



Special WORLD MARCH OF WOMEN

REPORT



Special **REPORT** WORLD MARCH OF WOMEN

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Sources

The Fédération des femmes du Québec web site <www.ffq.qc.ca>
World March of Women web site <www.worldmarchofwomen.org>

Logo design for the World March of Women: Rouleau/Paquin Design Communications © 1998



Word from the president

Having a deaf ear really seems to be becoming a habit for the Quebec government. The healthcare professionals have had a taste of it during the negotiations – and nothing is settled yet –, and now the Status of Women Minister, Christine St-Pierre, is serving up the same medicine to the women's movement.

On March 8, the demands of the World March of Women (WMW) were made public during the launching of the international March. It has been seven months! Seven months to learn about a half dozen demands and to think about them – it's not that hard.

So, after these seven long months, the Minister simply announced that the issue of the status of women would be addressed in November, during a parliamentary commission on the government programme for promoting equality. How can the minister on the status of women display such disregard for the women's movement, when we know that the Quebec coordination for the WMW is composed of more than fifty organizations and groups representing hundreds of thousands of women from various walks of life and the four corners of Quebec.

It took eleven women, ages 24 to 74, to hold a sit-in in her office for Christine St-Pierre to agree to issue a so-called response the next day, through a press release. In reality, this release was nothing more than a laudatory statement of the liberal government's actions and not an answer to the specific demands of the WMW who are seeking, among others, to put an end to poverty and violence.

The Minister seemed to have found the sit-in in her office a little inconvenient and unappealing. I would say rather, that what is unappealing, Madam the Minister, is that women who work 40 hours a week, at minimum wage, cannot reach the low income threshold. Unappealing is a woman deemed fit to work, who loses her job, is not eligible for unemployment benefits and who obtains social welfare and must live, or rather survive, on \$569 a month!

What is also unappealing is the fact that the government promotes private services to the detriment of the public sector. This is the reliance on personnel from private healthcare placement agencies. It is the government introducing a health tax of \$200, which applies indiscriminately, whether a person earns \$15,000 or \$150,000 a year.

What is unappealing is the use of women's bodies in advertising. It is the army going into institutions of learning, including elementary schools, at an age when youth are easily influenced, to promote joining the military. What is unappealing is that Canada is one of the two last countries not to endorse the United Nations Declaration on the rights of native people. That, Madam St-Pierre, is what is unappealing!

The columnists and commentators have questioned the representativeness of the World March of Women and the *Fédération des femmes du Québec*. This is not new, the FIQ knows this tactic well. In negotiations, when things get complicated, there are always attacks on the representativeness of the labour organizations and questions on the legitimacy of their representatives.

However, women will not leave Madam St-Pierre alone, because a decent income, quality and accessible public services and a control over her own body are vital keys in attaining equality. All the parliamentary commissions in the world cannot enable women to attain equality if these rights have not been acquired.

In Solidarity,

Régine Laurent

Souvenir album World March of Women 2010



In October 2010, six days of actions, local, regional and national marches were held under different themes throughout Quebec:

- October 12: work, economic independence and fight against poverty
- October 13: common good and access to resources
- October 14: violence against women
- October 15: peace and demilitarization
- October 16: indigenous women's rights
- October 17: national gathering in Rimouski

More than 8,000 kilometers covered!

"The Eastern Townships activists did not hesitate to block the streets in their region in order to make known the demands of women for independence and the common good."

Marie-Josée Forget,
President of the Syndicat des professionnelles en soins de l'Estrie

"The energy released by a women's group such as this one gives the impression that it can move mountains!"

Claire Alarie, CSSS du Sud de Lanaudière

*"I have a 23 year old daughter.
Things must change for her."*

Nicole Desjardins, Mount Sinai Hospital Centre

Source : SPSE





“In Nicolet, we symbolically re-soled shoes in the context of the World March of Women... which still has a lot of road to cover.”

Claude Boucher, CSSS de Bécancour-Nicolet-Yamaska

“Young women must be reminded that it wasn’t always like this. To avoid setbacks, never forget.”

Sylvie Boulet, Hôpital Maisonneuve-Rosemont

“I am proud to be a woman. It is up to me!”

Lynda Lessard, CSSS de la Vieille-Capitale



“I am sad when I notice all the inequalities and injustices that affect women. I came to march in Rimouski so that governments will open their eyes about what needs to be improved, about the resources that they need to make available to women.”

Marie-Odette Pillay, Mount Sinai Hospital Centre

“It must be shouted loud and clear that violence still exists.”

Colombe Ouellet, CSSS des Basques

“Solidarity is important to ensure respect for women.”

Diane Bossé, CSSS de Kamouraska



Qui Sème
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Récolte
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Vos Coupures
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“Power is still in the hands of men, even if the status of women has evolved. There is still a lot to.”

Louise Lévesque, CSSS de Rivière-Du-Loup

“I am marching for me, for you and for all women on earth.”

*Julie Ouellet,
President of the Syndicat des professionnelles en soins de Québec*



“I am marching for peace. I marched in Sorel-Tracy and I am marching in Rimouski. We must continue to march as long as women are not treated equally, as long as they are used as weapons of war. I am marching to end violence.”

Marie-Claude Ouellet, CSSS Pierre-De Saurel

“[...] we still have a lot on our plate if we really want to continue to improve all the living and working conditions of all women! In Quebec, as throughout the world, it is by ceaseless action by feminists that we have obtained gains: the right to vote, the right to education, the right to health, the right to paid work, etc. This is why we believe it is still pertinent to continue our commitment to the World March of Women network as we are strong from our unity and alliances built with various social groups.”

Quebec Coordination for the World March of Women





FLORENCE 2010 IS BORN!

In the fall of 2010, the World March of Women Secretariat, following up on a proposal coming from Quebec, launched an appeal for walking marionettes. These giant marionettes, made by women from numerous countries including Argentina, Belgium, Brazil the Philippines, Portugal and Puerto Rico, symbolize the living conditions of women, their struggles, their demands and their dreams.

Thus, during the meeting of the Women's Network, the participants were put to work to sew a marcher in the likeness of a healthcare professional. This marcher, baptized as Florence 2010 in reference to Florence Nightingale, wore a patch "I am currently working overtime" and stickers against violence. She also personified the five values in the Women's Global Charter for Humanity: equality, freedom, solidarity, justice and peace. However, Florence 2010 was very determined as there is no doubt - our patience has been tested long enough! ■



THE NETWORK IN A NUTSHELL

The most recent meeting of the Women's Network, held on October 16 and 17, took on a very specific tone. In fact, the activists went to Rimouski in order to take part in an important mobilization activity: the World March of Women. Creative activities and discussions prompted by feminist values were thus on the menu.

Indigenous women's rights

At the Women's Network breakfast, France Robertson, and four of her colleagues from the Quebec Native Women organization, spoke to the participants about the United Nations Declaration on the rights of native people, stressing that this is a fundamental tool for indigenous women.

In fact, it is the first international tool which recognizes the double discrimination to which they are victims, as women and as indigenous women. The declaration calls on governments to take into account this double discrimination, and to see to it that women and children are protected from all forms of violence and discrimination. At the present time, Canada and the United States are the only two countries not to have signed it.

Following this presentation, the speakers answered questions and participated in informal exchanges with the activists, rattling some of the wide-spread biases in the process. ■

What is the World March of Women?



Photograph: Chantal Locat

The World March of Women is a global movement of feminist actions which brings together the groups and organizations working to eliminate the causes of poverty and violence towards women. Its members fight against all forms of inequality and discrimination to which women are subjected.

Its history in a nutshell

1995

“On May 26, 1995, answering the call of the *Fédération des femmes du Québec* [FFQ], 850 women put on their shoes and marched towards Quebec City demanding: bread and roses. They demanded changes from the Quebec government that would improve their economic conditions through nine essential demands*. For ten days, three contingents of marchers were massively supported by the population. On June 4, 1995, after having covered 200 km, the marchers were greeted by a crowd of 15,000 people gathered in front of the Quebec National Assembly. The *Bread and Roses March* wrote a page in the history of Quebec.”

(Taken from a *Une histoire brève de la Marche mondiale des femmes, Intersyndicale des femmes, 2009-2010*) (our translation)



Photograph: Jocelyne Gauvin (CSQ)

- * Implementation of a social infrastructure programme
- Raising the minimum wage
- Creation of job insertion or reinsertion programmes
- Access to training programmes
- A tuition freeze and an increase in student bursaries
- Adoption of a Pay Equity Act
- Reduction of the period of sponsorship by their husband for immigrant women
- Establishment of an automatic support collection system with deduction at source
- Creation of social housing.

Following this Quebec march, the idea to organize an international action was launched by the FFQ, at the Global Forum for Women in Huairou, China, in August, 1995.

The World March of Women was officially launched on March 8, 2000 at a press conference in Montreal, in touch with the women in New York City and Geneva.





Source : R des centres de femmes du Québec

2000

From October 9 to 14, 2000, more than 40,000 women and men, of which a great majority were women, participated in local, regional marches or the rally in Montreal on October 14. It was the largest feminist demonstration ever held in Quebec.

A huge rally was also held in New York City: an historical moment in solidarity!

2005

Adopted on December 10, 2004 in Rwanda, the Women's Global Charter contained numerous affirmations hinging on the values of equality, freedom, solidarity, justice and peace. The Charter proposes that a world be built where exploitation, oppression, intolerance and exclusions no longer exist; a world in which the diversity, rights and freedoms of all are respected.



In 2005, this Charter traveled through 56 countries and territories. The relay was taken up in Quebec on May 7. Passed hand to hand, via a human chain of more than 2,000 women, the Women's Global Charter for Humanity was carried to the Parliament building in Quebec City. This mobilized nearly 15,000 people!



Photographs: Jacques Lessard

2010

The global action took place from March 8 to October 17, 2010, each country taking into account its own climate conditions. The international actions were launched on March 8, 2010. For the closing rally, delegates from the five continents converged on the Democratic Republic of Congo on October 17. During this time period, simultaneous actions were carried out throughout the world in order to attest to a solidarity with all women living in a country involved in conflict.

World March of Women Objectives

For women, the World March of Women is an opportunity to demonstrate and to be heard. Thus, they can broaden their network of influence, one after the other, but also with governments. Here are some of the objectives of this formidable global movement:

- Strengthen and maintain a vast solidarity movement of all women and grass-roots groups so that the WMW constitutes a gesture of affirmation by women of the world.
- Promote equality and justice between women and men, among women themselves and between all peoples.
- Build and reinforce a vast process of popular education so that all women can analyze by themselves and for themselves the causes of their oppression and discrimination, and the possible alternatives.
- Highlight the common demands and alternatives issuing from women's movements worldwide relating to the issues of poverty and violence against women, on the local, national, regional and international levels.
- Exert political pressure on governments and multilateral political institutions (for example, the UNO) so that they institute the changes necessary for improving the status of women and women's quality of life worldwide. The WMW demands, in particular:
 - A disarmament and peaceful conflict resolution policy;
 - An end to all forms of impunity and corruption, the use of rape as a weapon of war, occupations and foreign military presences;
 - The imposition of political and economic blockades.
- Challenge and denounce the international financial, economic and military institutions (IMF, NATO, WTO, WB, transnational corporations, cooperation agencies) that impose conditions on women's struggles, that are responsible for impoverishing and marginalizing women and intensifying the violence committed against them and formulate proposals for alternative institutions.
- Convince the general public, other social sectors and social movements to support and institute the changes necessary for improving the status and conditions of women and women's quality of life the world over.
- Develop and implement feminist actions and proposals that denounce the economic and financial institutions that promote the exploitation and degradation of our resources, climate change and the loss of our biodiversity. Lead the struggle for the self-management of our environmental resources based on a development model that respects the basic needs of present and future generations.



Photograph: Jacques Lessard



Quebec demands

Following a broad consultation of about fifty groups and organizations making up the Coordination of the World March of Women, key demands for the improvement of the situation of women were targeted:

- An increase in the minimum wage to \$10.69 an hour, so that those paid at minimum wage who work 40 hours a week have an annual income equal to the pre-tax low-income cut-off for a single person as established by Statistics Canada.
- The abolishment of social assistance categories - “fit and unfit for employment” - to fight prejudices and guarantee a minimum income to every person that ensures coverage of vital needs while respecting that person’s dignity. This amount must be subject to automatic annual indexing.
- The end of privatization of public services and the common good - health, education, water, wind energy - and a stop to any increase in rates for these services.
- The Quebec government putting in place concrete measures to prevent and fight violence against women, particularly hypersexualization and commodification of women’s bodies, starting with:
 - Legislation on advertising practices;
 - Establishing specific sex education courses with a perspective for egalitarian and non-sexist relationships.
- A guarantee, by the Government of Canada, for the inalienable right of women to decide whether or not to have children, which involves the maintenance and consolidation of the free abortion services offered by the public and community networks and the development of new public services in zones with few services.
- The Quebec government prohibiting military recruiting in all Quebec educational institutions.
- The immediate withdrawal of all troops from Afghanistan by the Government of Canada.
- The signature of the United Nations Declaration on the rights of indigenous people by the Government of Canada and the implementation of the rights it contains, with special attention to the rights of Aboriginal women and children.



Photographs: Chantal Locat



Photograph: Jacques Lavallée



Photograph: Jacques Lavallée

MARCHE MONDIALE DES FEMMES



The **fiq**

A strong voice, actions that count

Gains won

In Quebec, after fifteen years of national and international meetings, actions and various marches, the women's movement has established bargaining power. Furthermore, the social movements hail this significant contribution in advancing numerous fights:

- A law on an automatic support collection system
- The funding, though insufficient, of resources for women victims of violence
- A reduction of the period of sponsorship by their husband for immigrant women from 10 years to 3 years
- A freeze on tuition costs until 2007
- The Pay Equity Act
- Access to social programmes for immigrant women victims of spousal and family violence
- Increases in the minimum wage over the years, even if they are still not enough

There is still much to do!
Women on the march until we are all free!

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