

Program in workers' interest

Affirmative action for native people and for women were the subjects of two panel discussions Saturday at International Women's Day activities.

Syncrude's preferential hiring of native people in north-

eastern Alberta was the topic of Herb Callihoe of Syncrude.

The program applies only to treaty Indians, not to Metis or non-status Indians.

Syncrude has also hired counsellors for the native people and their families and trained

supervisors and managers in various aspects of native culture, Callihoe explained.

Joanna Johnson, administrator of the Frog Lake Indian Reserve, said 85 percent of the people on her reserve are unemployed. Without affirmative action, she said, there are

no guarantees of employment. "How do you get your people ready to go out and compete?" she asked.

"It is very difficult to tell people who've always been discriminated against that they are reverse discriminating," she said. "It makes you sick."

Neil Reimer, president of Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, said Syncrude's affirmative action programs were not voluntary. According to Reimer, they were instituted in return for federal investment in the project when Atlantic Richfield withdrew.

"No other companies will follow suit because they are afraid of the human rights legislation," he said.

"The test of affirmative action is how many of them (natives) are still there ten years down the road."

In a second panel discussion, Rosemary Ray of the "Women Into Stelco" campaign, discussed affirmative action in Alberta.

Women have been systematically kept out of industry since the industrial revolution, Ray said.

"Women must fight in alliance with the trade union movement to force companies to hire and train women," she said.

"It is in all workers' interests to support affirmative action. It eliminates pools of workers who will work for low pay and threaten the jobs of the men."

It is burying your head in the sand to say women should be given equal treatment rather than preferential treatment, said Harry Kostiuk, president of the Alberta Federation of Labour.

Six provinces and the federal government already have affirmative action, he pointed out.

"We are not even following, let alone leading, as far as human rights legislation is concerned," said Kostiuk.

Kostiuk said quotas were fine as long as they are imposed fairly and equally. He also said he was in favour of preferential seniority to redress years of inequality.

"Let's face it, sisters and brothers, we have got a lot of educating to do," he concluded.

Equality only protects the present imbalance, said Jennifer Bowerman, vice president of the Alberta Union of Public Employees. "AUPE would like to see 50 per cent women distributed fairly throughout the public service."

Minister of Labour, Les Young, began his remarks by commenting on the "less than objective viewpoints here." He referred to "political parties and trade unions trying to sway people to their position by using this issue."

The goal of one and all is that every person be able to participate effectively in a social and economic sense, Young said.

What we are dealing with is systemic discrimination, which is not willful but just occurs he said. "It is our target to remove that systemic discrimination," he added.

"It is a fundamental principle that all groups should be treated equally."

"I think we can eliminate all existing systemic discrimination under the existing legislation," he concluded.



The IWD march up 109 Street to Sir Winston Churchill Square.

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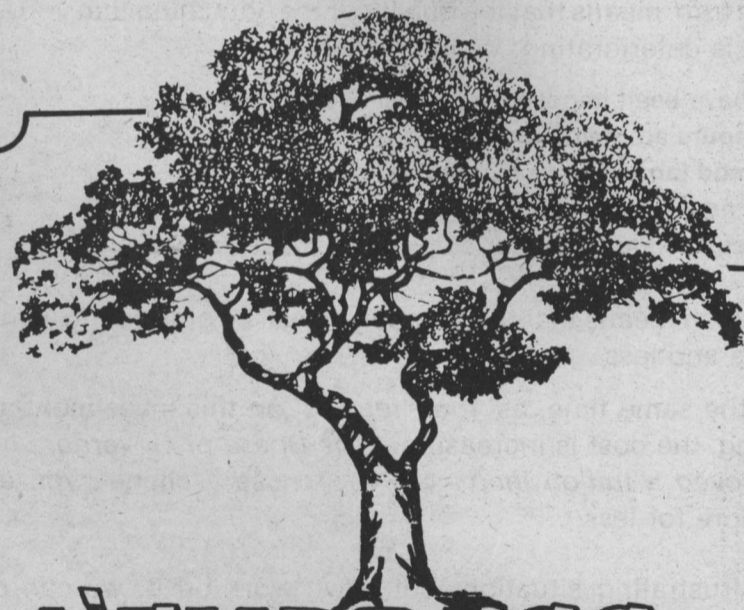
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