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POWER of WOMEN

P in file: EMPLOYMENT/OCC-housework

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ICELAND, OCT 24, 1975—GENERAL STRIKE OF WOMEN. Full-time housewives, factory workers, teachers, typists, actresses, childminders, telephonists, prostitutes, bank clerks, school girls, mothers, grandmothers. Some businessmen took their children to work. 90% of industry ground to a halt. Meals not cooked. Shopping not done. Floors not swept. Of 60,000 women in all Iceland, 25,000 at mass meeting in the capital, Reykjavik. Women struck to show their power—and did! (More news and pictures inside.)

International Lesbian Conference

On July 24-25 nearly 100 women gathered from all over North America and Britain for a conference "Toward a Strategy for the Lesbian Movement" called by Wages Due Lesbians, Toronto. The conference was open to all women, and quite a number of the women who came were not lesbian. Some women came from complete isolation—one lesbian mother from a small town told of a three-year search to find other lesbians. Others came from lesbian organisations, and from gay organisations of women and men.

The conference opened with an international panel on lesbian autonomy. The first speaker, Ruth Hall from Wages Due Lesbians in England, defined autonomy as "when we decide what we want, what we need, and how we're going to get it". She spoke about the divisions between lesbians and other women, including her own experience of being sent to Coventry by the women she worked with—women who, like her, were involved in a daily battle against their factory work and housework, and against men's power over them. When we organise as lesbians and in connection with other women, she said, we have to get together as lesbian

Lesbians Toronto, laid out in more detail how wages for housework is a strategy for lesbian women. She outlined how Wages Due Lesbians, within the Wages for Housework Campaign, had been able to contact women, lesbian and straight, on an unprecedented scale, always on the basis of our own needs and our own organised power as lesbians.

There was lively discussion after the speeches, with women from mixed gay organisations describing their battle to establish some power for themselves—and sometimes to break away from gay men altogether—and Black women presenting their fight for autonomy from Black men.

Things got even hotter in the next session, on "sexuality". One of the speakers, after laying out some of the gains we make by being lesbian, looked at the pressures on our lives. "I'm so busy, between my job and my housework, that the only time I can manage much in bed is Sunday morning. And God help me, the pressure to make it on Sunday morning . . ." The discussion explored how sexuality is pushed into a separate, underprivileged corner of our lives—only in certain times and certain places, and after all the exhaustion and strains of the day or



women to make sure that those women's fire is directed outwards against the ones who are making us all work.

Wilmette Brown followed, a member of Black Women for WFH. A number of women, lesbian and straight, had come from that New York organisation. She spoke of the need for Black lesbian women to organise autonomously and visibly: "Invisible as we are, there are many, many of us." That autonomy can be achieved, she said, in fighting for Wages for Housework. "It has not been possible until Wages for Housework for Black lesbian women to organise autonomously with anything . . . with the possibility of getting something by organising." This campaign offered the possibility of getting money "which is the power to struggle to be lesbian" and for many Black women, trapped in marriages by dependence on a male wage, the power to come out.

The last speaker, Francie Wyland of Wages Due

week. It made clear that freeing our sexuality means attacking all our work and all the discipline that binds us. With very little of that discipline, the conference explored the various joys and trials of masturbation, celibacy, "market place" clubs, and couple relationships.

Sunday suffered from an all-too-successful dance on Saturday night, but participants gradually emerged from their beds in local women's houses, and discussed their relationships with their mothers, and how our mothers' own rebellion against subordination in the family nourished the development of many lesbian women. A talk on custody of lesbians' own children followed, and a resolution was passed:

"No lesbian or any other woman should face the blackmail of losing custody of her children, in court, through social pressure or through poverty. We demand from the government the money we need to keep our children without being forced to depend on a man."