

Government lax on International Women's Year

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OTTAWA (CUP) - About 150 demonstrators marched on Parliament Hill to throw the International Women's Year slogan back on the doorstep of the federal government.

"It hasn't been done... WHY NOT?" demanded speeches, chants, pamphlets and pickets during the two hour demonstration October 25.

Equal pay for equal work; equal job opportunities, access to free, quality childcare for all; removal of abortion from the criminal code; lesbian rights, equal rights in marriage and property law; and safe effective birth control for all were major issues protesters believed the government had ignored while favouring an

elaborate publicity campaign to celebrate IWY.

"No serious attempt has been made this year to implement legislation with teeth that would put an end to discrimination and remove our secondary status," Women and the Law Society representative Shirley Greenberg told demonstrators as she accused the government of extending women's responsibilities without removing their handicaps "all the while mouthing rhetoric".

"As long as the law reflects prejudice against women, it influences attitudes", she said. "Advertising campaigns are useless."

She cited equality in decision-making power, equality in division of labour in marriage and the equality in the sharing of income and property as three main areas requiring change. Others included eliminating the female sexist image in law and recognizing a housewife's individual right to pension, insurance and retraining.

Greenberg was one of ten speakers who elaborated on the government's deficiencies in handling IWY.

Pat Hacker of Women's Career Counselling reminded the group that women are still inferior in the employment field and are still without wages for work performed in the home.

"Where are the thousands of seats Manpower should have bought to permit women to retrain, to catch up after 10 to 15 years in the home? Where is an effective body to insure equality for

women's rights in employment?" she asked, pointing to employment and wage figures in public and private institutions that proved women are still earning less money than men and are not aspiring to management positions.

"It is unlikely that the private sector ... will make any large overall effort to improve opportunities for women," she said, "until the government cleans the dirt from its own doorstep".

Women and the Law Society speaker Chris Barnes did not believe wage disparity was about to change, heralding an even wider gap between wages and job opportunities as a result of the federal governments wage and price guidelines.

Women are bound to be kept in traditional female jobs since restraints are based on percentage increases of current salaries, Barnes said and warned wage disparity will increase to more than \$5000 during the three years the controls are in effect.

A large contingent from Gays of Ottawa participated in the demonstration demanding equal custody rights for lesbian mothers and inclusion of the term "sexual orientation" in the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Although the gay movement and the women's movement have experienced a traditional tension, Marie Robertson cited "sexism" as the common enemy and encouraged the groups to support each other in order to bring about its downfall.

"Lesbians are oppressed as women and as gays", said Robertson, noting the ever present fear of losing children, jobs, or homes because of choosing a homosexual lifestyle.

She wonders how women can demand the right to control their own bodies and not the right to sexual preference.

Why male homosexuals in the

demonstration? Sexism affects us all, straight and gay, and "face it", she said, "gay men are oppressed because they are more like women".

Telegrams of support from across the country included a message from Ed Broadbent, leader of the federal New Democratic Party, who pledged his alliance with the women of Canada "in protesting the government's inaction to provide effective legislation to deal with the high degree of discrimination against women which still exists in our country."

At the provincial level, NDP MLA for Ottawa Centre Mike Cassidy, participated in the protest and addressed the gathering in a speech that denounced the province of Ontario for equaling the Federal Government's inaction during IWY.

Demonstration organizer Diana Pepal, although displeased with the small turnout, believes media coverage did help to bring home the major aim of the protest - to rid the Canadian public of the misconception that the government was doing something for women in IWY.

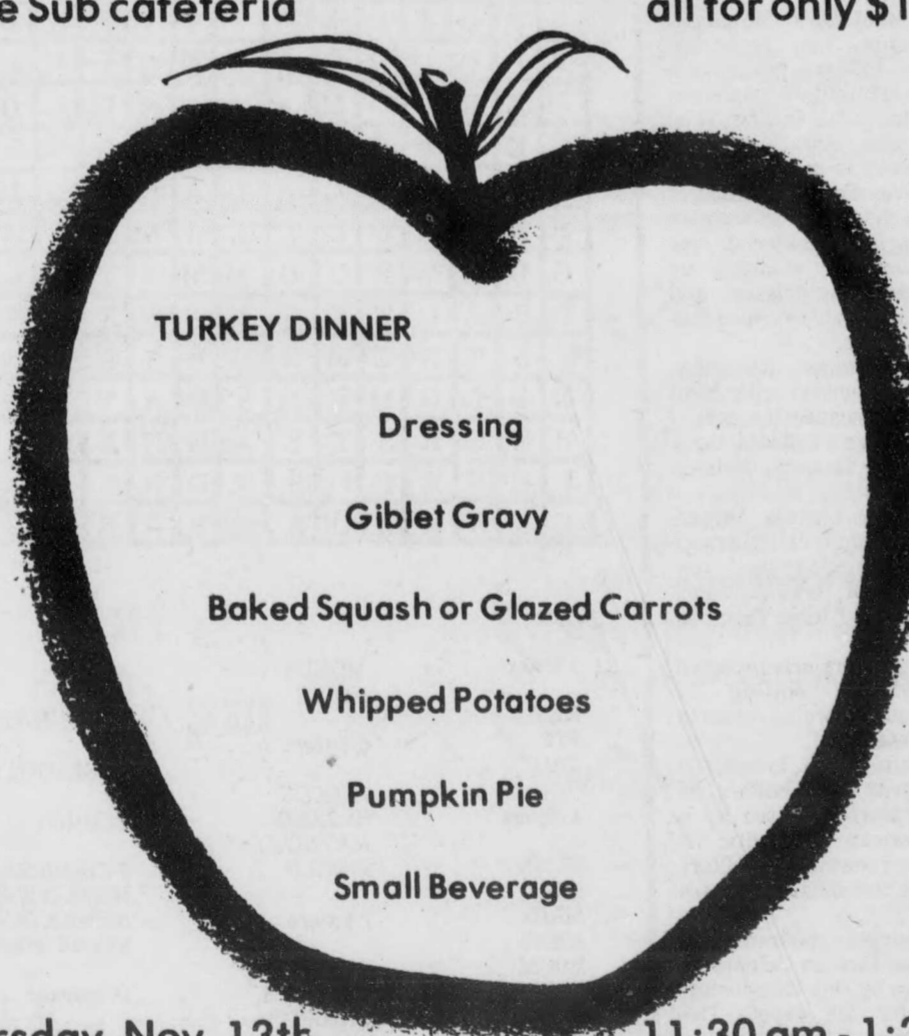
A political action group will be organized out of the Ottawa Women's Centre.

According to Pepal, the group will act to further women's issues ignored by the Canadian government.

The demonstration was organized by the Ottawa Women's Centre in conjunction with Women's Career Counselling, Gays of Ottawa, Voice of Women, Women and the Law, and the Canadian Association for Repeal of the Abortion Laws. Women's centres from Hull, Montreal and Lucerne, as well as the Ad Hoc Committee on Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value, and the Gay Alliance toward equality were represented during the protest.

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