

April 16, 1988 - Judy Vashti Persad, Women Working With Immigrant Women

I am proud to be speaking today on behalf of Women Working With Immigrant women, and to add our voices to the hundreds gathered here today - publicly pledging to continue to fight, for full access to free abortion.

I am a Caribbean woman, an immigrant to this country - and for most Asian, Black, Native, South Asian and other women of colour and immigrant women, choice is an illusion. The laws, institutions, and economic structures of this society perpetuate racism and sexism, denying us our reproductive freedom. Our right to choose whether or not to have children, our right to reproduction itself, has been denied us.

We know there is access to abortion, but it's a very privileged access. Women with economic resources, who knows how to use the health care system, have the right to abortion. It's the working class woman, the Immigrant Woman, and the Woman of Colour, who does not have this access - And this we will not accept!

We need, not only the right to abortion, but the facilities in our own communities and our own languages, in order to make that choice a reality! That is why we raise the demand for full access to free abortion for every woman in this country!

This is not an abstract struggle for us. The issues we are fighting for, are real and immediate. Women are suffering every day, because the demands we are raising are not being met.

We know we have the power to make changes, if we work together. The recent overturning of the federal abortion law has made it perfectly clear - change takes place through the strength of a movement.

But as we make gains, the attacks increase - as we have seen in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island.

- The right is organizing.
- The federal government is threatening to bring in another abortion law.

So our task is clear.

We must continue to build the reproductive rights movement.

A movement which speaks to the reality of every woman's life, whether she is a woman of colour, an immigrant woman, poor, working class, disabled, young or old woman.

A movement, which when speaks of, and struggles for reproductive freedom, must include a range of women's issues.

We must demand an end to forced or coerced sterilization, which particularly affect Native Women, Black Women, and Disabled Women.

We must demand safe and effective birth control in our own communities and in our own languages.

We must demand free universal childcare and paid parental leave.

We must demand an end to the harassment of Native Mothers by the courts and Children's Aid.

We must continue to demand full access to free abortion.

We do not want an abortion law which will still allow therapeutic abortion committees to control access - access which is based on racist assumptions, stereotypes and practices. We refuse to accept a law, which allows for doctors to insist on the sterilization of Black and Native Women, as a prerequisite for an abortion.

We joined together to overturn the racist/sexist federal law!  
And we must continue to build a fighting movement.  
This is the time to build a campaign from coast to coast.

A mass movement made up of everyone, who has a commitment to equality and women's rights. We will have to mobilize our forces, so that the provinces understand, that we will not accept a woman being denied an abortion because medicare funding has been withdrawn or the services aren't there.

We say no to cutbacks and yes to full funding of abortion services. We must send a clear message to the federal government, that the people of this country will not accept another abortion law.

We must continue to press for full access to free abortion in every province across the country.

The time has passed when we must justify ourselves and our needs to the state and professionals. The time has come when, by the strength of our movement, abortion rights can finally be ours.