

Ask for housework pay

By JOANKENT

When Italian women voted in favor of a referendum permitting divorce a year ago, the church and the state were shocked.

"The political parties were sure women would vote against the referendum because they were so weak—so afraid of losing their support by men," recalls Mariarosa Dalla Costa, member of the women's movement in Italy.

(Laughing, she also recalls when the women did vote for divorce, Italian men took the credit by attributing the women's vote to their ability to move women to that position.)

The church and state were also surprised when women marched, 10,000 strong, this past February, in protest of the arrest of women who had abortions.

"The church has been the chief instrument used to suppress women," says Ms. Dalla Costa, a member of the political science faculty at the University of Padua. "But since World War II, women have begun to struggle against the church's repression."

The establishment in Italy may be in for another surprise from the weaker sex, particularly from the home front.

Ms. Dalla Costa is one of the originalists of the international movement for wages for housework. A member of the WFF Triveneto Committee which coordinates that movement in Italy, she was in New Orleans following her participation in the international WFF meeting, recently in Toronto, Canada.

This movement is the strongest thrust of women's liberation efforts in Italy now, she reports. Since it originated in 1971, two marches have been held, with another planned for May of 1976. She says the movement has spread throughout the country, in small towns as well as in Rome and Milan.

Reasoning of the movement is that the

workers for the price of one. "Husbands and children profit directly by women's housework, but employers also profit indirectly," Ms. Dalla Costa explains. "If women did not take care of the children, do the shopping, clean the house, do the washing, male employees would not be able to work as much because they'd have to spend many hours doing these duties."

The movement is seeking that the government pay wages to women who work in the home. Where the money will come from to support these wages will depend on the strength of the workers, she says. "Employees must show their strength so that the cost will be passed on to employers, not to the working people."

So far, leaders of the Communist Party as well as more conservative political factions have said no to the idea, she reports.

"The state's economists have figured out that women's housework has a lot of value—that it would cost much money to pay for the services a woman does. But it is to the benefit of the state to be against wages for housework because it will save the state money and keep low the power of women."

"If the employees get more wages, the government helps the employers by passing the cost on to consumers, say in higher food or gasoline costs. This often means more work for women—such as having to prepare more complicated meals to stretch the food budget. Women have been so weak—because they have no income—that they have had to make these sacrifices."

SHE PREDICTS "when the government is forced to pay women wages, political leaders will try to divide women by saying, for example, that some women should earn less because they work outside the home."

But the WFF leaders do not intend to buy that. "It cannot be assumed that a woman who works outside the house

says, "What really happens is that she gets up earlier, does housework until late at night and works at a more intensified speed."

The movement is therefore seeking that all women from age 15 be eligible for wages for housework. "We are not linking the payment to marriage," she explains. "When an Italian girl turns 15, her I.D. card says 'houseworker' if she is not employed outside the house. Many girls do housework in their family home. Many older, widowed women must do housework for their married children in return for a place to live and food to eat."

Last they be accused of female chauvinism, the WFF leaders are also seeking that men be eligible for wages if they perform housework.)

The WFF movement has made some headway in Italy, she reports. By striking against employers, some women have won wages for their housework. More such strikes are being planned and working women are bringing their children to their places of employment to illustrate their double duties.

ITALY MAY NOT be the only country in for a surprise from housewives. Since Ms. Dalla Costa helped start the movement, with Selma James of Great Britain, it has spread to the United States, Canada, Germany, and Switzerland.

A New Orleans chapter is being started by Mary Capps, former head of the YWCA's rape crisis program. The local group will hold a meeting, featuring Ms. Dalla Costa, at St. Mark's Community Center, 1130 N. Rampart, at 7 Tuesday night. Persons interested in learning about the local group may call 861-4480.

In May of this year, women and supportive men marched in cities throughout the world in the first international demonstration for wages for housework. Ms. Dalla Costa says participation crossed pro-anti women's movement lines.

The wages for housework movement



women," she says. "When we win the struggle, women will be able to be more comfortable and free, in whatever role—career or homemaker—they choose."

Ms. Capps hopes the movement will cut across pro-anti movement lines here, too, by improving, rather than putting down, women who choose to work within the home.

One of the American WFF movement songs certainly should have wide appeal. "There's too much worryment goes into a bonnet."

"There's too much ironing goes to a shirt."

"There's nothing that pays for the time we waste on it."

"There's nothing that lasts but trouble and dirt."

Entitled "The Housewife's Lament," it was written by Sarah Price, housewife