

International Women's Day Calgary - March 8, 2010

International Women's Day is rooted in the resistance and struggles of our foremothers. They marched in their thousands in 1857 and 1908 - against horrifying working conditions in New York City's garment industry and to demand economic and political rights.

This day also commemorates the hundreds of thousands of women in Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East who in the 20th and 21st centuries have dedicated and often given their lives struggling for freedom and against oppression. We also salute the European and North American women who have joined these struggles.

Today, in order to honour the memory of these women, we must build the resistance needed to defend the gains that they have fought for and won in the past.

We are already under attack from an economic system that puts profits before people. It's not the banks and the big corporations who have lost out in this recession; the latest in a series of recessions that are part and parcel of the capitalist system; but it's working people-women and their families who have lost their jobs, homes and quality of life.

We are also under attack from a regressive taxation system that benefits the very wealthy in this country. In 2007 Statistics Canada figures revealed that "up to 90% of Canadians are taking home a smaller share of the economic pie that they helped bake". In fact if we cut that economic pie into ten pieces for ten people, one person, the wealthiest would get 6 pieces, 4 people would get over 3 pieces, and the five least wealthy people would get less than half a piece.

This concentration of wealth in the hands of the very rich through tax cuts and loopholes directly linked to the gutting and deterioration of many of our health, education and social programs.

We are also being attacked by a federal government that claims women have achieved equality with men, and that therefore we don't need equality seeking policies and programs. The reality, however, is that:

- the planned \$5 billion national child care program was cancelled
- women's advocacy organizations have been cut making women more vulnerable;
- on average for every dollar a man earns women earn only 70.5 cents,
- many women still do not receive child support
- the poorest people in Canada are women heading up single parent families and single elderly women.
- every minute of every day, a Canadian woman or child is being sexually assaulted, and
- in 2004, twice as many women than men were beaten by their partners and four times as many were choked.

In other words, male domination continues to be a reality in our lives. Another example is that women are over half the population and yet only 22% of parliament. Make no mistake, however, simply electing women into power is not necessarily the answer. For example late last year a provincial woman politician, told a women on AISH to “shut up”. This is nothing more than a continuation of patriarchy and the exercise of class power.

While women have made gains in education; these have not necessarily led to economic gains especially for poor women, women of colour, First Nations women, and women with disabilities. And meanwhile access to education is being curtailed e.g. the University of Calgary is raising fees for the professional faculties of law, medicine and engineering, thereby ensuring that working class women will be shut out of these faculties-this is class gate keeping-guaranteeing a two tier society.

Furthermore we need to address women in power who when they abuse o

History teaches us that improving the lives of women improves the lives of men and children too. History also teaches us that

- if we are to reverse attacks on working class women
- if we are to defend jobs,
- guarantee our social, health and education programs,
- end violence against women, and
- end poverty,

We need to rebuild a strong, truly inclusive and internationalist women’s movement capable not only of resisting, but of demanding and winning the policies and programs that we need for working class families in this country and around the world.

This task sounds monumental but it is achievable and we don’t have a choice. So Women Together Ending Poverty calls on women in Calgary to stand up, speak up and organize in their communities to challenge the attacks targeting working class women today.

Women Together Ending Poverty
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