "assertive" enough. Not so! Women's basic weakness is that we have no money to show for our work in the home. And that's why we can't get it off our backs. Neither education, nor consciousness-raising, nor unionizing on the second job has come even close to throwing off the "housework handicap".

Turning the tables...

The fight to refuse unpaid housework takes almost as many forms as there are women, but the message is the same: pay us for the work we do because we need and deserve the money!

An international Wages for Housework Campaign is underway in many countries including Canada, the U.S., England, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and New Zealand. The campaign is demanding wages for housework for all women from the government. Evidence that women need that money and are fighting for it daily is everywhere:

TORONTO (1974-1976) -- The Mother Led Union, a group of welfare mothers, has been organizing to demand parity with foster mothers who make three times as much as natural mothers for looking after the same children! The National

Welfare Council said that women on welfare "fall victims to one of the cruelist and most senseless myths of our society: that the person who stays in the home to raise the family is not working."

FRANCE (June 1975) -- The government is paying pensions to women who have been full-time housewives all their lives in recognition of the fact that they have made an "economic contribution" to society. (If they can pay pensions, why not wages?) Canada is considering a scheme where the wife shares her husband's pension -- no extra money, just a bit of recognition so we can fight for more!

CHICAGO (September 1976) -- The FBI arrested three women who were part of a \$100 a night call girl operation. Many of the women involved were "housewives supplementing family income and college students earning money to return to school." Enough said.

CHINA (1975) -- The People's Republic of China has a system of "work points" which determine each worker's benefits and holidays. Women have demanded that housework (unwaged also in China) be included in the point system.

ITALY (January 1976) -- Over 100,000 women demonstrated in Rome for abortion on demand. Their main slogan was "we want the right to abortion, but we don't only want to abort". A strong movement for Wages for Housework in Italy has stressed that without money, no woman can really choose to have or not have children.

CANADA/USA (August 1975) -- Crime is increasing among women at a much faster rate than among men, especially crimes involving money. In Canada, between 1963 and 1972, the number of men guilty of fraud was up 5% compared to 240% for women. For possessing stolen goods it was up 81% for men and 233% for women. In Toronto, the highest rate of shoplifting is among old age pensioners and housewives. With or without wages, we need to feed ourselves and our children!

OTTAWA (May 1975) -- Wives of diplomats and MPs called for public recognition of their tasks as hostesses, secretaries, and managers for their husbands. They said the government is get-

ting "two for the price of one" and that the time has come to put wives on the government payroll.

REGINA (June 1976) -- The Saskatchewan Court of Appeal overturned a controversial 1974 ruling that denied a farm wife any interest in the farm she and her husband worked for 21 years. Helen Rathwell was awarded half interest of the farm because she had contributed to a joint account to buy the land. In December 1975 the National Farmers Union went on record supporting the bid farmwives are making to be paid a wage for their work from farm revenue.

THE PHILIPPINES (June 1975) Anthropologist Margaret Mead told a seminar that "wives are the cheapest form of labour ... if a man earned \$100,000, it would take all the money he earns to find enough women to do what his wife does for nothing. It takes the work of five men to equal the work of one wife", which is why we want the money from the government -- they are the only ones who can afford to pay the bill! Most men don't have enough for themselves, and besides, some of us don't have husbands.

CANADA/USA (1976) -- Several child custody cases involving lesbian women have been reported in the press recently. One woman in Alberta and another in Maine won unconditional custody. Still, thousands of lesbian women are losing their children, inside and outside the courtroom because, like other women, they don't have the money to fight it out or to support them in the unlikely event that they win.

TORONTO (January 1976) -- The Ontario Ministry of Labour "revealed" that most women in the paid labour force are working out of necessity. About 37% are single, widowed, or divorced. The others are with men who do not earn enough to support another adult and two or three children. So much for those who say that women work "to be fulfilled". We have to beg for a second job because we aren't paid for our first one-- housework.

POLAND (June 1976) -- Housewives and other workers went on strike all over Poland when the government announced it was planning to increase prices. It was forced to back down immediately. In 1970 a similar strike over food prices toppled the government! Housewives were central in that struggle too.

Many support occupation of women's hostel Women at Nellie's fight for survival

On August 26, 1976, the residents and staff of Nellie's Women's Hostel declared an "emergency occupation". They are refusing to turn women away for lack of space or to ask them to leave after their limited (subsidized) stay has expired.

The central demand of the occupation is more money from the Metro and Provincial Governments to run their desperately-needed housing facility, and money for a long-term residence for women.

For 1976, the skeleton budget for Nellie's was \$186,000, of which they received only \$85,000 from Metro, and nothing at all from the Provincial Government directly. The rest is supposed to come from fundraising.

In Toronto there are presently 1,184 emergency beds for men, and only 77 for women! With government cut-backs reducing hospital beds, discharging more psychiatric patients, freezing building costs for old age homes, and cutting back welfare, more and more women are being thrown into crisis.

Thirty residents is the legal maximum for Nellie's 13 bedroom, run-down old house, but since the occupation started there have been between 40 and 60 women per night -- "wall to wall mattresses", as one staff member put it! In their initial press release they say, "Overcrowding contravenes health and fire regulations, but we refuse to allow lack of housing and lack of money to force women to return to intolerable home situations or to streets and park benches."

Negotiations are presently underway with the Metro Government, and extra emergency funding is expected to help carry Nellie's through to the end of the year.

But the issue is, fundamentally, long-term funding. Nellie's is one of many crisis-ridden community-based services which sprang up to meet specific needs for which there was no adequate service available: housing, welfare, daycare, legal problems, family planning, rape and suicide prevention, and wife battering.

Most are run by and for women and survive with only partial and temporary funding from various levels of government. The cancellation of the federal OFY program and curtailment of LIP has forced many such services into a fight for survival. Little alternative money is available through private funding agencies, who prefer to fund more "established" services. Nellie's case is typical -- it has operated with constant short-staffing and unstable funding since opening its doors in June 1974, and is threatened with closure because of the government "austerity" program.

In a statement which Nellie's sent out to potential supporters they said "...we are facing a financial crisis, but our situation is only the tip of the iceberg of how the government is making its cuts on the backs of women."

The description they gave of their work and their crisis was bound to strike a responsive chord. "...At Nellie's the staff is basically doing housework for other women. We keep a house open (24 hours a day)

where women can find food, shelter, and a sympathetic ear... But housework comes cheap ... and we feel it with our long shifts; we feel it when we are exhausted at the end of a shift because the hostel is understaffed, but we can't afford to hire anyone else."

Supporters rallied immediately. Many Letters to the Editor appeared in the three daily papers. Every afternoon a "special program", organized by the Wages for Housework Committee was held at Nellie's during the first two weeks of the occupation. There was live entertainment, movies, comedy. Dozens of women came as individuals and from other community services in crisis: Hassle Free Clinic, the Immigrant Women's Centre, Rape Crisis Centre, Interval House, Christian Resource Centre, Anduhyaun House, Birth Control and VD Centre, the Mother-Led Union, Wages Due Lesbians among them.

At a supporters' meeting held on September 1, over 30 groups were present. A lively discussion about how to show support for Nellie's took place. The result was a statement, "In Supporting Nellie's, We Support Ourselves", which was directed at all three levels of government which routinely shunt such groups from one level to another. It said in part, "... The situation at Nellie's is a mirror image of women's lives, and of the crisis that many community-based services run by and for women are facing. ...No level of government presently accepts responsibility for funding these services... The consistent refusal to recognize (them) as a social necessity which deserve adequate funding

betrays the fact that they are seen as mere 'women's work' and run unceremoniously on a pool of cheap female labour -- the same labour that works for nothing in the home."

This statement, which concluded by demanding new government policies for long-term funding of community-based services, was signed by 53 groups. The following week it was delivered by a delegation of over 60 women, children, and some men, to the Mayor of Toronto and to the office of the Premier of Ontario. Outside the Provincial Legislature, the delegation held a "Speak-Out" to express publicly the demands to the government. The event was covered widely by radio and TV and, along with ongoing media coverage, has helped keep the crisis at Nellie's before the public.

The following week, Hassle-Free Clinic, a much-used community health service, held a similar event on their premises to appeal for emergency funding from the government so they can stay open. Many of the same women were present because the "emergency occupation" at Nellie's has exposed how "women's work" in community-based services is lowest in the government's priorities and how women are beginning to fight back.

All levels of government continue to plead "poverty", but already the emergency occupation at Nellie's has forced the Metro politicians to sit down and review the financing of Nellie's. Otherwise, they would never have budged.

WOMEN'S NOON HOUR CONCERT

RITA MacNEIL pioneer of women's songs

BOO WATSON original country rock

SPEAKOUT: women from Nellie's, the wages for housework campaign and others.

TO PROTEST unpaid work in the home
low paid work outside

Noon October 14 City Hall