

# Bread and Roses: Celebrating International Womens's Day

By **MELISSA DOUCETTE**

March 8 is International Women's Day. It had its beginnings in the labour movement, where women fought for better wages and working conditions, and later the right to vote.

The date was chosen because of an event that took place on March 8, 1909. Fifteen thousand women marched through the streets

of New York City, protesting for shorter working hours, safe working conditions, equal pay, and the right to vote. They were violently dispersed by police.

Their anthem was "Bread and Roses," symbolizing economic security (bread), and better life (roses).

On March 5, 1999, their struggles and the struggle of all women fighting for

equality in their personal and professional lives were commemorated by the singing of "Bread and Roses." The event took place at a breakfast sponsored by the Canadian Labour Congress, the PEI Federation of Labour Women's Committee, and the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

Special Guest speaker was Nancy Riche, executive director of the Canadian Labour Congress.

"International Women's Day is a celebration of what it is to be a woman," Riche began. "It's not easy."

Riche's talk was tied into the theme of "A Society for All Ages" which is the Federal Government's version of the United Nations-sponsored Year of the Older Person. Riche said that pay equity will have an important impact on older people. Pension funds are tied to wage levels which could help stave off the poverty that so many elderly -- and single women -- now live in.

"I have never seen such an attack in my life," commented Riche on the federal government's opposition to pay equity. PSAC workers fought for 14 years on this issue, and the Supreme Court of Canada recently ordered the federal government to pay \$5 billion owed to female

workers. The federal government, which added pay equity to women's rights legislation in 1977, appealed the decision.

PSAC workers are not the only women who face pay equity struggles.

Women at Bell Canada have been fighting for 9 years on this issue. In the last few weeks, Bell Canada announced that the lay-off of 2400 workers -- most of whom were women, and a pay reduction of 40 per cent. Many of these women were the ones involved in the struggle for pay equity.

Riche also speculated that the federal government will be changing the law to avoid paying the \$5 billion.

According to her, the federal government has called the law "confusing," and wishes to amend it.

Riche spoke about "the length they'll go not to pay women what they are worth."

She commented on remarks made by people around pay equity to the effect that they are not opposed to it, but feel that \$5 billion is too much.

"If the women are owed \$5 billion, then they're underpaid by \$5 billion," replied Riche.

She concluded by stating that the battle for pay equity is a victory for years to come.

## Bread and Roses

As we come marching, marching in  
the beauty of the day,  
A million darkened kitchens,  
a thousand mills lofts gray,  
Are touched with all the radiance  
that a sudden sun discloses,  
For the people hear us singing:  
"Bread and roses! Bread and roses!"

As we come marching, marching, we  
battle too for men  
For they are women's children, and  
we march with them again,  
Our lives shall not be sweated from  
birth until life closes,  
Hearts starve as well as bodies, give  
us bread, but give us roses!

As we come marching, marching  
unnumbered women dead  
Go crying through our singing their  
ancient cry for bread.  
Small art and love and beauty their  
drudging spirit knew,  
Yes, it is bread we fight for - but we  
fight for roses, too!

As we come marching, marching, we  
bring the greater days.  
The rising of the women means the  
rising of the race.  
No more the drudge and idler - ten  
that the where one reposes,  
But a sharing of life's glories: Bread  
and roses! Bread and rose!


**The women all come  
marching, marching,  
hand in hand**

Join the  
**World Women's March 2000**  
March 8 is International  
Women's Day.

Join in the local activities or start  
something yourself.

2:59 AM

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