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Women exist on the other 364 days, too

March 8, 2007

INTERNATIONAL Women's Day, which falls today, is far from a contemporary occurrence. One of the events behind its genesis occurred on March 8, 1917 (February 23 in the Julian calendar), when Russian women began a four-day strike for "bread and peace"; the strike, after 2 million Russian men died in World War I, was a contributing factor in the revolution. In the years since, International Women's Day has been observed across the world as evolutionary rather than revolutionary; yet at its heart is an acknowledgement of how courageous women with little or no power could, by acting together, change their circumstances and have a profound and lasting effect on history.

Although today is rightly seen as one to celebrate women's achievements and the progress of feminism, it is just as important to use the day for inspiration, guidance and furtherance of ideas and ideals to take into the other 364 days of the year. Independence and equality for women have been representative of a long continuing struggle, not exclusively for recognition and acknowledgement but also for confirmation that true equality exists for all the right reasons. There should, after all, be little sensation caused by a woman becoming a chief justice or union leader or even presidential nominee — that there still is a sign that confirmation of women's rights to such positions is not yet absolute and that more work still needs to be done.

The gains made by the women's movement, although substantial, are not consistent. A good reminder of this can be seen in this week's ACTU analysis, based on recent Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, showing that full-time female workers earn an average 10 per cent less than men and that real wages of women have fallen 2 per cent in the past year. The war may be over; the battle continues.

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