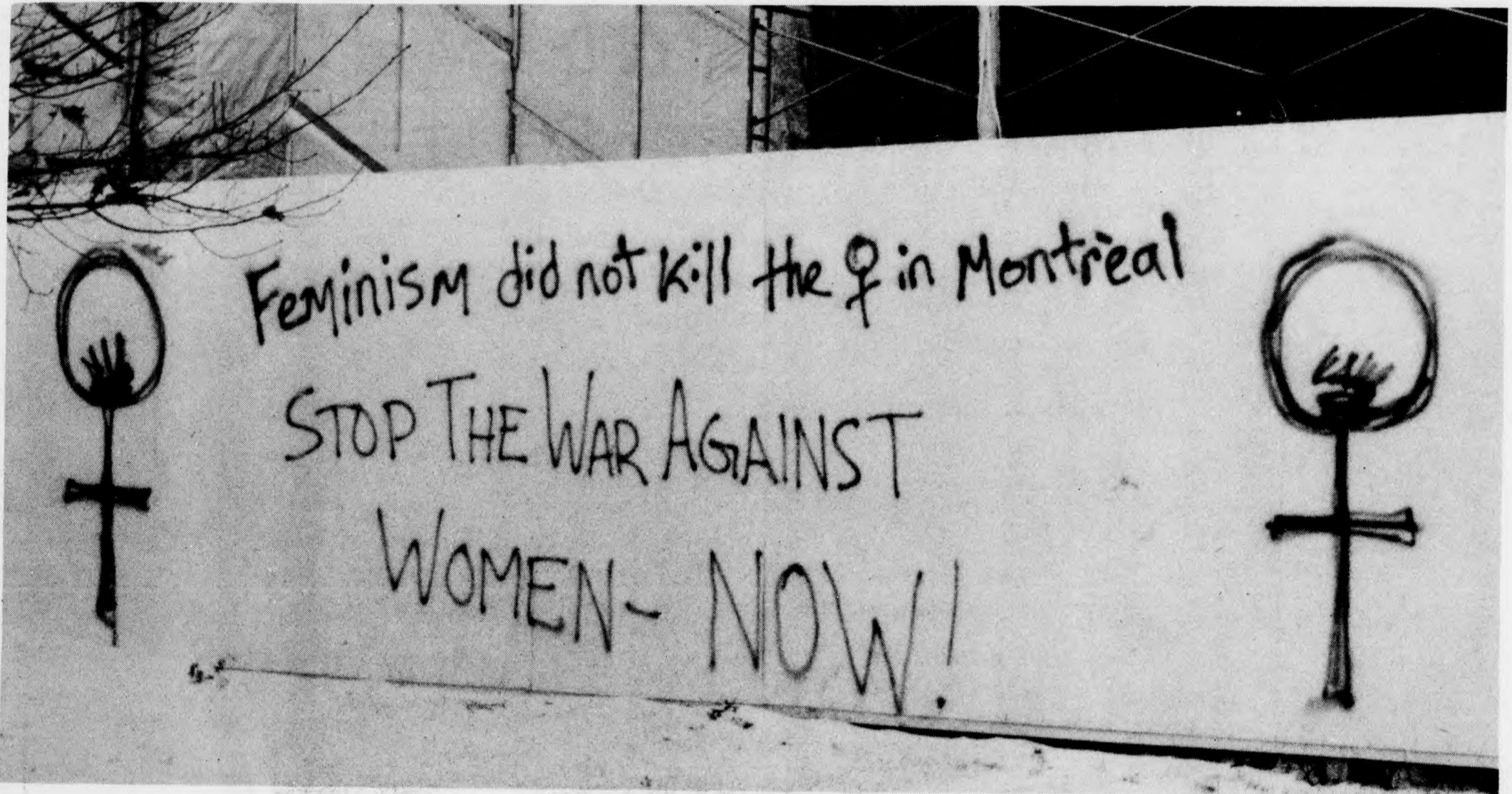


## International Woman's Day

# The status quo has got to go



by *Elissa Horscroft and Claire Sykes*

For all those trying to fight the sudden onslaught of feminism, we have a surprise. We're here, we've been here a long time, and we're here to stay.

This is not to say that the women's movement has, or is now, a unified group speaking for all women. Far from it. Yet there is a movement toward rebuilding strength based on coalitions and the tying of movements which have traditionally been ignored in terms of "women's issues."

This year's theme for International Women's Day, stopping the racist war from Oka to the Gulf, could make the March 9 rally the largest multi-representational gathering of people this city has seen in a long time. This is not a radical change but should be seen in terms of the women's movement returning to its roots.

The idea originated in Germany in 1910 with Clara Zetkin, when she proposed at the International Socialist Women's Conference that women's demonstrations be held annually on a fixed day world-wide. It was initially meant as an international vehicle for socialist women to express solidarity in emancipating the female labourer.

By March 19, 1911 it had turned into mass demonstrations throughout Berlin and Germany. Within the next two years the demonstrations spread to Sweden, France, and Russia.

In February 1917 female tex-

tile workers in Petrograd organized a demonstration for International Women's Day, their theme being opposition to the war, high prices and the situation of the female worker. The tremendous power of women in the strike worker's movement drew the attention of the Bolsheviks, and their power in politics was recognized.

Around the same time in New York, textile workers, drawn almost completely from the ranks of immigrants, blacks and women, started to unite. In 1910 there was a general strike of shirt waist makers.

In the years since, the movement shifted toward dominance by a group of predominantly straight, white, (educated) middle class women. The effect of this whitewashing, and ridding of the "lavender menace" was to create disunity. No longer could the movement even pretend to speak for a proportionately representative portion of the female population.

As well as losing representative qualities, it also lost power. For example, demands for employment equity have historically been weakened by the fact that this is an issue for only a small part of the population. Multi-layered discrimination has ensured that any "privilege" granted goes to white women, generally from the middle or upper classes. In this instance, the fight was directed too narrowly, not including demands for a comprehensive overhaul of discriminatory hiring practices.

The pro-choice movement, on the other hand, is one which

we can learn from. It has reached some measure of success, because it is not fighting just a "one-issue" campaign. By fighting to make abortion legal, safe and accessible for all women, the pro-choice movement has recognized the importance of taking on other issues. It is about more than abortion and daycare. The idea of choice extends to all areas of peoples lives, and is not only about the right of women to control their own reproduction. People should be able to live the lives they want to live.

Following from this premise it is evidently necessary that the fight is continued on many different fronts, showing solidarity with groups that are fighting racism, sexism, an oppressive economic system, heterosexism and homophobia. It also has forced people to take an active role, showing that although they are student issues, they are not only academic.

People are taking to the streets on these issues, fighting for the rights of **all** groups. As we see that the needs of a greater number of people are being met, we also realize the importance of coalition building; a force which cannot be underestimated.

This year's International Women's Day has followed in the recent tradition of creating a broad base of unity. It has taken the theme of self-determination and expanded it so that the focus is on people as a group as well as individuals. Adopting a theme, however, is still an abstract concept. Without education as to how and

why these links should be drawn, it is an empty statement. This is where smaller, localized, active groups must play a role.

At York, we can play a large part in this by mobilizing campus organizations. It is important that we take up the lead of the IWD committee, and start connecting the issues, fighting for our rights together. This will address a number of problems which we continually experience on campus.

Currently many of the campus groups end up duplicating each others efforts, sponsoring workshops on the same issue, sometimes presented at the same time. The result is that work toward the eradication of discrimination, exploitation and other problems that we have on campus, is often static. By recognizing the importance of connecting the issues we will also see the benefits of working not in to each other but in unified conjunction. This will allow us to advance as we start building our efforts, not only reiterating the concerns of other organizations but pressing them forward.

It is also important to note that it is not so much the responsibility of the traditionally disempowered to speak out, but of all people. Oppression does not only affect marginalized groups, but everybody who lives within this society.

Simply put, if you are comfortable with the status quo, then it is you whom we are fighting in the halls and on the streets. If you are not satisfied with existing norms then do something to fight them.

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