

May Day 2010

On this May Day, Women Together Ending Poverty salutes all workers locally and globally who are organizing to resist exploitation and oppression. We especially salute the women who face the worst working conditions, whether outside or in their home. And as workingwomen, as your mothers and grandmothers, aunts and sisters, daughters and granddaughters, we want to raise a series of questions and demands.

Do we really want an economic system where working people - who produce the real wealth in this world- are the first to suffer when the system runs amok? This latest crisis in capitalism has destroyed thousands of our jobs and reduced our quality of life; it is also being used as an excuse to attack our public services; and to open the door to increased privatization and profits for multinationals.

Do we really want an economic system where politicians say we are recovering from the crisis, but it's a recovery for the banks and financial institutions only. We have not seen our jobs come back – especially in Alberta. Instead this crisis and the lack of jobs is perfect soil for corporations and neo-liberal politicians to weaken our labour organizations and our working conditions. Employers push for more flexibility in the work force especially in sectors where women are concentrated. More flex means more part time jobs, fewer or no benefits and no job security. Meanwhile politicians slash training and academic upgrading funds.

Do we want an economic system where recurrent crises and government policies translate into more poverty especially for working women and their families? All agencies serving women have seen an increase in the numbers of women and their children coming to them for housing, food, bus tickets and general support. Women are often so tired they are asleep on their feet.

Do we want an economic system where many women cannot afford to pay rent or buy a bus pass; or are forced to use the food bank as a regular source of food rather than on an emergency basis?

Do we want an economic system where some of us find ourselves forced into sex trade work in order to feed our families because that's where some of the highest paid jobs are? In many families women are the only source of income and we are experiencing deterioration in our lives and health.

Do we want an economic system where we can purchase cheap consumer goods because well paid union jobs disappear here and corporations super exploit workers elsewhere? Even in the best of times the capitalist system has exploited women's labour by paying us less than men, and if they can, pitting us against men in competition for jobs. The system has also exploited our unpaid labour in the home, where we take the major responsibility in reproducing the next generation of workers, even if we are in the paid workforce.

Women Together Ending Poverty says that at a minimum we need to hold politicians accountable and work to bring in governments that will legislate:

- Living wages and benefits for all whether we are in the paid workforce or on social assistance
- Pay equity whether we are working full or part time
- Universal and affordable child care
- Rent controls

And will provide:

- Increased training and academic upgrading funds
- Subsidized rents, and
- Increased access to services for the working poor

In the long run though, we need to challenge the idea that capitalism, with its built in crises, is the best way to organize our society. We need to begin thinking about and organizing to build a society where there is no exclusion and exploitation, and where all of us can lead productive and fulfilling lives. And remember, if we work for permanent systemic changes in our political, economic and social systems to improve the lives of women, we will also be improving the lives of men and children and build a better world for us all.