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LESBIANS ORGANIZE FOR WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

An international conference entitled "Toward a Strategy for the Lesbian Movement" was held in Toronto, Canada July 23 - 25. The conference attracted over a hundred women from many different situations. Some of us were lesbian mothers. Some had come from separatist communities. Many of us came from situations of isolation. For some this was the first contact with other lesbians.

We came together to talk about our needs as lesbian women and how to organize around those needs. Although our individual situations varied, what all of us want is the same: to control our lives and the conditions in which we live. To be able to choose to be lesbian without the risk of losing our jobs or our children, or the possibility of having children. To be able to leave relationships with men without starving. To refuse to work at jobs that destroy our minds and bodies and leave us no time for anything else in our lives.

The question is, how do we organize to get what we want? In order to build our power and our movement we need time and money. Time to organize, meet and talk with other women. Money to print newspapers and books, set up women's drop-ins. We need money so that we can leave men on whom we're economically dependent. We need money so that we can "come out" without fear of being stranded because we can't make ends meet. We need money so that we can quit jobs that we don't want and do what we want with our lives for a change.

Women all over the world are organizing to demand this money in the International Campaign for Wages for Housework. We are demanding a cash wage from the government for every woman for the work we all do. The money to come from corporate profits. The Campaign has organizing centers in Europe, Canada, and many cities across the United States. Within the Campaign exist autonomous lesbian groups, Wages Due Lesbians. We are organized autonomously because there is a real power division between lesbian and straight women that can't be ignored or wished away. Many of us who have worked in groups with straight women are painfully aware of what this power division has meant. It meant that we were forced to be quiet about our lesbianism so that the group would be "legitimate," it meant that our needs always came last.

Wages Due Lesbians are organized autonomously within the Wages for Housework Campaign to make sure our needs are always expressed. But we are not Separatist. We know that while in some ways our situation as lesbians is different from that of straight women, fundamentally our position and our needs are the same. All women are trained from birth to fill a certain role, to work for nothing in the home and for a pittance outside it. All of us risk losing our children and becoming isolated and impoverished if we deviate too much from our "proper" role. All of us feel the same terror and degradation when we walk the streets. And all women fight against our exploitation in whatever way we can because all of us want better lives for ourselves, our friends, and our children.

The division between lesbian and straight women exists in order to weaken our power, and Lesbian Separatism reinforces that division. We can't afford to be divided any longer; we need the power of all women if we are to win. Lesbian Separatism divides our struggle and separates us not only from our straight sisters, but from the mass of lesbian women who can't afford to come out because they would starve or lose their children. And it separates us from the millions more whose lives are such that they haven't even been able to think about the possibility of lesbianism.

We refuse to hide any longer. We are coming out of the closets, kitchens, offices, restaurants, and factories to demand Wages for Housework so that we can have some real choices in our lives. We are organizing to reclaim control of our lives. We are demanding what is ours. We urge women to contact us.

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