

November 7th, 1989

WOMEN WORKING WITH IMMIGRANT WOMEN

On behalf of Women Working With Immigrant Women I would like to state that we recognize work as a principal necessity for the mental health, for healthy family relations and the social life of Immigrant, Refugee and Visible Minority Women who are struggling to adjust and to integrate economically and socially into a new society.

WWIW, an umbrella organization of 40 community-based agencies serving Immigrant, Refugee and Visible Minority Women in the Metro Toronto Area, would speak in favour of the proposal to establish a Labour Development Unit for the City of Toronto. We believe that such a Unit will give us some control over the politics of Unemployment, Underemployment and the poverty experienced by workers of this city, and make the solutions of some of these problems reachable. This thinking and our support is based on our years of experience which taught us that Immigrant, Refugee and Visible Minority women are forgotten by policy makers, our issues are ignored or manipulated by the politicians and the larger community and movements and to-date the majority of us we remain the most exploited sector of the labour force. If this was not true we wouldn't need to form the Alliance for Employment Equity and this truth can be demonstrated if one examines the Pay Equity legislation which does little for us, by the Lark Manufacturing Inc. Workers who were owed hundred of dollars in unpaid wages and other benefits when the plant closed and it can be demonstrated by the hundreds of phone calls and complains we receive daily by our people asking for support and advice. The majority of these workers are in unorganized workplaces, working for minimum wages and in places where health and safety standards are not met and injuries are not reported and where Employment standards are not implemented.

It is always assumed that is enough to introduce legislation and is assumed that we all benefit. It is believed that we all benefit from existing services and programs. This is far from reality.

-The structures of many institutions, white, middle class mentality and training of staff, programs which don't meet peoples needs and language barriers make the services of many institutions unaccessible.

-Threats and restrictions from immigration policies and restrictions because of status keep immigrant and refugee workers silent.

-Racial discrimination, lack of educational and training opportunities segregate them into dead end, low paying jobs.

The last who benefit (and they benefit the least,) from the economic development and the so call prosperity is the workers in this city. They can't afford what they produce, they can't afford to live in the houses they build and they can't afford the services for which they are taxed.

When this Unit is established, could do the following from which we could benefit:

-In conjunction with community and labour organizations organize educational workshops on Health and Safety, Employment Standards and workers compensation issues.

-Lobby other levels of government and all government departments for improvements and enforcement of standards.

- Lobby for and monitor the implementation of mandatory Employment Equity programs in the public and private sectors.
- Launch campaigns on labour issues, and mobilize support for the struggles of unorganized workers.
- Distribute multilingual information to workers and refer them to the appropriate services and programs.
- Do research and monitor the effects of Free Trade on the workers of the City of Toronto.

-Lobby for adequate funding for Employment Training programs which meet the needs of workers who need retraining

-Lobby for the recognition of work as a principal necessity for the mental health, for healthy family relations and the social well being of people and assist the city council to develop policies which will guarantee that employers who have contracts with the city meet labour standards and create full time good paying jobs.