

Toronto

### Cutbacks hit lesbians

Ellen Agger, a member of the Wages Due Collective, spoke March 11 at a rally on the University of Toronto campus. The rally, organized to oppose provincial government cutbacks on social services, was attended by 400 people. Representatives of various community groups, daycare groups, trade unions, and senior citizens groups spoke at the rally. Wages Due, which was last on the agenda, was the only group to speak about how the cutbacks affect lesbian women.

### Wages Due Lesbians and the Family Allowance Protest

The lesbian women in Wages Due are also part of the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee and of the Committee-launched Family Allowance Protest. All of the government's recent cutbacks hit women hardest. We know that when women are under attack our struggle as lesbian women must be more concerted and public than ever. The Family Allowance Protest has given us the opportunity to begin to be a vocal

- and visible force.
- When we go door-to-door asking women to sign the petition (see below), when we canvass at supermarkets, when we go to groups of women, or on radio or TV, either as the Committee or as Wages Due, we always speak specifically about the impact of the cut-backs on lesbian women.
- The Wages Due endorsement of the petition (most of which is included in the speech below) is being circulated across North America. While we were nervous at first about identifying ourselves openly as lesbian, women's response to the endorsement has been extremely positive. They say, "Why not?" or, "Of course"; a few women have looked up pleased, saying, "Me too, but I can't say anything now; my husband's in the kitchen". One woman replied to our rap by saying, "That makes sense. We're all the same; it's the same floor we have to scrub".
- One of us spoke last month as a lesbian about the Family Allowance Protest at the Coalition Against the Cutbacks Rally, in front of an audience of several hundred people (see below).
- We have asked every lesbian and gay group in Canada to endorse the petition.

Wages Due Lesbians will be organizing more and more publicly, putting forward the situation and struggles of lesbian women. As our buttons say, we and millions more of us are and will be "Coming Out With Wages for Housework".

For more information, call (416) 466-7457 or (416) 465-6822.

### Address to March 11 cut-backs rally by Ellen Agger

I am a member of a lesbian group called Wages Due. Lesbians have been shut up for too long. As usual, we have gotten pushed to the end. Wages Due is a group of lesbians who want wages for housework. We endorse the petition "Hands Off the Family Allowance" which the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee is circulating for the following reasons:

- The cutbacks that the government has introduced hit women the hardest. As lesbians often without the income of a husband, we are dependent on government benefits or our second jobs for money — the jobs that have been threatened by the cutbacks.
- The largest cutback so far has been the Family Allowance. Mothers are being asked once more to lead the way in self-sacrifice. And now the government is telling us that welfare mothers must go out to work. As if housework and raising children isn't work.
- Many lesbians are mothers who depend on the baby bonus to supplement an already meagre income. Since we have the threat of losing custody of our children constantly hanging over us, it is hard for us to fight against the cutbacks and the enforced double workload they bring.

— Lesbians all over the world have made a strong bid for the rights we need and are denied under this system — the right to custody of our children, to job security, to the end of discrimination from landlords, schools, employers, and so on. We have done this by being a visible force wherever possible. But for most lesbians our existence is still underground. Through these cutbacks we are being forced even further underground. As the crisis continues women are being forced to depend much more on a man's wages. This means for lesbians that it's going to be harder to fight openly. All the independence from men that we have fought for as lesbian women is under attack.

The only solution to this situation is economic independence for all women. So that we can all have the power to determine our own lives, whether we want to be lesbians or not. And this means to be paid for all the housework we already do in our homes and in our paid jobs.

As lesbians, we want wages for housework so that we are no longer forced to hide our lesbianism. We're not going to let them take away what we have gained and we want more — not just a bigger piece of the pie — we want the whole bakery!

There have been calls here tonight for us to support the organized labor movement. Women have been supporting the trade union movement with our unpaid labor since it began. And now we want the trade union movement to support us women for a change. Thank you. □

### The petition

#### Hands off the Family Allowance

No increase in Baby Bonus. The \$220,000,000 Baby Bonus increase we were all expecting has fallen victim to the government's "anti-inflation program". Why have they seen fit to make one of their biggest cutbacks from the pittance they give mothers? As always, we women are the ones expected to do without, to put ourselves last, and sacrifice "for the good of others". What better way for Trudeau to launch his "lowered expectations way of life" than by taking money away from mothers, the symbols of self-denial?

We refuse to be a good example. We know it means even more work, and less for ourselves and our children. It also means we are more of a discipline on the men so many of us depend on. Nurses said "dedication won't pay the rent" and have fought for well-earned increases across the country. Teachers are refusing the blackmail of paying for cutbacks in education and are going on strike. All around us others are demanding their share of society's wealth which our unpaid work in the home helps create.

We want our increase too. And we need it more than most. Many of us are sole-support mothers and \$36.00 a year per child — little as it is — does make a difference. Much more than anyone with a 10% surtax on

their \$30,000 salary can begin to imagine! And for those of us with husbands, the Family Allowance is often the only money we can call our own; the only recognition that we work in our homes.

Our housework is worth money like any other work.

Trudeau's cutbacks in Family Allowance represent a widespread effort to make women pay for this present crisis. On top of all the unpaid work we do in our homes, we are faced with:

- Higher prices which mean more work shopping for bargains and more time in the kitchen.
- A growing wage gap between women and men in the paid labor force, and tougher policing of women on UIC.
- Elimination of Government-funded projects (LIP, CYC, OFY) which provide wages for young people many of whom are women) and sustain community services for children, old people, immigrants, etc.
- Cutbacks in daycare subsidies which mean more work finding adequate childcare or looking after our children ourselves.
- Cutbacks in social services which jeopardize the wages of many women and throw the burden of the work back in the home.
- More hardships for women on fixed incomes like the sick

and the aged who are expected to live on next to nothing after a lifetime of hard work.

• We women are an easy target because we are so used to working without pay in our homes and for low pay outside. But we don't intend to stay at the bottom. Let the government go after the banks and the corporations — they have more than us!

**WE DEMAND:** the family allowance increase scheduled; the removal of family allowance from taxable income and we won't be satisfied with only a pittance for mothers — all women need more money, more power, to fight against the lower standard of life Trudeau has in mind for us all.

**WE DEMAND:** wages for housework for all women from the government

We, the undersigned, support the following demands:

- the family allowance increase as scheduled
- the removal of family allowance from taxable income and;
- wages for housework for all women from the government!

For information and copies of this petition contact: Wages for Housework Committee 745 Danforth Ave., Suite 301 Toronto, Ontario Tel — (416) 466-7457