

Money needed

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Local lesbians told 'coming out' risky

By Valerie Raymond

Citizen staff writer

Admitting being a lesbian can cost a woman her job, home and children, Francie Wyland said Tuesday at a meeting of about 25 gay women.

Ms. Wyland was representing the Toronto branch of Wages Due Lesbians.

She said there are probably millions of lesbian women still in relationships with men because they haven't got the financial security "to come out."

To fight for a measure of financial independence for all women, Wages Due Lesbians has joined forces with the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee, comprised of both lesbian and "straight" women, to demand that government pay women regular salaries and benefits for housework.

"Unpaid housework is the source of our lack of power," Ms. Wyland said.

She said the present economic crisis has hit women hardest because they have the least: "Men usually earn about twice as much as women."

The campaign for wages for housework started in England in the early 1970s when the government planned to take family allowance payments away from mothers and administer them instead through husbands' pay cheques in the form of a tax credit.

Ms. Wyland said British women took to the streets with a petition called Hands off the Family Allowance. The movement has since spread to North America, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

She said the largest single cut-back the Trudeau government has made this year has been the \$220 million taken away from women with children. "These family allowance payments were the only money many women received."

The Toronto Wages for Housework Committee launched a petition at the end of January demanding scheduled increases for family allowance payments, the removal of family allowance from taxable income and wages for housework for all women.

"The campaign symbolizes that housework is not something women do because it's part of their nature but because it's forced upon them," Ms. Wyland said.

"The fight against housework is to reclaim every aspect of our lives — our time and energy, our minds, bodies and sexuality."

Not everyone in attendance agreed the housework issue was the way to reach lesbians hiding their gay identities.

"I don't think a packet of money (wages for housework) will make lesbian women leave relationships with men. If a woman wants to leave, she will," one woman said.

LESBIANS AND THE GAY MOVEMENT

On the long weekend (May 22-24), a number of us from Ottawa attended a conference in Kingston, sponsored by Queen's Homophile Ass. About 100 people from various parts of the country attended, with the majority of the participants coming from Ottawa and Toronto. During the opening plenary session, the 40 women present decided to take the conference into their own hands. We met apart from the men and rescheduled the workshops so that we continued to meet separately, only coming together for the lecture on Child custody and the closing workshop on Sunday, where we shared experiences.

During our workshops we discussed the Wages for Housework Campaign, Lesbian Autonomy, the role of lesbians living in small, isolated communities, and the importance of broadening our perspectives to include both feminist and gay issues. The most significant result of our discussions was the laying of a foundation for an autonomous lesbian movement in Canada. To this end, we prepared a statement announcing our intentions, which we read to the men Sunday afternoon. Their reactions were very positive and supportive. The move into separatism enabled us to feel a strong sense of pride and accomplishment at realizing our needs and power. We also began the initial planning for a lesbian conference to be held here in Ottawa next fall.

The Child Custody seminar was led by Chris MacNaughton, a lawyer from St. Catharines. She discussed three Canadian cases involving lesbian mothers as well as various aspects of the law pertaining to gays and custody rights.

A dance was held on Saturday and the weekend concluded with a fantastic pot-luck dinner. The conference left us feeling very excited about our plans for a Lesbian Movement and revitalized in our endeavours to struggle against oppression - now on a more complete front - as lesbians and as feminists.

Glynis ELLERINGTON & Marie ROBERTSON

Wages for housework

by Kendra FORBES

On 29 June 76, Francis Wyland and Ellen Agger of Wages Due Lesbians (WDL), Toronto, spoke on wages for housework, at the Ottawa Public Library. WDL believe that all women are raised to do housework, for free. Attending to the physical, sexual, and emotional needs of men and children, while sacrificing our own needs, desires, is natural, we are to believe. This is actually part of the "unwaged housework" for which we should be paid. With money in their pockets, women without skills, trapped in an intolerable marriage situation, could choose to leave. All women would have the freedom to do with their lives what they wish, economically independent of men.

Our government assumes that all women are straight and married, having access to a man's wage, i.e. their husband's. So they feel perfectly justified in cutbacks on Family Allowance and other Social Services. Little do they think of women who do not have access to a man's wage, e.g. single, lesbian or welfare mothers, who will either be forced to subsist on even less or go out to get a meagre paying job. What about the many women working in government funded projects such as LIP, CYC, OFY, which have been eliminated?

Wages Due Lesbians sees Wages for Housework as an issue which can unite all women, whether lesbian, straight, black, white, etc. Money means power, the power of control over our own lives, by us, not as dictated by the capitalist system which would have us all be straight, baby-makers.

Wages Due Lesbians believe that Wages for Housework will become a reality within our lifetime. They expect the money to come from the government. Who would be so naive as to believe that the masters are willingly going to give up their power (money) to the slaves?

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New group: MONTREAL LESBIAN ORGANIZATION
3595 St-Urbain, Montreal

Telephone: 842-4781