

Women in the changing Labour Market

A perennial problem facing decisions makers at all levels is primarily that of influencing the change process. Unfortunately, it would seem that the will to change is something that crosses all boundaries. It runs from the top to the bottom of the social ladder. In the workplace is it common place to hear the remark of 'this is how it is done here.' That is known as the workplace culture. There is nothing that will last forever and so it becomes the responsibility of leaders to drive the process of change.

In today's workplace there is a seemingly a need for change. These are induced by changes to human resources and industrial relations practices, and moreover by the technological changes and advancements that have engulfed the world.

One of the most significant changes to be recorded has been the engaging of women into the workforce. Over fifty years ago the labour market called for improvements in the employments rights and freedoms for women. As it stands, women are increasingly entering male dominated professions and jobs. In many progressive societies they have attained such things as maternity leave and equal pay.

Barbados as a small island developing country, which this year is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary as an independent nation, can be counted as a leader in ensuring that there is equality in the workplace. This is significant when compared to the revelations of findings of labour market study completed by Fawcett in the United Kingdom. The study addressed the changing labour market and its implications for women. It revealed that women also face stark inequalities within the labour market. There remains the persistent gap between women and men's pay. The observations were made of women in full-time work currently earning an average of 15% less per hour than men, and the dominance of women in low paid, low grade work. The point was reinforced that these factors also have a knock-on impact on women's economic status in later life, citing that women's average personal pensions are only 62% of the average for men's and that they make up the majority of pensioners living below the breadline.

It is hard to believe that within the 21st Century that a developed and industrialized society would be find itself operating at a level that calls the integrity of governance into question. The fact that women in the private sector are paid less than women at the equivalent levels of the pay distribution scale in public sector and less than men at the at the equivalent levels in the public and private sector is to be abhorred.

Amongst the startling observations coming out of this Fawcett study that dates back to 2012, are the barriers facing women in accessing job opportunities in the private sector, and the growing concerns about the quality of jobs available. These findings highlight the growing inequalities and practices of discrimination that continue to be evident in

the mother country. This gives much credence to the importance that is to be attached to independence, for it allows for progressive decisions to be made; where there is the will to do.

Caribbean Trade Unionists can be proud of their achievements; much of which emerged from the struggles of the 1930's social unrest against social and economic ills. There is every good reason to identify with and support with the Fawcett recommendations of that unless robust action is taken to both ensure that women are able to benefit fully from decent work opportunities in the private sector and to tackle the lower levels of pay and the wider pay gap in the private sector, we are likely to witness persistent and rising levels of female unemployment, particularly amongst single mothers, diminishing levels of female pay across the board and a widening of the overall pay gap between men and women.

Where ever we are in the world, we should take a good look at the prevailing situation as it relates to women in the work force, only if to ensure that archaic thinking, attitudes and actions and not allowed to be perpetuated.