

TORONTO STAR

# NEWS

## ON SUNDAY



Women and supporters march on Bloor St. yesterday on International Women's Day. One topic was recent laws to make abortions illegal. RICHARD LAUTENS/TORONTO STAR

## 3,500 march for women's day

### Focus on hotel workers' plight, daycare crisis

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STAFF REPORTER

Thank Prime Minister Stephen Harper for the huge turnout at the International Women's Day march in Toronto yesterday.

His plans to scrap a national daycare plan pledged by the former Liberal government galvanized support for the 28th annual rally and march that filled sunny downtown streets with 3,500 people chanting and carrying signs and banners. About 750 marched last year.

"I believe in the tradition of International Women's Day and the importance of equal rights. And I'm here to send a message to the Harper government," said Mike Phillips, a Toronto teacher. "Thirty years is too long to wait for a national child-care program. We're not going to rest until we get it."

Virginia Thomson recalls when her mother was an active member of the movement for a national child-care program. That was in the 1950s. "Now I'm about to be a grandmother. The situation, never mind getting better, is getting worse."

As the director of a non-profit child-care centre in a Toronto school, Thomson said she fields as many as eight calls a day from families asking about available spots for their child. "I have nothing to say to them and it's extremely demoralizing. It's been decades and decades and we're still not there," she said.

"We're angry but we're also hopeful now that something has been put into place and we're not just going to let that be taken away."

For 27-year-old Nicole Sullivan, the march was a way to lend support to two important issues — daycare and ending violence against women.

Violence was a factor in her life when she was growing up, Sullivan said. And, especially now that she has a son — 22-month-

old Nicholas — affordable and high-quality daycare has also become a concern. "It's important for our society to come together. I think it helps other women come out and speak. Numbers are powerful."

Speakers at the rally just prior to the march addressed a variety of issues, from persistent gaps in pay equity and national child care to legislation passed in South Dakota last week that

**'It's important for our society to come together. I think it helps other women come out and speak.'**

NICOLE SULLIVAN,  
Mother at march

makes abortion illegal, even in cases of incest and rape.

"Not only do we have to fight for the goals we haven't yet won," long-time activist and teacher Cherie MacDonald told

a packed auditorium at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. "We have to fight all over again for what we thought we won."

The struggle of low-paid, primarily female hotel workers was a key focus of the event.

Karen Dublin, a nurse in her native Guyana, has worked as a room attendant for the Sheraton Centre hotel for 13 years. "We want to talk to you about the realities of the job," she told the crowd. "The hotel companies we work for exploit our labour. They sell an image to their customers of comfort and caring, but they do not care about their workers."

The median wage for non-union housekeepers is \$10.48 per hour. That goes up to \$14 per hour for unionized workers.

The median annual wage for all housekeepers is \$26,000 and there are few benefits.

On-the-job injuries are common as hotels offer bigger beds and rooms with more amenities, but do not hire more housekeepers to help handle the load.