



# HOW TO ORGANIZE A FEMINIST ACTION FOR IWD 2009



March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009

*Resist, make waves!*

*Women, let's misbehave!*

8 mars 2009

*Toujours RebELLEs!*

*La droite à la poubelle!*

It's really not that hard to organize an action! Especially for passionate young feminists who are eager to change the world! At the Gathering, over 20 actions were organized and carried out in one afternoon. There, young feminists met in workshops to discuss a specific topic and then agreed on an action they would carry out in connection with the topic; the idea was to move quickly from analysis to action! We know that you're dying to repeat the experience for IWD 2009! **Young feminists, it's your turn to speak out and take action! The sky's the limit!**

Here are some feminist suggestions for organizing an action!

But first, a few excerpts from the Manifesto of the Gathering of Young Feminists:

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## PREAMBLE

### Why be a feminist?

"We are told that feminism is over and outdated. If this were true then we wouldn't need to denounce the fact that:

In reality, many of the demands of our feminist mothers and grandmothers remain unmet. Women continue to be the victims of sexual violence. Our communities are haunted by the silence that follows these assaults. Throughout Canada, in spite of our right to it, access to abortion services remains insufficient. Across Canada as well, colonized, marginalized, racialized and disabled women are coerced and/or forced to undergo unwanted or uninformed abortions, forced to use contraception and are subjected to forced sterilization. The hyper-sexualization of women in the media has taught us to view women as sexual objects rather than complete human beings. Getting off, lesbianism and being queer are taboo and a women's choice to seek sexual pleasure is seen as negative. Our identities are eroded as we are taught, from the time we are children, and through television and magazines, that how we should look, dress, and act is determined by our sex. Violence is normalized, sexual abuse eroticized. Our sexual health education is inadequate and our reproductive rights are disrespected. Our needs are not being met."

*From the Manifesto of the pan-Canadian Gathering of Young Feminists*

### What can we do?

**We will:** Change our attitude: get pissed off, refuse, resist, walk out, speak up!

**We will:** Transform our daily lives and relationships: actions can take place in small interactions

**We will:** Encourage people to learn about, care for and love themselves and their bodies

**We will:** Support safe and accessible space for individuals to define and express themselves without fear of judgement

**We will:** Create alternatives, write poetry, articles, letters, make art

**We will:** Join with others, find common ground, build community, create feminist spaces and gatherings, raise awareness, educate, spread the word

**We will:** Believe that a better world is possible and work to achieve it

**We will:** Organize and struggle: build alliances with existing feminist groups and create new ones, fight together in solidarity, be seen and be heard, disrupt, trouble, destabilize established powers, become culture jammers

**We will:** Build solidarity based on the commonality of our diverse struggles and perspectives

**We will:** Value people rather than profits

**We will:** Demand massive State reinvestment in social programs and the end of privatization

**We will:** Organize pan-Canadian days of decentralized feminist action against the rise of the Right

**We will:** Protest and resist sexist bills and laws that threaten our reproductive rights, racist immigration laws, war, free trade, repression, the criminalization of political movements, corporate exploitation and plunder of the earth, and violence against women

**We will:** Champion safety, respect, justice, freedom, equality and SOLIDARITY!"

*From the Manifesto of the pan-Canadian Gathering of Young Feminists*

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## **MOVE INTO ACTION!**

### **THE ABC'S OF ORGANIZING AN ACTION**

#### **A. Get together!**

To organize an action, all you need to do is gather together a good group of from two to 2000 young feminists. Your wildest dreams are welcome! Feminism is contagious! You can form a group for a single action or set up a collective, affinity group, or team and give yourself a name! There are no limits to creativity!

#### **B. Share our analysis of the Canadian (or other) social, political, and economic context**

By discussing and sharing our analysis of the current context and its impact on young women and the feminist movement we learn about each other and recognize ourselves as young feminists.

#### **C. Discuss and agree on the goal of the action**

What do the young feminists who are organizing this action want? What do we have the capacity to do? What are the fears, if any? Who supports us? What do we want to denounce? What do we want to propose? Do we have demands? Who do they address? In short, what is the goal of our action (denounce, demand, take back a public space, popular education, festive action, mobilize, raise awareness about feminism, discuss and broaden our analysis, confront, obtain reparations, justice, etc.)?

#### **D. Discuss the target and type of action**

How about a brainstorming session on possible actions for IWD 2009? Throw out your ideas, dream, imagine, don't censure yourselves, it can be anything at all! Then, talk it over and decide as a group what action you're going to organize for the first young feminists' pan-Canadian day of decentralized actions for IWD 2009! (See: **Suggestions for Facilitating a Workshop on Organizing Feminist Actions**).

## ACTION IDEAS BANK

Here's a bank of action ideas. Some of them include references with organizational pointers. We suggest this idea bank as a way to open ourselves to a whole range of possible IWD actions! **Let your imagination go!**

- Workshop on the rise of the Right (*tools, including a facilitation guide, are available on [www.rebelles2008.org](http://www.rebelles2008.org)*)
- Publicize the young feminists Manifesto:
  - Feminist theatre based on the Manifesto (*info on invisible theatre: [http://nopasaran.samizdat.net/article.php3?id\\_article=1236](http://nopasaran.samizdat.net/article.php3?id_article=1236)*)
  - Chant the young feminists Manifesto at symbolic locations
  - Distribute the Manifesto in the street
  - Publicize the Manifesto to feminist groups by asking for a meeting with these organizations
  - Read the young feminists Manifesto in public areas
  - Present the Manifesto to city council members, members of parliament, etc.
  - Draft demands based on the Manifesto
- Demonstration (you don't need to be 500 to demonstrate; 20 women are enough to carry out an effective demo!)
- Rally at a symbolic location with or without a symbolic, creative, or festive action
- Contingent of young feminists in a larger demonstration
- Feminist *batucadas* (see [http://netfemmes.cdeacf.ca/les\\_actualites/lire.php?article=10525](http://netfemmes.cdeacf.ca/les_actualites/lire.php?article=10525))
- Discussion evening on feminist issues
- Culture jamming <http://www.businesspme.com/articles/communication/71/le-detournement-publicitaire.html>)
- Feminist party
- Feminist sticker commando
- Occupy a symbolic location (*info on occupations <http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/IMG/pdf/ABCoccup.pdf>*)
- Symbolic or direct action against a transnational company that exploits women
- Symbolic or direct action in front of a well-known anti-choice personality
- Feminist graffiti team
- Unfurl a banner in front of a symbolic location
- Sing feminist songs in front of locations where women are viewed as sex objects
- Hand out pamphlets denouncing sexual assaults in bars
- Reclaim your street (see <http://www.reclametarue.resist.ca/>)
- Feminist retreat
- Radical cheerleading in the street, in front of a business or offices of a transnational company, as part of a broader demonstration, etc. (<http://radcheers.tripod.com/>)
- Target masculinists and symbolically vaccinate them against sexism
- Dismantle patriarchy by publicly destroying a "patriarchy" *piñata*
- Put up eviction notices or present them to institutions/individuals that either threaten or actually trample on women's rights
- Confront a sexist teacher: banner or public confrontation in class or in his department
- Complaint or petition protesting sexist advertising

## **E. Share the preparation work for the action: young feminists at work!**

Once you've chosen your action, decide together who will be responsible for:

- Selection/development of action scenarios: go to the location; plot the route if it's a demonstration; think about the different ways the action can unfold and possible alternatives, etc.
- Develop the content, tools, leaflets or demands: what are we criticizing? What do we want instead? Write a draft leaflet to present to the group, if applicable for your action, or if you want to raise demands.
- Mobilizing: recruit participants, publicize the event, distribute leaflets, produce posters, post info on the Web, etc.
- The media: do you want your action to be covered by the media? If so, you must choose media spokeswomen for the action; you should also draft a news release to submit to the group for agreement. (See *How to get media coverage for an action in just a few steps*).
- Visual elements of the action: artists interested in making banners, placards, posters, etc. ? This is your chance!
- Protest tools for the action, if needed: music, slogans, songs, etc.
- Logistics: materials or room purchase or rental, food, if necessary, etc.

Keep in mind that the action was developed collectively. We recommend that you discuss the different ways the action could unfold and plan ahead (plan A, B and C). If you have to make last minute changes, make sure that everyone is informed and in agreement!

*Important: These roles are not necessarily useful for every action; it depends on the kind of action you're organizing and your own preferences!*

## **F. During the action**

Who does what during the action?

- Action leaders
- Leafleters: hand out leaflets to passers-by, explain the purpose of the action, etc.
- Decorators: stickering, graffiti, drawing on the sidewalks, etc. to leave young feminist traces everywhere!
- Scouts: If your action is a march, a demonstration or a rally, the scouts make sure that the road is clear and, if needed, prepare other routes or locations.
- Media spokeswomen
- Women responsible for safety/security (and to ensure that nothing interferes with the collective plan for the action).
- Women responsible for relations with the police

## **G. Our rights and risks, if applicable**

Public areas are the best place to conduct protests and acts of denunciation, invisible theatre, street theatre, etc., because this is where we can be visible—a fundamental aspect of most actions! Depending on the action in question, there may be associated risks. Sometimes even actions that seem harmless carry the risk of arrest when they are conducted in a public space. Risks (arrest, violence, accidents, etc.) should be assessed collectively and taken into consideration in the choice of an action, taking care not to spark panic in the group by being too heavy about it. You can work together on distinguishing actual from perceived risks by consulting resource people who know the law and police practices. You can also collectively delegate two women who will be responsible for relations with the police during the action and another person to be responsible for legal assistance, if needed: this can be someone who is not actually present at the action, but who would be able to organize legal and political support in the event of arrests.

It is extremely helpful if the women taking part in the action know their rights and what to do in the event of police intervention, but care must be taken not to make this scarier than it actually is! It is useful to consult a sympathetic lawyer and to have their number with you during the action. Guides are available on the Web. Here's one: [http://www.blocpot.qc.ca/files/COBP\\_surprise-fr.pdf](http://www.blocpot.qc.ca/files/COBP_surprise-fr.pdf).

It is recommended that you never leave the site of an action by yourself when the action is one involving the risk of arrest!

But above all, during your feminist action, take a moment to think about all the other young feminists who are organizing across Canada!

#### **H. Group evaluation of the action**

After your action, you can hold an evaluation with all the organizers and use the occasion to celebrate it with all the young feminist participants!

Did we achieve our goals? Did everything go as planned? Are there any areas of unease? Positive aspects of the action? Was the action organized democratically? Do we want to organize another action? Did we raise people's awareness? If we were to change something, what would it be?

## **Rebelles, let's move!**

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### **AS A BONUS . . .**

#### **FOR WOMEN WHO WANT TO TAKE IT FURTHER, HERE ARE MORE SUGGESTIONS!**

#### **Strategic and tactical thinking**

Before the action, it could be useful to assess these points:

- **What are our strengths? Our weaknesses?**
- **Who are our allies?**
- **What can we realistically gain?**
- **Is our action part of a short-, medium- or long-term strategy?**
- **Is it a good tactic given our goals and the current context?**

To evaluate our means of action, we must identify the actors, their strengths and weaknesses, and our potential allies. What do we have the capacity to do? What do the young feminists who are organizing the action want? What are their fears? Who supports us?

## Different types of action

There are many different kinds of actions: symbolic, direct, legal or illegal actions.

**Symbolic actions** are aimed at pressuring the government or a company to change their policy or to rally public opinion on a particular topic, for example, violence against women. The impact of these actions depends on the target's willingness to listen and/or on the media coverage. Eg.: legal demonstrations like those organized across the country in 2003 to oppose the war on Iraq.

**Direct actions** are aimed at directly changing the situation we are protesting without going through an intermediary (public opinion or the government). Direct action does not require the cooperation of public authorities or the media to produce results. Eg.: the occupation of an empty building to provide housing for homeless people.

**Civil disobedience** encompasses any explicit and intentional violation of the law, usually carried out in a non-violent manner, for social and political reasons. E.g.: chaining oneself to the doors of a large company or building that is about to be demolished, etc.

**Creative resistance actions** can draw on the three preceding types of action, but are distinctive because the creative dimension is highlighted. Regardless of the action, there is a creative, even playful, dimension! This type of action can enable you to reach more people; you can use humour and irony to attack your target. This is the type of action we carried out at the Gathering. E.g.: go to a minister's office with a huge fake syringe to vaccinate him against mad politician's disease (a reference to mad cow disease) to protest a recent action that tramples on women's rights, makes us poorer or oppresses us. This action was carried out at Paul Martin's office when he was prime minister.