

March 8th - International Women's Day A reminder we need bread and roses, too!

By Kelly Moist

International Women's Day (IWD) grew from women's struggles in the home, the workplace and the political sphere.

As unions were formed in the early 1900s, socialist organizations in New York and Copenhagen established International Women's Day as a celebration of women's work and an opportunity to make demands for gender equality. Other countries soon began celebrating IWD annually. By the time of World War I, women were a powerful voice for peace. IWD became synonymous with bread and peace, or bread and roses.

Women's work still matters and has value for all. Without it, nothing else would work. While women do every kind of job, there is a male-female gender division that places less value on women's work and contributions to society. Women have won many gains but feminism is not "over". These gains do not apply to all women everywhere, and women lose ground if we stop advocating for equality.

Let's face it, we live in a patriarchal society - one that is based on many traditions and institutions that place higher economic value and social status on men's work, decisions and needs. It is hard to convince employers to pay fair wages for work that women do for free in the home, or to convince those in charge that we can all benefit from collective decision-making or women's political involvement.

The concept of gender equality has gone beyond the "battle of the sexes". More and more of us are challenging this binary or two-sided male-female view to see gender as a spectrum and a self-defined identity. From male and female to two-spirited and transgender, gender equality is still all about respect. These more inclusive ideas can free us to be ourselves, ridding us of the pressure to fit into gendered expectations and roles.

International Women's Day has grown from its start as a North American and European movement, by recognizing that not all struggles are created equal. Our systems and institutions devalue not just women, but those who are poor, racialized, differently abled or sick, migrants and refugees, rural, Indigenous. Women who have always experienced added layers of oppression and discrimination face even greater challenges, and dominant women's movements have not always welcomed their views or shown solidarity for their resistance.

Thankfully, gender equality movements are always evolving. Recently, the Women's March on Washington movement that rose out of the anti-woman, racist, anti-immigrant tone of the US Presidential election inspired us to build unity and resistance here in Canada, too. Thousands of us



marched in Winnipeg in January to embrace love over hatred, and global justice over narrow-minded politicking.

Now, this movement is calling for a one-day general women's strike on March 8, exhorting families and social institutions of all kinds to consider "What would life be like without a woman today?" In addition to the paid labour women perform in their workplaces, would school volunteering, community volunteering, domestic chores, and other work be done? Would the young and the elderly be cared for? Would emotional needs be met and support services be provided? Would children learn and would phones be answered? Would this work be valued more if it were mostly men performing the same tasks? I think it would be obvious that there is still such a thing as undervalued "Women's Work".



In Winnipeg, local IWD event organizers were inspired by the idea of "A Day Without Women". We want to know what "women's work" and gender equality mean to you! We encourage women to take time on March 8th to reflect and connect, to ready ourselves for the next steps in our path to equality. Share photos and videos, and join us March 8 by wearing an IWD armband, converging online and in person to celebrate, and building strength for the struggles ahead! More details will be available on Facebook and other social media, or by emailing iwd.wpg@gmail.com.

Happy International Women's Day 2017!

#IWD 2017 #Be Bold For Change #A Day Without A Woman