

SUMMARY OF THE ONTARIO FEDERATION
OF LABOUR BRIEF TO THE GOVERNMENT
OF ONTARIO ON THE RESULTS OF THE
CAMPAIGN ON WOMEN AND AFFIRMATIVE
ACTION

MAKING UP THE DIFFERENCE:
ONTARIO WOMEN SPEAK OUT:

"Affirmative Action is not
'women into management' -
it is a systematic program
which roots out discriminatory
practices, puts in place train-
ing programs, support systems,
targets for hiring and promotion
and aims at economic equality."

April 26, 1984

SUMMARY OF THE ONTARIO FEDERATION
OF LABOUR BRIEF TO THE GOVERNMENT
OF ONTARIO ON THE RESULTS OF THE
CAMPAIGN ON WOMEN AND AFFIRMATIVE
ACTION

MAKING UP THE DIFFERENCE:
ONTARIO WOMEN SPEAK OUT:

"Affirmative Action is not
'women into management' -
it is a systematic program
which roots out discriminatory
practices, puts in place train-
ing programs, support systems,
targets for hiring and promotion
and aims at economic equality."

April 26, 1984

The adoption of a policy statement on affirmative action and women at the 1982 Convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour resulted in a series of public forums around Ontario to gather the views of individuals and organizations on this crucial question. Over 170 briefs were received at nine forums. The full report presents an extensive summary of the evidence of pervasive systemic discrimination brought forward at these forums. All of the issues raised are variations on the dominant theme -- the need for mandatory affirmative action and equal pay for work of equal value legislation.

In its first chapter the report addresses the question of the impact of the educational system on the perpetuation of inequalities in our society and its workplaces. The Ontario school system continues to mold children's perceptions of the roles of women and men which reflect an essentially sexist bias. This flies in the face of the reality which now exists: women's participation in the labour force continues to increase and their role as wage and salary earners is critical to the well-being of families in Ontario and of the economic system itself.

Not only is the system of sex-role stereotyping being maintained in the school system, women who work within it at all levels are subjected to discrimination and are systematically prevented from rising to positions of authority and decision-making within it.

"One male teacher in four can expect to be promoted to a position of added responsibility during his career, while only one in fifty women teachers can realistically hold this expectation."

Sault Ste. Marie Women's Teachers

The proportion of women in the positions of principal and vice-principal in primary and secondary schools across the province is grossly unrepresentative of the number of women teachers in the system. At the University of Western Ontario only 11-13% of faculty are women and even in faculties with a majority of female students most teachers are male.

The effect of this process is to further reinforce the perception of children and adolescents that men tend to be in positions of authority and decision-making while women are not. As such, the closed nature of the system reinforces the stereotyping of the past.

Most school boards in Ontario do not have affirmative action programmes, while the proportion of female principals has actually declined in the last ten years. The mandatory affirmative action conclusion is inescapable here, coupled with non-sexist language and curriculum materials and training for school guidance counsellors, who are largely male, to make them aware of the need to stop channelling female students into 'traditional' female courses and occupations.

Once outside the school system, women are victimized by the effects of the streaming processes which go on in the system. Very often they were not encouraged or were actively discouraged from taking math and other technical courses. Then, when they leave school they are in the position of having to seek work in a market place which favours precisely

those skills which they do not have. In this way, the failures of the educational system direct women into the low-wage and insecure job ghettos which have been their lot since entering the paid workforce.

"If women are not to be drastically victimized by technological advances, they must be trained and educated in the new and non-traditional areas." Yet in Ontario there are only 26 women out of 1500 enrollees in Employer Sponsored Training (EST). Many employers are unwilling to hire women for non-traditional occupations and there is powerful documentation of systemic bias and barriers erected against those women who do persevere despite overwhelming odds to get appropriate training.

The sum of all the submissions on this subject lead us to the conclusion that Ontario must institute systems of universal educational leave, vastly expand training opportunities with a minimum target of 50% female participation, provide adequate funding for training allowances, flexibility in the programs which offer training to women, a free and universal publicly funded daycare system and the direct linking of education and training programs for women with stated affirmative action goals and objectives. Daycare is critical along with paid parental leave and a legislated requirement for ten paid days per year of leave to care for children who are ill. Together, these measures have the capacity to remove the institutional barriers which now prevent women from equal and full participation in the labour force.

The ongoing gap between the wages earned by women as opposed to men may be well-known, but many of the briefs presented to our forums spoke to specific instances of outright discrimination, which our current laws completely fail to address.

"Classification systems and job evaluation programmes were found to perpetuate discrimination by weighing male skills and working conditions such as physical strength and dirty, noisy workplaces more heavily than female skills and working conditions such as dexterity, stress and the responsibilities of office work."

Often job descriptions clearly indicate that the work performed by women requires a higher level of skill and education than that performed predominantly by men, yet pay scales favour the male-dominated occupations. University truck drivers earn more than secretaries. Maintenance men earn more than health care workers of all types. Parking lot attendants earn more than receptionists. The litany is endless, and it is quite clear that equal pay for work of equal value legislation is essential.

The impact of microtechnology has often further eroded the position of women by reclassifying the new, machine-bound positions into lower pay categories, by vastly increasing the work load (at Bell Canada operators who used to handle about 320 calls per day are now required to handle up to 1400 per day) and often by requiring greater skills and more difficult and stressful work without providing for compensatory increases in pay.

In addition, there has been a rapid increase in the number of part-time workers, 75 percent of whom are women. These positions lack the standards and benefits of full-time work and are predominantly non-union. With the scarcity of jobs, employers are exploiting the desperate need for women to work turning full-time into part-time positions for their own convenience and to avoid paying benefits. An obvious case must be made here for immediate improvements in the employment standards of part-time workers and an end to this growing employer practice.

Finally, the forums heard many briefs on the disgrace of sexual harassment on the job. This kind of harassment falls most frequently on women in probationary and other insecure positions. It occurs in an air of intimidation, threat and fear. Clearly the capacity of the Ontario Human Rights Commission to investigate and deal with such complaints must be significantly beefed up through the provision of greater funding and staff, and an expansion of education and publicity on the issue.

The position of women who are elderly, of colour, immigrant, unorganized and single mothers is even more desperate than that of women generally. The government must move to improve the lot of women in this position of double jeopardy by encouraging and easing the rules for union organization, improving the minimum wage significantly and making English as a second language courses available in work places around the province. The public pension system must be

expanded and strengthened. Pensions must increase with the standard of living of the society as a whole and be available to people at the age of 60 if they are unemployed or widowed. A decision not to act in these circumstances is to condemn a large proportion of our population to lives of poverty and desperation.

The current economic recession has hit women much harder than men because the minor gains which were made towards equality in the society and the workplace have been wiped out or frozen by the effects of cutbacks, layoffs, plant closures and wage controls. Many women fear that campaigns already won will have to be re-fought to regain even the ground made before the recession. Women were the 'last in' in non-traditional occupations and they were the first to be thrown out by the recession.

We recommend an immediate end to wage controls so that the process of bargaining to close the gap between men and women's wages can be renewed.

Finally, it is crystal clear from all of the briefs and submissions to the forums that voluntary measures cannot create a world of equality between women and men in Ontario. Only legislated, mandatory affirmative action and legislated equal pay for work of equal value provisions combined with training and support measures can make that possible.

We urge the Ministers of the Government of Ontario to read the evidence presented in the full report and to conclude with us that the injustices must be stopped through mandatory legislation now.