

wages for housework

campaign bulletin

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Hands Off the Family Allowance

It was a cold and windy day on May 1, but in Toronto and Windsor women from the Wages for Housework Campaign took to the streets to protest the federal freeze in the baby bonus. A series of neighborhood rallies were held in both cities in local supermarkets, playgrounds, and parks. We went to places where women were busy going about their work because, although May 1 is an international workers' holiday, we women keep our noses to the grindstone.

We went with music, banners, speeches, skits, and a photography display of women's work. A colorful motorcade took us through the streets from one rally location to another. At each site, children played with free balloons, while their mothers stopped to listen. A puppet show starring Trudeau's pet alligator "Inflation" brought lusty cheers and approving nods from the crowd.

In Toronto, one of the rallies was held in Italian at the Galleria Shopping Mall where immigrant women and their families were doing the week's shopping. They gathered around to hear the songs of struggle from the Wages for Housework movement in Italy. Hearing their own language brought friendly smiles to their faces. Many came up to chat and take away petitions--one woman said she was sure everyone in her factory would sign it!

The speeches women gave spoke about how much we need the baby bonus, especially now with the squeeze on wages, high inflation, and the deluge of government cutbacks. Each of us spoke from our own situation, many of us for the first time, in public.

A black welfare mother:

"... Before I had a child I had all these fantasies about putting the baby bonus in the bank for my child's education, and I thought I wouldn't have to touch that money. Now I have a child and the government is giving me "wages" for my housework, but my pay is below the poverty line. So when I



May Day 1976 in Toronto

Photo by J. Sparling

get my \$22.08 a month, I have to use it as part of my food money. It's the only way we can survive from one month to the next.

And now I'm facing another reality about the baby bonus. I'm going to have to use it to put a roof over my head, because with the maximum they give me on welfare I would have to let the government put me into a place they want me and not have a choice to live where I want to. I think we should get

that increase to survive and make ends meet. But it's not much of a "wage". And that's why I'm fighting for Wages for Housework...."

One woman spoke in Italian:

"...When we come to Canada as immigrants we face more work than we could have ever imagined. Not only do we have to continue our work in the home but we have to take a second job in a factory as well to keep the family income at a decent level. The minute we step out of our homes we realize what's waiting for us: all the worst jobs in the sweatshops that others refuse because the pay is so low and the rhythms of work are so incredibly high.

Then, when we leave the factories, we have to wait in line at the supermarket and pick up our children at school and then go home to start a whole second shift of work: housework. It's a double load of work, more than we could have ever imagined.

That's the reason we are joining together with many Canadian sisters who are telling the government that we don't intend to just keep working harder for less money. We know this crisis they're talking about is an effort to control us more and tell us we can't have more money even though we see all around us how rich Canada is...."



May Day 1976 in Windsor