

March 30, 1978

Dear Sisters,

I'm sending along materials from the child custody picket we initiated in front of the Family Courts in San Francisco. The event was really exciting and we made lots of good contacts with individual women and organizations. At the time of the picket, and since then, we've been getting quite a bit of radio interviews. Through the event and other work we've been doing in the Bay Area, we are getting to be recognized as a reference point for child custody.

Please note our change of address:

P.O. Box 14512
San Francisco, CA 94114

Looking forward to seeing some of you in L.A. at the regional conference (and hearing about everyone else).

Love and power

Miriam Abrams

S.F. Wages for Housework

Lesbians fight for custody of children

By Miriam Abrams

At the International Women's Year conference in Houston last November, the growing power of the Lesbian Movement surfaced. Thousands of women supported the Sexual Preference, Welfare and Disabled Women's resolutions which demanded custody of our children and the money to have and keep them. Although we won many victories in Houston, we are continuing to pressure the government, to carry through on these resolutions.

On March 3, at 11:30 a.m., Lesbians for Wages for Housework organized a child custody picket and street theater at San Francisco City Hall — the site of the family courts. We intensified our fight to end the kidnapping of our children. Joining with other women who have also been categorized as "unfit mothers," we demanded custody of our children from the courts and pay for the work we do in the home. By doing so, we

are fighting for the power both to keep our children and to provide them with decent lives.

As lesbian women, we are continuing to fight one of the heaviest counter-attacks launched against any section of the population. The cornerstone of this attack is the government's attempt to separate us from children in all areas of our lives. The Save Our Children campaign and the Briggs initiative, which will make it illegal for any person who is gay or who supports gay rights to be employed by a school in California, are part of this attempt. To drive us further into poverty, to cut us off from our own children is to attack our fight for independence.

There is nothing more painful than to see our children snatched away from us by the family courts, social workers, the police or other government agencies. This fear of losing our children after we have invested our lives in raising them is so great that most women don't even con-

sider being lovers with a woman. And many of us who are openly lesbian have sacrificed the possibility of having children. We cannot face the thought of being forced to give them up or having to spend our lives struggling to give them what they need.

The attack from the government comes now in an effort to stop the massive and growing numbers of women who are "coming out" as lesbians. Lesbians are fighting to be independent from men, attacking head-on the "natural" role of women. Women are supposed to work inside the home, making sure our husbands, lovers and children are able to keep working outside the home. This is the basis of the family.

Women are to be "fulfilled" by putting a man's needs above our own, content with being "paid" room and board and the possibility of a little "love." The ability of government and business to make profits depends

on keeping women doing this work. In refusing to sleep with and look after men, we lesbians directly threaten the family. And it is through this institution that everyone is kept working.

Women internationally are demanding to live our lives as we choose, and not be dependent on men. We are refusing to be the unpaid nurturers of the world.

Initiatives like Briggs' are bent at cutting lesbian women off from the little access we do have to our survival money. This initiative will make it impossible for lesbians to work with children, and these jobs are the source of many women's pay. A move like this, which cuts us off from paid jobs, makes it more difficult for us to provide our children with decent lives or to have and keep our children at all.

Those of us who are the least vulnerable to these attacks must be the most visible in confronting the government's plans. This is particularly important when we concentrate on the issues of

custody.

It is true that lesbian mothers who have made their cases public have given many other lesbians a great deal of power in our fight to be with children. But publicity on a specific custody battle is often detrimental to the mother's case.

As lesbians, with and without children, we are fighting for the power to be with children in any situation we choose. We are picketing for every woman to be able to be independent of men without the fear that our children will be snatched away from us. We must demand from the courts what is in the "best interests of the children"...and the mothers.

For further information:

Lesbians for Wages for Housework

PO Box 14512

San Francisco, Ca. 94114

(415) 282-1326

(415) 681-4667

Community

Welfare & Wage Workers In A Struggle

By Vivian Massingale

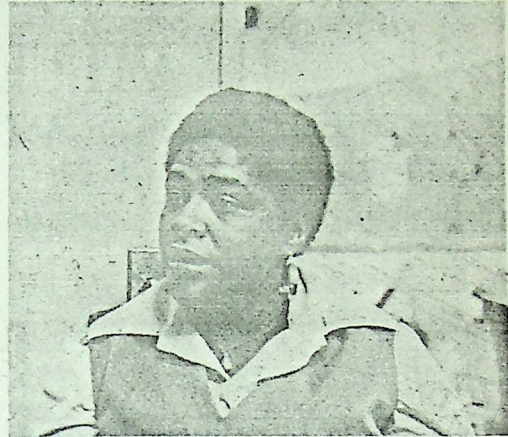
Since January of this year, members of the Western Regional Steering Committee on Welfare Reform have been trying to meet to discuss changes and legislation concerning welfare practices.

Each meeting has always been scheduled complete with designated delegates and then has been canceled. "They don't want anything to come out of these steering committees, because they have already decided what they're doing to do," said Lavinia Smith.

Lavinia is a founding member of Black Women for Wages for Housework (in Los Angeles) and she is one of three West Coast delegates who have continually shifted their schedules to attend meetings that never seem to occur.

One of the changes the committee wants to enforce is the abolition of Aid to Families with Dependent Children so that it is recognized as a wage instead of a handout. The committee wants big businesses to be taxed to pay wages to housewives. But it seems as if none of these changes are going to come about. Three meetings have been scheduled and canceled, and one telephone conference (a hook-up among all the delegates) excluded Lavinia and the one other Black delegate, Ron Washington, from Oakland.

The last meeting was to have been held at the New College of Law in San Francisco. After the meeting was canceled, delegates were asked to stay by their phones for a telephone conference. Lavinia and Ron were not called. The message came later that neither of them were home when called, but Lavinia says they both stayed by their phones and the phones



Lavinia Smith: "We see the white women holding on in the mainstream, and they want us to help them. I tell them, 'We'll fish you out of the water if you help us reroute the river.'"

never did ring. "It is clearly a Black-white thing. This is similar to what happened to us at a meeting in Washington. But any steering committee that does not recognize minority input is no steering committee for the people."

The goal also seems to be changing from one of securing wages for housework to procuring jobs. "It was agreed upon by everyone that income was the factor, and not jobs," said Lavinia. "But now they want to jam for jobs. They don't care about welfare recipients."

Black Women for Wages for Housework is also concerned about custody of children. While she was in the Bay Area, Lavinia spoke at a rally that was held at City Hall in San Francisco for women who are fighting through the courts to gain custody of their children.

The women who have their children taken away from them may be disabled, living on welfare, or homosexuals sharing life with other women.

A statement from the LABWWH said, "To Black women, custody has always been a matter of who has the money. In analysis, we see not only lesbians, prostitute women, welfare mothers, ex-offender women, disabled women, but all women involved in a custody battle. We will most certainly lose unless we stand together as women to fight for all women. It is also clear to us, as Black women, that this is not only a custody battle for our children, but for our own independence as well."

Lavinia also commented, "Women have no power unless we are coming from a power base, and I'm a token as long as that base is powerless."

Angela Davis will attend two screenings of "Angela Davis (L'Enchainement)" on Fri., March 10, at 7:30 and 9:30 p.m., at the Pacific Film Archive in Wheeler Auditorium, U.C.-Berkeley, and will be available for questions after each screening. Also attending will be the film's director, Jean-Daniel Simon, who will also answer questions about the film. Admission is \$2.50.



Sunreporter
(Black
Community
newspaper)

CHORUS:

Don't take away
 Don't snatch our children
 How can you know the mother's pain
 As you kidnap them away
 Don't take away
 Don't snatch our children
 We fight for them from the day they're born
 And we'll fight for them to stay.

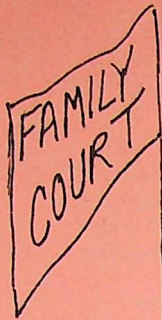
I. We fight as lesbian mothers
 Not to have to stay with men
 Not to have to tend their every need
 Or work at home night and day
 But between our lovers and children
 We're told we have to choose
 Through courts and through our poverty
 Our children are abused.

CHORUS

III. Well, we all might seem so different
 But our fight is still the same
 To have the money so we can live
 Independent of the man.
 And for this they take our children
 And they tell the rest of you
 Not to make the fight as we have done
 But we know you're fighting, too

CHORUS

II. Well you know to live on welfare
 Is a struggle every day
 To get enough to live on
 And to make the government pay.
 Well you know they give us peanuts
 For the work all women do
 But we're fighting for more on every score
 So they're taking our kids, too.



STOP THE KIDNAPPING!

COME TO A CHILD CUSTODY PICKET

March 3, 11:30 A.M. in front of S.F. Family Courts, City Hall, Polk St.

Lesbians for Wages for Housework is calling for a picket in front of the family courts to expose the kidnapping of our children and the child abuse that results from many court decisions. We are protesting the fact that more and more women — lesbian and straight — are losing custody of their children to husbands, relatives, and the Welfare Department. For most women, loss of custody happens outside the courtroom because we cannot afford to enter the courts and fight a lengthy and costly battle. Rejecting the label "unfit," lesbian women, disabled women, prostitute women, women on welfare and others are protesting the denial of custody and demanding the right and the money to have and keep our children.

This picket is built on the strength of recent victories by women in the Bay Area who have won court custody cases. For lesbians, the possibility of having children has grown brighter and our strength to fight a custody order is greater. But lesbians are experiencing a heavy counterattack in an attempt by the government to push us back in the home, taking care of men's needs for free. In massive numbers, all women are refusing this unpaid housework, rejecting the conventional definition of what is "natural" and "feminine." Because of this rebellion, the courts and other government agencies are snatching our children away from us, breaking the chain of our struggle. The proposed Briggs Initiative, one that would ban gay teachers and schoolworkers and their supporters from California schools, is another witchhunt for all women that are rebelling.

In the face of these attacks, thousands of women at International Women's Year conference in Houston expressed through the passage of welfare, disabled and sexual preference resolutions our determination to have custody rights of our children and the money to raise them. We demand that the courts respect the decisions made by that body.



WE DEMAND!

WE REFUSE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN OUR LESBIANISM AND OUR CHILDREN.

Our sexuality should not be a criterion in the courtroom for judging our fitness as a parent. Every woman wants to be able to make sexual choices and those choices should have no bearing on the determination of custody.

HANDS OFF OUR CHILDREN!

No custody judgment is ever final. We can lose custody at any time, particularly if we are labelled lesbian, disabled, prostitute, on welfare, or considered "unfit" for any other reason. Custody should not be denied because of our poverty or the lack of a "stable" relationship with a man.

INCOME SHOULD NOT BE A CRITERION IN COURT FOR A CUSTODY DECISION.

The determination of the "most fit parent" is often based on who can provide the most financially. Until the government guarantees women money for our work in the home beyond present welfare levels, we cannot compete with men in the courts. (Women earn \$.57 for every \$1.00 a man makes)

NO CUTS IN OUR WELFARE MONEY — MORE BUCKS!

For many lesbians and other women who aren't depending on a man's income, welfare is all we've got to have and raise our children. Our present welfare checks are unfit for us and our children, yet Carter's welfare reform plan will mean even less money and more work inside and outside the home. Without that money, more of us will be forced to give up our children to the welfare department or to become sterilized. Led by black women, we have fought for our welfare wage so we can choose how we want to live — to be lesbian or straight, to live with men, alone, or with other women, and to have the children we want.

NO SAY IS NO WAY FOR OUR CHILDREN.

Our children rarely have a voice in custody rulings, and their choices remain limited because our poverty and lack of power restricts what we have to offer them. We need quality time to spend with our children, and money to provide for their needs. In fighting for the power to have more choices in our lives, we open up more options for our children's lives as well.



STREET Theater

Endorsed by: Black Women for Wages for Housework (USA), COYOTE, California Welfare Action, Linda Gill Defense Committee, Northern California Committee Against the Briggs Initiative.

Sponsored by:
San Francisco Wages for Housework/Lesbians for Wages for Housework
P.O. Box 14512, San Francisco, Ca. 94114
282-1326 or 681-4667

Help all women gain custody of their children. Make checks payable to "Wages for Housework." All donations are tax-deductible.

CUSTODY—A BLACK WOMEN'S ISSUE

To black women, custody has always been a matter of who has the money. In analysis, we see not only lesbians, prostitute women, welfare mothers, ex-offender women, disabled women, but all women involved in a custody battle. We will most certainly lose unless we stand together as women to fight for all women. It is also clear to us as black women that this is not only a custody battle for our children, but for our own independence as well.

What all black women really have in common is the revolutionary aspects of their behavior as it relates to the economic powerlessness associated with being not only black, but also women. Black lesbians, in our refusal to service men, refuse also to tender capital's control over our uteruses and further serve as an example to other women of actual separation of sexuality and power. Capital has risen to destroy this independence. And since black lesbians have even less access to a man's wage than other women, we are particularly vulnerable to harassment and being abused by the legal system.

Prostitute women, on the other hand, set the market price for sex. That is to say that we bring the functions of a woman out of the abstract and into the concrete. It is not hard to understand, therefore, why WASP male, corporate America cannot tolerate this, for it is truly revolutionary.

Black women on welfare are revolutionaries when we go down to the welfare office and demand the money that is due us for the work done for free by other women, giving us the right to walk out on unwanted marriages where we are battered and abused.

But we women lose custody also. We lose custody of ourselves when we are forced to sign forms giving our children social security numbers and marking them for life. We lose custody of ourselves when we are forced to spend hours in the welfare office without compensation for time spent or expenses incurred in getting there. Black women lose custody when we are forced to fill out paternity affidavits. We black women lose custody when we are forced into low-paid, non-creative jobs outside the home, leaving our children vulnerable to police harassment, surrogate abuse, and feelings of low self-esteem. For these efforts of independence, capital has risen to take custody of our children.

Disabled women show one side of the coin, where through our poverty, we are unable to care totally for our children because we cannot afford to pay for the simple services that are our right. Through denial of our rights, disabled women are used to tell all other women that they dare not get sick or complain. But by fighting for custody for disabled women, all other women sign their own insurance policies.

We black women know the totality of the custody issue, and we realize through our experience that we cannot just look the other way. Unless we struggle along with our sisters for all women, we can never be free ourselves.

Custody is not exclusively a mother-child issue. Custody is taken from us at birth with the assignment of social security numbers by the welfare department. Custody is taken by the schools through directing children into capital machinery. The courts take custody through juvenile and adult "justice" system. The military and the traditional institution of marriage are all ways in which the state takes custody of our lives. Therefore, unless we black women are free to raise our children independently, our children will grow into adults who will, like ourselves, never gain custody of themselves. So for ourselves and our children, we must come together with other women, too.

— In struggle,
Los Angeles Black Women for Wages for Housework



Not only do I ask "Who is fit to judge? but who should be judged. Today, we judge the family courts in contempt of decisions made at the IWY conference in Houston and we charge the family courts with kidnapping and abusing our children. We've all heard about the Chowchila kidnapping in vivid detail but who's heard about the fact that more and more women are losing their children every day. That is why we are here today.

Lesbians for Wages for Housework has called for this picket to expose not only what is happening to lesbian mothers in the family courts but to all mothers, and not only in the courtroom but outside but outside of it, and not just in San Francisco but all over the world.

What's happening inside the courtroom is that more and more of us are being branded unfit--lesbian mothers, disabled mothers, welfare mothers, prostitute mothers, women incarcerated in jails and in psychiatric hospitals, and many many others. Our husbands, our relatives and even in the Welfare Dept. are all judged the better parent if we commit the crime of fighting for independence--for some time and money of our own. If we insist on the right to love who we want, or if we fight to get some money for the work that all women do, or if we refuse to do the job we've been taught is our natural role our children are snatched from us.

The judges are now using income to determine the most fit parent and that means we are automatically disqualified. Not only do men have more money, but the judge hangs on him, the man, getting a new wife, who'll do the work for free and discipline the children in a traditional family setting.

Outside the courtroom our situation is just as bad. The govt. is punishing us for our rebellion by forcibly separating us from our children in every way possible. Things like cuts in medical money for abortions means that more and more of us will be forced to go to the sterilization clinics. Did you know that Planned Parenthood has already shifted much of their funding from abortions and into sterilizations.

And then there's Carter's Welfare Reform which, simply simplifying hundreds of pages of fine print means, more work and less money. It will force women whose children are over 6 to take jobs at minimum wage. That in effect takes our children away since we won't have any time to spend with them.

If we refuse to work outside the home, in addition to our unpaid work in our homes, our welfare checks will be chopped down to nothing and we won't be able to keep our children.

So it's not just through the courtroom rulings but through the abortion, welfare, and social service cutbacks that we are being denied our children or the possibility of ever having them.

~~Lesbians for Wages for Housework~~

Lesbians are x caught in the jaws of this. We would like to expose the fact that those of us who can be here today or ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~iceberg~~ that were here on Gay Pride Day--are only the tip of the iceberg. There are millions of lesbians that cannot "afford to be here. And that is ~~ix~~ because just by showing our faces we can risk losing alot -- ~~p~~ our paid jobs, our welfare ~~ent~~ checks, our homes, and our family ties. And the hardest loss we suffer is the loss of our children. All ~~the~~ these threats have really kept us invisible. Many lesbian mothers are here knowing that our children could be ripped off at a moments notice. Just knowing that today we can have them and tomorrow we may not is a powerful club in the hands of the government. We have been forced to stay in marriages we hate wbecause we can't leave with our children. What this weapon does is really counter what lesbians are doing--we're refusing to sleep with man and take care of their every need. It keeps us hard at work doing what's supposed to come naturally.

The Briggs initiative is another child abuser. It's a proposed state ballot measure that would ban all gay teachers, schoolworkers and their supporters from the schools. What it really is, is another witchhunt for all of women who are rebelling

It's really easy to see how the govt. could use this to get rid of those of us who argue or criticize, women that don't smile enough mothers that don't live with a man. And everyone knows that it's women who are in the schools because that has always been part of our ~~we~~ housework. We depend on those jobs, with their measly pay to survive and raise our children or ~~and~~ ~~xxxx~~ raise our hopes of having children. In addition to separating us from ~~and~~ ~~ent~~ children on our paid jobs, the Briggs Initiative is another attempt to deny us the possibility of having our own children by cutting us off from our money.

O.K. and then there's Governor Brown who tells us to lower our expectations; what he's really trying to tell us is to go back to what's always been expected of us; and we know what that means. With less money there will be less lesbians. We'll barely have any time to spend with our lovers, friends, or ~~our~~ children after we figure out how to make \$1.00 stretch 80 ways. We are already having to be more closeted on our jobs as they become scarcer and shakier. Without enough welfare money and social services, we'll be stuck in marriages or unable to support the children we do have. With less money, particularly the cuts in welfare, disabled lesbians will be unable to live independently of men and institutions and unable to have the children we want. ~~and~~ ~~right~~ ~~ix~~

And tightening our belts, as Carter puts it, means we'll be further closeted in the gay movement. Lesbians won't have a voice of our own if we are forced to depend on the gay men that have some money.

Personally, and I know, I speak for many other lesbians, my children were stolen from me ~~before~~ I ever gave birth! What I thought was my desire not to have children was just the stance I took, knowing what an impossibility it was. I didn't let myself want children. It just never seemed like an option. Just ~~an~~ another price you pay for being a lesbian. And that's because with barely enough money to keep me going, and all the work I was doing, I wasn't looking for another mouth to feed.

But this is not to say that the word isn't getting out. The WORD IS GETTING OUT and our power is building. Our invisibility and isolation are coming to an end because we, along with all women, are determined to lead our lives as we choose. I've even stared thinking about having a baby.

Being here today is a real show of strength. In the past I have come here to stop the harassment and the few bars we are allowed in or to demand a new law on the books that never seems to change our lives much--But today we are not here to demand just a few crumbs, but the whole bakery. We are here not only to defend one of us in our custody struggle but to fight for custody for all of us -- custody to ourselves and to our children. Too often the lesbian mother who has had to be public in her fight has risked sacrificing her children. We're here to put an end to sacrificing.

Thousands of lesbians joined with thousands of other women at IWY in Houston and passed resolutions that demanded custody rights to our children and the money to raise them and today we are here to see that the courts respect the decisions made there. Even the attacks leveled against us; the Save Our Children Campaign and the Briggs Initiative, are a measure of the threat we pose and an index of the power we have built. They know we are teaching our kids not to be satisfied with ~~any~~ crumbs either.

On our side of the score sheet, more and more mothers are trying to come out as lesbians without losing our children and are fighting openly for both. We are taking the money we've won, entering the courtrooms, and in some cases winning our children. Recently we have celebrated several cases in the Bay Area in which lesbian mothers have won their children.

Another recorded victory -- recently, the straight press got hold of the fact that we are using artificial insemination to have the children we want. Of course, they got the news a little late, we've been doing it for ten years. Now the government is trying to restrict artificial insemination to legally married women. Be we refuse to live in childless ghettos and we, along with all other women, are gonna keep on figuring out ~~new~~ ways to have the children we want. We're fighting Carter's Welfare Reform because we know that whether we have a waged job or not, welfare money has always been an insurance policy for us -- it has given us more of a chance to have ~~the~~ children or to keep the ones we have.

All of us being here today is a real victory. The powerlessness that a lesbian mother feels comes in large part from how separated we have always been from all other women. We have been seen as "unnatural" and different from the rest. But all of us rejoice when a lesbian mother wins her children because all of us women--be we disabled, on welfare, prostitutes--want to choose how we are going to live--whether its without men alone, with men, with or without children. As lesbians we will continue to fight for our own needs because we know in doing so we give all women more options. And, as lesbians, we recognize the power that the Black woman's struggle has given us. In particular the black woman's fight for the welfare wages has given all of us a way to live independently of men and to keep our children.

And so we stand together today--demanding what thousands of women at IWY in Houston also demanded -- we demand to have custody rights to our children and the money to raise them.

WHO'S FIT TO JUDGE (written by Lori Nairne and
Sally Abrams) Performed at
Child Custody Picket- March 3

Characters:

L- Lesbian Mother
9- Janet, a 9 yr. old
5- Sue, a 5 yr. old
S- Straight Mother
J- Judge

L- Teri, stop that now. I know you're nervous but you must act even older than the 9 yrs. you are.

9- Yes, mom. I'll try.

L- Wait here while I go make a phone call.

S: (walks in with 5 yr. old) Wait here while I go see where the hearing room is...

5: (to 9 yr. old) Do you want to see what my Daddy bought me?

9: Sure.

5: See...

9: I don't have a daddy.

5: Everbody has a daddy.

9: Well, I don't

5: Well mine doesn't live with me and mommy. But he buys me lots of presents. Mommy never buys me anything, she says it costs too much money.

9: I bet you'll have to go live with your Daddy soon.

5: No I won't.

9: Yes you will (back and forth)

5: (runs to mother) Mommy, can't I live with you. Please, please. That Judge can't make me go live with Daddy, will he??

L: (to S) They're trying to take your daughter too? Don't worry They won't take her. You don't have anything to worry about.

S: Nothing to worry about! My friend Norma Jean lost her child last month to her ex-husband and you're telling me I have nothing to worry about. He just had more money that's all it came down to.

L: I'm on welfare. My social worker has decided I'm an unfit mother. They're are trying to put Terre in a foster home.

St: But why would they want to do that?

L: Because I'm a Lesbian mother.

St: A whaaaat? But how....

L: How did I have a child? The same way most women do. Since the day I walked out of the hospital I've hussedled to get her what she needs. I havn't had a man to hand me money.

St: Hand me money...ha!! Lady you really don't know what you're talking about. You think your the only one who had it rough.

L: You bet I do.

St: I slaved for him 15 years, cooking, cleaning, and washing. I had to fight to get money from him just to buy Sue's clothes. And now that he's re-married he wants his kid back.

9: Mommy they won't put me in a foster home, will they?

L: Not if I can help it Janet. We'll fight them with everything we've got.

4: Mommy I love you. Won't the judge let me stay with you.
5: I hope so honey, but don't worry we'll fight, too.
9: Well I'm not going. I don't care what that judge says. I'll runaway.
5: Me, too.

COURT

(enter judge)

J: Good morning ladies...lets see what we've got here. Oh no, 2 more custody cases. (I'm sick of all these "unfit" mothers)

St: Is that our judge?

L: Thats him all right.

9: He can't take me away. He's just a man. (to judge) Listen judge, I'm not going to any foster home. I'm staying with mommy.

J: We'll see about that, little girl. I'll take the lesbian case first. (this should be easy, obviously unfit) Please take the witness stand. On every occasion your social worker visited your house, she found other women there.

St: Well, I have women visiting.

J: Posters in your daughter's room presenting homosexuality in a favorable light. She has advised the court that you don't take seriously the importance of the male role model in your daughters life. You are not a good influence on your child.

L: My child is happy, healthy, and well loved. What do you mean I'm not a good influence on her.

J: Well she does look very healthy. But she can't grow up to be truely feminine in that enviornment.

L: You mean she won't be dependent and passive. That she might cause trouble when she grows up?

J: You can't give your child what she needs when you're on welfare.

L: Well, I do the best I can, but I sure could use more money.

J: Look I don't like taking little girls from their mothers. Promise me a few things and I'll think about leaving your daughter with you.

L: Like what?

J: Untill your daughter leaves home, I don't want any of your girlfriends staying overnight at the house.

L: What!!

J: We are discussing proper enviornment for child raising. Does orgasm mean more to you Lesbians than children or anything else?

St: He better not make a crack like that to me.

L: I can't believe he saying this.

9: Mommy, what does he care who stays at our house? (to judge) And who do you sleep with?

J: I'm sick of listening to this brat's remarks. There'd better not be another or she'll have to leave the court.

9: But its my life you're deciding about.

L: If you can even think of taking my daughter from this court then you obviously are n ot thinking about her welfare. You made up your mind before I came into this court that I'd lose my child, just because I'm a lesbian and poor.

J: Oh yes, I almost forgot, next time I see you, you'd better be off welfare. Get a job. According to Carters Welfare Reform you should be out working to earn your welfare check. Your daughters older than 6.

St: Isn't raising children worth something?

J: Look, it's not your case we're talking about. Just keep quiet or I may have to hold you in contempt. Do you belong to any lesbian organizations?

L: Well, if you want to count Bay Area Women's Center.

J: You must stop. I don't want you carrying the flag for any homosexual

You should be spending more time with with your child,
teaching her better manners.

J: You mean I can't go to Kid's lib day care anymore?

J: And you'll have to take some courses in proper homemaking,
cooking and nutrition.

L: Homemaking, cooking nutrition...

St: Listen, that's the first thing our mothers taught us.

J: I bet he can't cook or sew.

J: You leave my mommy alone... she's a good cook.

L: Mister, are you telling me if I want to keep my kid, I have to be
who you want me to be? Who gave you the power to play god?

J: Come on make up your mind. This court doesn't have all day.

St: But your talking about 2 people's lives.

L: Look judge, you tell me to get a job, so I can bring home more
money, then you tell me to spend more time with my child. Raising a
child is enough of a job. How about getting me more money from
Welfare?

J: You don't love her enough to give up your sex life.

L: There is no reason I have to choose between my kid and my lover.

J: Let's get on to this next case.

(Now here's an perfect example of what a mother should be , of
course I'll give her custody) Lets see, recently divorced. Are
you planning on getting remarried soon?

St: No, I divorced my husband. I'm supporting myself now.

J: Yes, I see that here. But really do you honestly think you can support
Sue on \$6,000 as well as your husband can on \$35,000.

St: I put my husband through school That is why he makes \$35,000.

J: Tat's irrelevant, the fact is he makes more money than you.

St: If it's money your're concerned withm, make him give me child
support.

J: By the way are you sleeping with anyone? Do you date?

St: That's none of your business.

L: He sure is very interested in what goes on in our bedrooms. I
wonder how he gets his kicks?

J: It is my business. Whatever affects your daughter is my business.
So you are living in a 3 room flat in the Haight, rather small for
2 isn't it?

St: No it isn't. And its clean and sunny and near the park.

J: Look, why don't you remarry? Then you'll have plenty of time
to raise your child.

L: She obviously doesn't want to remarry, why don't you just get
on with it.

J: There is a note here from your psychiatrist, that you had a nervous
breakdown 4 years ago.

St: I am fine now. I fell apart because of the stress of being a
decent mother, working a full time job, and keeping my husband in
school. But I'm fine now.

J: Do you really think your stable enough to take care of this child?
Don't you think she would be better off with your husband ?

St: No, I don't.

J: Poor, questionable mental health, living space cramped, and I bet
you have to leave her at one of those public day care centers 40
hours a week. I just don't see how you can give her the attention
she needs.

St: I don't neglect my daughter. Don't call me "unfit". Unless I
remarry, you won't be happy.

J: I am just looking at the facts...it is the best interest of your
child we are concerned with.

J: I'm going to stay with Mommy.

St: I'm concerned with the best interests of my daughter too. I've

sacrificed to raise her and I've taken good care of her. You are not taking her away from me just because I don't bring home the money my exx-husband does.

J: You seem to be getting very excited.

St: You're darn t right I am. You're talking about snatching my daughter away from me.

L: And you have no ideas how that feels. We spend our lives raising our children. And who we sleep with or how much money we have has nothing to do with whether we should keep our children.

J: Girls, girls, calm down.

L: We are not girls we're mothers.

St: And we are fit mothers.

L: Your trying to do the same thing to both of us.

9: I won't go to any old foster home.,

5: I won't live in the suburbs. Why should I leave my friends?

J: Stop it, stop it. This is a court of the law. I make the decisions here.

L.St.59--And the question we ask, is,whose fit to judge?

L. Is-he I ask you, Is he fit to judge???

Crowd--NOOOO!!!!

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Linda Gill 841-4776

For the past year The Linda Gill Defense Committee has been defending my right to custody of my children. We did not win my case, but we did a lot of gains for the movement for women to have the right to have and keep the children they want. I will always feel that the court had no right to make the kind of decision my children away from me and it has been real hard for me to emotionally deal with it, but the Linda Gill Defense Committee will continue to fight for the rights of all women to have and keep their children.

My defense committee is endorsing The Lesbian Wages for Housework Custody Picket because all women, regardless of whether they are a lesbian, disabled, black, native american, chicano, on welfare, and or any other minority have the right to children.

I lost my case because a welfare worker and a judge decided that since I was blind and on welfare that I was an unfit mother.

Disabled women are first considered not capable of having children at all, so many of them are forcibly sterilized, and those who aren't are many times faced with losing their children.

Just this past week we, (the LGDC) learned of a deaf couple in southern California lost custody of their little daughter because they were deaf. They did win the case, but only after a outcry of rage from the public.

Instead of taken our children from us because we are on welfare, we want the government to give us the money due us for the work we do in raising our children and doing housework. We do not consider welfare a charity but a wage for work we do and it is certainly not a reason for the courts to take our children away from us. We will not be called "unfit mothers" because we are poor.

We therefor demand the immediate unconditional return of all children to their mother.

We also demand that no children be take from their mother because they chose to live an alternative life style, and or because they are disabled, and or not mater what race.

We further demand and insist that welfare is awage for the work we do and that that wage be increased substantially.

Lastly we demand that all forced starolization of disabled women be stopped.

We are not powerless, and we will no longer sit passively by and watch while are children are taken from us. No woman should have to suffer the agony of losing their childre as I did and I intend to use all thepower I have to see that no woman does.

We will stop the kidnaping of our children byt the welfare and court system in this country.

For further information:
Lesbians for Wages for Housework
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
SAN FRANCISCO-

Lesbians for Wages for Housework initiated this picket of the Family Courts to demand an end to the kidnaping of our children that goes on every day both inside and outside the courtroom. At the International Women's Year conference, thousands of women passed resolutions demanding that we be granted custody of our children and the money to raise them. Yet the family courts and President Carter have flagrantly ignored these mandates. The courts, along with our ex-husbands, relatives, the Welfare Department, police and other government agencies, have continued to kidnap our children. And President Carter, through his proposed Welfare Reform Plan, is guilty of child abuse because he is cutting back on what little money we women have with which to raise our children. Lesbian women, disabled women, prostitute women, women on welfare and others have joined together today demanding to be able to keep the children we have and have the children we want.

Our platform includes five specific demands. First, we demand that our lesbianism not be used against us in a court custody decision. As more and more women have 'come out' as lesbians, refusing to work for men in the home for free, the government has retaliated by snatching our children from us. Many more women would choose to be openly lesbian, but are trapped in marriages because of the fear of losing their children. And many of us who are openly lesbian have been forced to give up the possibility of ever having children. But today we are demanding an

end to being forced into this position. We won't choose between our lovers and our children; we want both!

Not only lesbian women, but any woman who is fighting to be independent of a man's income is threatened with the loss of custody of our children. Lesbian women, disabled women, prostitute women, women on welfare, in prison, immigrant women and many others are being labelled "unfit mothers." No woman should be called unfit because of our poverty or lack of a 'stable' relationship with a man.

More and more, the courts are basing the determination of who is the 'most fit' parent on which one has more money. As long as women are unpaid for the work we do inside the home and low paid for our work outside the home, we cannot compete with men in the courts. We demand that income not be used as a criterion in the courtroom.

Outside as well as inside the courtroom, money is key to our power to have and keep the children we want. For women who are not depending on a man's income, welfare is all we've got to have and raise our children. Led by Black Women, we have fought for our welfare wage so we can choose to live with or without men and still have the children we want. But Carter's Welfare Reform Plan will mean more work inside and outside the home and less money than our already measly welfare checks. That means we'll have to leave our children at home alone or in the streets, or we'll have to give them up to the Welfare department or become sterilized. More women will be denied the possibility of leaving marriages we hate or having the children we want without having to be dependent on a man. We demand a raise in our welfare wage, not cuts.

Finally, we are demanding a voice in the courtroom for our kids. Their choices remain few as long as our poverty limits what we have to offer them. We need quality time to spend with our children and money to provide for their needs. In fighting for the power to have more choices in our lives, we open up more options in our children's lives as well.

Lesbian and other mothers fighting not to be separated from children in any way, are part of a world-wide movement of women fighting for power to choose in every area of our lives. We condemn any move, such as the Save our Children Campaign or the Briggs Initiative, which attempts to use our children against us to crush our rebellion. In our homes, on the streets, in the schools, lesbians join with all women demanding the power to be independent of men and still be with children as we choose.

For Further Information Contact:
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

SAN FRANCISCO-

WOMEN HOLD FAMILY COURT JUDGES IN CONTEMPT OF THE INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S YEAR CONFERENCE: DEMAND CHILD CUSTODY RIGHTS

In order to force the courts to respect decisions made by thousands of women at the International Women's Year conference, Lesbians for Wages for Housework is calling a child custody picket and street theater on March 3, in front of the San Francisco Family Courts at City Hall. The IWY conference demanded that women be granted custody rights and the money to raise their children.

"We are here to celebrate recent victories of Bay Area women who won custody of their children in the courts. We are pressuring the family courts because we know thousands more lesbians and other women are losing their children in the courts, or because we don't have the money to wage courtroom battles," states Maureen Rafferty, member of Lesbians for Wages for Housework.

"I was labelled an "unfit mother" by the courts because I am disabled and without the money or education they thought I should have," says Linda Gill, a disabled woman who recently lost custody of her children. "I have invested years in raising my children. What the courts want for my children and what they want for themselves are very different."

Lavinia Smith, founding member of L.A. Black Women for Wages for Housework, expresses her anger in this way, "Black women have our children snatched from us not only by the courts, but also by the police, prisons, and the Welfare Department. I'm here demanding the money I need to keep custody of my kids and to be able to raise them the way I want."

The three women quoted above will be speaking at the custody picket and will hold a press conference there. Lori Nairne and Maureen Rafferty, members of San Francisco Lesbians for Wages for Housework and the International Wages for Housework Campaign, are presently available for advance interviews with the press.