

Women's Equality and Rights are still not guaranteed

By Alice M.

On March 8th around the world women and their supporters celebrate International Women's Day.

International Women's Day was born in 1911 out of many long and hard struggles by women against oppression and inequality. Thousands of women from different walks of life in Europe and America united around their common cause for social and economic equality, the right to vote, equal opportunities, peace and justice.

Many struggles by working women were led by women from flourishing socialist and communist movements in late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Communist and socialist women were actively engaged in the immediate struggles for reforms within capitalism, but strongly argued that the real equality and emancipation of women cannot be realised under the system of capitalism founded on exploitation, oppression and inequality of all humanity.

They pointed to the inherently exploitative nature of capitalism as the main obstacle to attaining full equality and rights for women. Only socialism could create the conditions for genuine equality.

Celebrate and honour International Women's Day

Today, International Women's Day commemorations are held in all parts of the world celebrating and honouring the many struggles and achievements by women.

International Women's Day throws the spotlight on the conditions of life and work of billions of ordinary women around the globe.

Women's work, unrecognised, unrewarded and unglamorous, sustains societies, communities and families. Capitalism reaps extra profits from the lowly paid work of working women.

On this day we pay tribute and honour the courageous women in war-torn countries resisting the yoke of imperialist aggression and occupation.

We celebrate and are encouraged by the big strides towards emancipation made by women in socialist countries.

We are inspired by women in struggles for national liberation, socialism and independence of their countries.

Women in Australia

In today's Australia, the strength and persistence of Aboriginal women leading their peoples' fight for survival is an inspiration to all women.

This spirit is poignantly represented by the life and work of the greatly

respected Aboriginal singer and song writer, the late Ruby Hunter.

Women's struggles thirty years ago had achieved some improvements in the lives of women. Equal pay for equal work, more accessible child care, legislation on equal opportunity and sexual harassment, even if mostly in word and on paper, acknowledged women's rights.

Going backwards

But even these small achievements have been whittled away in past 25 years.

Child care is again unaffordable to many women preventing them from full participation in the workforce.

Limited maternity leave rights continue to disadvantage women's equal rights as workers.

Equal pay for work of equal value has not been realised, with most women still concentrated in low paid jobs. Most women are still in the position of economic insecurity and dependency.

There are still many obstacles in the path of women's full and equal participation in the workforce.

In spite of equal opportunity legislation, it is overridden by the rule of capitalist exploitation of labour. Workplace structures and organisation are solely designed to improve productivity, cut costs and maximise profit.

Equal opportunity in the workplace through paternity leave arrangements and flexible work arrangements are allowed only as far as productivity and profit margins are protected.

Australia's working women make up a mere 45% of the workforce. In June 2009 only 58% of women were in the paid workforce and only 55% in full time employment. Women make up over 70% of all part time workers.

Low paid jobs

Women are concentrated mainly in the low paid caring and human services industries – aged care, child care, disability, health and community services.

In the capitalist social system this work holds little value because big profits can't be made from caring for the sick, disabled, elderly and children.

Women are still missing in large numbers from trades and technical work, but are concentrated in lowly paid clerical, sales and personal services.

Most working women are on minimum wages and rely on awards. The recent Award modernisation under the Labor government has reduced penalty rates for some of the country's

lowest paid workers!

Pay Inequity

There is still a wide gender pay inequity gap between the earnings of women and men. Women earn less than men in all industry sectors, private and public. The worst gender pay gaps are finance and insurance (61%) and mining (76%).

Despite a persistent and prolonged fight for equal pay, women's pay remains well below men's earnings.

The small advances made by women unionists in closing the gender gap and achieving equal pay for work of equal value are quickly lost as part of big business' downward push on all workers' wages and conditions.

The gender pay gap has been slightly closed in the past 25 years from 19.3% to 17.2%, but is still too great.

Women covered by collective agreements earn 10% above women on individual contractual arrangements.

Many provisions in WorkChoices that had hit women hard – penalty rates, unfair dismissal, inflexible carers' leave, individual contracts – are continuing under Labor's Fair Work

Women's superannuation earnings are also still well below men's.

Trade Union leader rattles the cage

by Bill F.

Electrical Trades Union Secretary Dean Mighell has spoken out against the formal affiliation of many trade unions to the Australian Labor Party. This sentiment is shared by increasing numbers of unionists and workers disappointed with Labor.

Key points from his article in the Melbourne Age are reproduced...

"Too often, despite the theatre, both Labor and the Liberals now look to the polls rather than their party conferences for policymaking. There can be no more glowing example than that of industrial relations policy.

"Labor has effectively adopted most of the Howard government's IR policy, and re-badged it, and refers to it as "Fair Work". But in reality, big business and their representatives have had unprecedented access to Labor and are delighted with the results.

"Even Howard's Building Industry Taskforce has been retained, to the delight of multimillionaire builders and developers...

"During the recent Senate inquiry into the Fair Work Bill, the ACTU refused to buy into the debate that the bill contained

Women's superannuation deposits are a third less than men's.

Many women work part time or casual hours earning less than \$450 a week, the cut off limit beneath which workers earn no super.

70% of family primary care-givers are women. They care for pre-school and school-aged children, the elderly, chronically ill and disabled family members in their own time on top of paid work.

Non-flexible working arrangements for carers and little government funding for community carers' support services prevents many working class women from realising their employment potentials and work fulfilment.

This inequality in women's employment opportunities entrenches wider social and cultural discrimination, as well as male chauvinism.

Resistance to women in leadership positions and discouragement of women's equal participation in public and social life still persists.

Imperialist globalisation and intensified capitalist exploitation are placing heavier burdens on women in developing and developed capitalist countries alike.

The fight for women's rights and equality is not over by any means.

many breaches of human rights as defined by Australia's international obligations under International Labour Organisation conventions.

"If the ACTU is so severely compromised by the ALP relationship that it can't stand up and fight for basic workers rights, then something is seriously wrong...

"Many workers are sceptical that ALP affiliation is too often a mechanism to ensure pre-selection to a safe Labor seat for a few union leaders and they rightly ask, to what end?

"I've seen too many union leaders who think the ALP is the "main game" and spend most of their time wheeling and dealing in the ugly factional process. I'll admit, I've done my bit too, but I've always known that a union's mission is looking after workers, not preselection.

"Unions must act strategically. That may include backing independents and parties that care about the interests of ordinary working people.

"Collectively, unions represent close to 2 million Australian's directly as members; we act to protect millions more. We proved with the "Your Rights at Work" campaign that we can be Australia's most powerful lobby group."