

Action due in Decade for Women

MS DIANA Lin's three-part report on ATV News (May 23, 24, 25) regarding the recruitment and training policies of married women in Government training institutions has focused attention on the more subtle ways in which some women are being prevented from obtaining equal career opportunities with men.

The reasons for the present policies given by the directors of these institutions were feeble and unconvincing, and although they may not be responsible for their original implementation, neither have they taken the initiative to revise them in line with the greater part which women play today in the social and civic affairs of Hongkong, and in making their own life choices as responsible individuals.

This report showed yet again that unless women take the initiative to become well-informed and aware, and join together to ask for needed changes, nothing will be done to improve their situation.

Legislation is passed, campaigns are conducted, decisions are made, but the effects of all these on women is never considered.

Another example of this was demonstrated recently in the Industrial Safety Campaign which omitted altogether the dangers to pregnant women of exposure to gases or radiation machinery.

So while a great deal is done to try to improve the conditions of workers in general, the safety of a large number of women has been neglected.

It is a well-known fact that in Hongkong many problems and needs are hidden and emerge only when some incident brings them to the surface. One needs only to look at the meagre improvements made for women since 1975, the year which the United Nations declared the commencement of the Decade for Women.

The changing of legislation and raising of awareness with regards to rape, the introduction of paid maternity leave, and parity of conditions in the civil service, the only concessions made so far during this decade, were energetically campaigned for and obtained by women's groups in Hongkong.

And despite their lobbying and hard work, and the obvious need, separate taxation for working women, a women's information and resource centre, and a refuge for women and children in distress, have met with great resistance and inextinguishable barriers from the Government and some members of the business community.

We are well aware of the generally held opinion in Hongkong that in raising the status of women we are pitching women against men.

On the contrary, an independent and competent woman will be less isolated and alienated from the rest of the community. She will have more to offer in her co-existence with other women and men in an inter-dependent society.

By improving the life options for women, whether educational, legal, financial or familial does not mean taking away any gains which men

may have made.

Such suspicion and antagonism seldom arises in promoting the cause of other target groups during the Decade for Women, such as the aged, the child, or the handicapped.

The Decade for Women is now more than three-quarters over. In order that Hongkong gives at least equal support to this UN Declaration as it has given to the target groups identified on the UN International Year's basis, we suggest the setting up of a Women's Advisory Council, consisting of concerned women aware of the condition and the needs of all women in Hongkong, to screen policies, make recommendations and suggestions, and present reports from a women's perspective.

Such an advisory council (set up long ago in most developed and developing countries to mark the Decade for Women), could have suggested the updating of the unrealistic recruitment and training policies still lingering on in our Government training institutions.

We urge this step in the words of the United Nations declaration that "... the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world, and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women as well as men in all fields."

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