

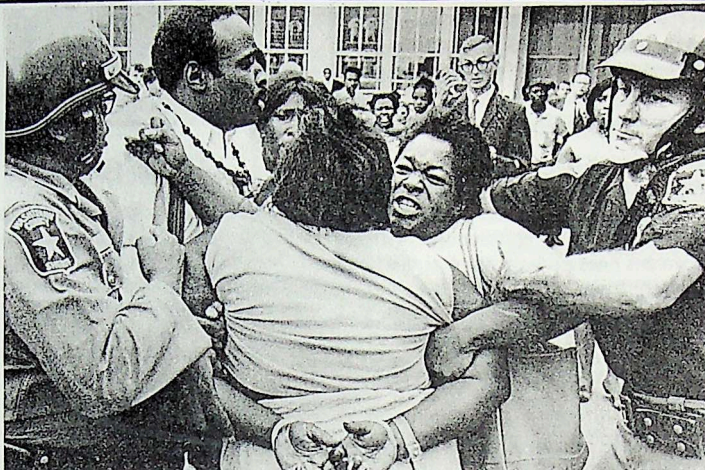
# SAFIRE

*"When woman gets her rights man will be right."*

*-Sojourner Truth, 1867*



**BLACK WOMEN for WAGES for HOUSEWORK (USA)**



Sept. 1968 - Welfare mothers demanding more money for winter in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

## EVERY MOTHER IS A WORKING MOTHER

1975 was International Women's Year. Under the auspices of the UN at a world conference in Mexico, it was declared as the beginning of the United Nations "Decade for Women". From the start that conference was divided between the feminist proposals from the West—and the demands for economic independence from the women of the Third World, the historic claim of Black people for reparations internationally. It chose as its themes "equality, development, and peace". But the question for Black women was equality—compared to what?; development—for us or against us?; peace—how, when we are still hungry?

During the same year prostitute women in all the cities, ports, and towns of France waged a massive strike against being classed as outlaws and unfit mothers, taxed and jailed, raped and beaten and fined, for demanding money for the work that all women are expected to do for free. When they were attacked by French feminists telling them they should find "decent" work—or at least agree to bring prostitution more under government control, the prostitute women of France answered: "We are women like all women."

1975 was also the year of the women's general strike in

Iceland. Coming out of factories, offices, schools, and homes, leaving behind switchboards and typewriters and stoves, the women of Iceland left women's work undone. So on the day of October 24, all Iceland came to a halt.

And it was in 1975, at the annual conference of the International Wages for Housework Campaign in London, that Black Women for Wages for Housework was conceived as the way finally to take back what is ours.

But two decades before, Black women of all ages the world over—from Soweto to New York—had come out of our homes claiming our right to a standard of living equal to the wealth in money and technology that our unpaid work building the world's richest and most developed nations had produced. We took to the streets in marches, boycotts, pickets, sit-ins, freedom rides, rallies, and demonstrations; we took up arms in every possible way demanding food, shelter, clothing, health, education, justice, and peace. With one voice we said it was costing us too much to live among the people we loved in the cities and fields which our own hands had produced. We said ya basta—enough. Uhuru—freedom

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# IWY

WHEREAS all women do housework—our first job—for which we receive no money, and the powerlessness of women is rooted in our lack of money;

WHEREAS this powerlessness leads us to financial dependence on men, which means battering and rape in marriage and on the street, and being forced to take on *second* jobs outside the home for low wages;

WHEREAS welfare is the first wage that women in the USA have won for housework, and women internationally are demanding a cash wage for our work:

BE IT RESOLVED that we oppose any cuts in welfare, including President Carter's Welfare Reform Program for Better Jobs and Income (HR 9030), and we demand **WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK FROM THE GOVERNMENT FOR ALL WOMEN.**

## EVERY MOTHER, *continued from p. 1.*

now. We produced a movement for human rights and national independence among Black people which at once embraced every cause for human freedom. Through our struggle by any means necessary in every area of our lives—as mothers, grandmothers, schoolgirls, teachers, nurses, lesbians, clerks, salesgirls, prostitutes, maids, and housewives—we led not only the Black movement, but the student movement, the anti-war movement, and the women's movement as well.

We were led by Black welfare mothers. No one more expressed the total refusal of Black people, of all people, to be satisfied in a ghetto of poverty in the midst of plenty. And no one had a bigger claim to that plenty than the daughters of the 400 years of slavery that made Europe and America great. It was through the struggle, the work, of Black welfare mothers that International Women's Year was born.

Black welfare mothers took the streets, took over city-halls, offices, factories, and schools, demanding money for the work of raising Black children and being the support and comfort of Black men in the ghettos of America. They demanded money for that work—money which alone could destroy the walls of those ghettos which divide us from other women, from other races, from other nations, from men, from children, and even from ourselves, once and for all. From the bottom of the richest nation on earth Black welfare mothers came out refusing ever to be the bottom again and so led the way for women everywhere to come out to demand the means—the money and the technology—to live our lives as we choose. For when we have no money we can afford to demand nothing else. That money—or the lack of it—in every woman's hands is the basis of our power to demand *everything* else.

By their demand for money in their own hands for themselves and their children, Black welfare mothers established once and for all that **EVERY MOTHER IS A WORKING MOTHER.** They won the first wage for housework. In claiming their money, they staked everyone's claim. And they are not alone.



Aug. 1976 — Black women demonstrate in Cape Town, South Africa.

## FROM SOWETO TO NEW YORK — POWER TO THE SISTERS!

President Carter's Welfare Reform Program for Better Jobs and Income (HR 9030), now under consideration by the US Congress, attacks all the wages of everyone who works—inside and outside the home; rural and urban; white-collar, blue-collar, pink-collar, no collar; women and men; children and adults; immigrant and native; Black and white. Quoting President Carter on the aim of the welfare reform, the *New York Times* on Aug. 7 said that "the system would be so constructed that people in private jobs would always have a higher income than those in public jobs, and so that people in public jobs would be better off financially than those on welfare who did not work."

Calling for the creation of 1.4 million public jobs, the reform would force welfare mothers with children past the age of 7 to take a part-time job outside the home, and mothers with children over 14 to work at outside jobs full-time.

At two national women's conferences recently held in New York, one on the "Homemaker: Career in Transition", and the other on the "Future of Housework", the value to the US economy of women's work in the home was cited at \$350 billion a year. And while economists now estimate that women's services in a family of four are worth from \$15,000-21,000 a year, the Carter welfare reform program would establish a national maximum income of \$5500 a year for a mother with three children and \$2500 for a disabled or aged adult.

Attempting to "ensure that work will always be more profitable than welfare," the Carter welfare reform denies that women on welfare—mothers, disabled women, single women, married women, lesbian women, teenage women, older women, schoolgirls, "unemployed" women—are already working and entitled to a wage for that work. Denying women's right to a paycheck for our work in the home, the reform steals that much more from the paychecks of everyone in every job. It holds the sword of women's poverty over everyone's head.

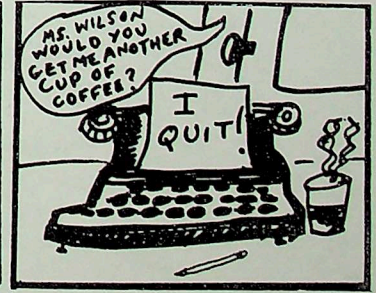
We don't want more jobs and token training programs. We have never been paid enough for all the work we have already done. We don't need more work. We need more *money* to work less. And no one's work will be done, until the work of being a woman with no money is undone.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said over a decade ago that "a price can be placed on unpaid wages." From the ghettos of South Africa—where Black women work for no wages, with no electricity or running water, producing the workers who produce the gold on which the economy of the world is based—to the tenements and squats of Europe and the USA, women everywhere are naming our price: we want the money to have the children we want and not to have the children we don't want; we want the money to live where and how we want, and to love whom we want.

If International Women's Year is to mean anything for Black women internationally it must mean money to claim what what has already been promised in treaty and in law, what has already been more than earned, what has always been withheld. IWY must mean money to claim all the unpaid wages due us for all our unpaid work.

**WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK FOR ALL WOMEN FROM ALL GOVERNMENTS.**

SAFIRE: No Pay, No Work



## WOMEN'S STRIKE ICELAND

WOMEN'S DAY OFF  
OCTOBER 24th 1975  
WHY A DAY OFF FOR WOMEN?

The Women's Congress, held in Reykjavik, June 20 and 21 1975, urges women to take a day off on October 24, the United Nations Day, in order to demonstrate the importance of their work.

Why was a motion like that put forward and carried at a congress where women of all ages and political parties were assembled?

- Because the reasons are many and here are but a few:
  - Because when someone is needed for a badly paid low-status job the advertisement specifies a woman.
  - Because average wages of women in trade and commerce are only 75% of the average wages of men doing the same jobs.
  - Because the principal negotiating body of the Icelandic Trades Union Congress has no woman representative.
  - Because the difference between the average monthly earnings of women and men labourers is Iceland kr.30,000 (approx. £100 or \$200).
  - Because farmers' wives are not accepted as full members of the Farmers Union.
  - Because it is commonly said about a housewife "she isn't working—just keeping house"
  - Because there are men in authority unable or unwilling to understand that day nurseries are a necessary part of modern society.
  - Because the work contribution of farmers' wives on the farms is not valued at more than Iceland kr.175,000 (approx. £500 or \$1,100) a year.
  - Because whether an applicant for a job is male or female is often considered more important than education and competence.
  - Because the work experience of a housewife is not considered of any value on the labour market.
- The general conclusion is that women's contribution to the community is underestimated. Let us demonstrate to ourselves and to others the importance of our role in society by stopping work on October 24th. Let us unite in making the day a memorable one under the theme of the International Women's Year:
- EQUALITY—DEVELOPMENT—PEACE
- Executive Committee for Women's Day Off.

# COMPARED TO WHAT?

EQUAL

In 1963 James Baldwin wrote that Black people did not want to be integrated into a burning house: to be equal with white America was not our idea of paradise. We knew it from living in their homes, doing their housework; and we knew it when they followed our lead, making the same struggle against the way all of us are forced to live.

Everyone gets higher wages than Black women; and some Black women get more than others; but nobody—except the precious few who work only to keep us working—gets enough. Black women have always worked outside the home; but our lack of a wage *in* the home means being forced to settle for any kind of work at the lowest pay outside. Still today in the same job ghettos, we have a long history of teaching and typing and serving other people's needs.

And *our* lack of a wage for housework, that we are forced to do it for free, has been the weakness also of Black men, who more than any other group of men are identified with housework and the lack of money. Sharing buckets and mops with our brothers, or sexual competition on the streets—sharing housework is not our idea of equality.

We are always more than equal when it comes to the work, but never equal enough when it comes to the money. We don't want equal poverty for more than double the work.

The International Wages for Housework Campaign is against the Equal Rights Amendment not only because it promises what laws cannot give, not only because equality between women and men cannot be legislated—any more than equality has been legislated between Blacks and whites. We are against the ERA because the legislation of "equality" between women and men—the so-called "equal pay for equal work", when the work has never been equal—is the Man's best cover to keep us all working for nothing and next to nothing.

We take our lead on equality from Sojourner Truth. Born a slave in the state of New York, Sojourner Truth was a leader in the movement for the abolition of slavery and for women's rights. At the first annual meeting

of the American Equal Rights Association held in New York City on May 9-10, 1867, she said:

I come from another field—the country of the slave.

If it is not a fit place for women, it is unfit for men to be there.

I have done a great deal of work—as much as a man, but did not get so much pay. I used to work in the field and bind grain, keeping up with the cradler; but men never doing no more, got twice as much pay. So with the German women. They work in the field and do as much work, but do not get the pay.

We do as much, we eat as much, we want as much.

What we want is a little money. You men know that you get as much again as women when you write, or for what you do. When we get our rights, we shall not have to come to you for money, for then we shall have money enough of our own. It is a good consolation to know that when we have got this we shall not be coming to you any more. You have been having our right so long, that you think, like a slaveholder, that you own us. I know that it is hard for one who has held the reins for so long to give up; it cuts like a knife. It will feel all better when it closes up again.

When woman gets her rights man will be right.

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*International literature, posters, buttons, potholders, dishtowels, films, videotapes, and speakers available from any Wages for Housework Campaign address.*