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Women to fight funding cuts

Groups vow to be radical force against perceived anti-feminist government

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STAFF REPORTER

Almost a dozen national and local women's groups, one of Nova Scotia's two female MPs and all three of its female MLAs joined Wednesday in attacking Ottawa's decision to cut funding for women's centres.

Women's groups are pledging to become a united, radical force to fight what they say is an anti-feminist federal government.

At a press conference in Halifax, the groups pledged solidarity in their fight to reinstate \$1.6 million for women's resource centres cut in February's federal budget.

Halifax MP Mary Clancy, Liberal status of women critic, and the province's female

MLAs, one from each party, condemned the funding withdrawal.

NDP Leader Alexa McDonough said it was "an historic first" that she, Liberal Sandy Jolly, and PC Marie Dechman expressed solidarity on an issue.

The province's two women's resource centres, which provide services such as helping women re-enter the workforce, may close.

Second Story Women's Centre in Bridgewater and Antigonish Women's Resource Centre will lose their entire budgets of \$48,000 and \$43,000, respectively, as part of cuts to the Secretary of State's Women's Program.

The two centres would serve the Lockeport and Canso areas, where women have been affected by layoffs at National Sea

Products fish plants.

"Our area is in severe crisis right now," said Lucille Harper of the Antigonish centre.

"Many women who worked at the fish plant in Canso are faced with the situation of having to start over again and we see many of those women coming through our centre. What it means when we're not there is that there's one more door closed and one more crack for women to slip through."

The cuts are a deliberate effort by the male-dominated federal Parliament to undermine feminism, representatives of women's groups charged yesterday.

Money for the program is "peanuts" compared to other initiatives, so the government's slashing of the fund is a symbolic gesture, said Mildred Miller of the Women's Action Coalition of Nova Scotia.

"This represents a direct attack on the heart of the women's movement in Canada," said Linda Christiansen-Ruffman of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women.

She said federal funding to women's programs has been reduced to 75 cents for each woman.

Ms. Clancy agreed the government was trying to silence women.

"I think it is unfair of Michael Wilson to attempt to balance his budget on the back of Canadian women," she said. "Sadly, this is part of what I believe to be a concerted effort to diminish women."

In the legislature yesterday, a motion by Mrs. Dechman, Lunenburg West MLA, to ask Ottawa to restore funding to Nova Scotia's centres was carried.