

STATEMENT TO THE DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM COMMITTEE
by RUBY DUNCAN, Clark County, Nevada Welfare Rights Organization
for NATIONAL WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAUCUS and WOMEN'S LOBBY, INC.
Atlanta, Georgia, April 17, 1976

The few minutes I have I would like to devote to Full Employment from a welfare recipient's point of view.

First, you should realize that welfare can be viewed as a great way to want to live - if you died yesterday.

However, if you are alive it is the most humiliating experience you will ever suffer. I would not wish it on my worst enemy.

The popular image is a do-nothing person who talks loud, rides in a cadillac limousine and won't work. That more correctly describes President Jerry Ford than a welfare recipient.

We have the added insult of hearing "workfare not welfare". You should know that when you talk of workfare and of welfare - you talk as though they were separate choices to be made by welfare recipients. I have been after workfare for years - until I realized - as you must now realize - that there is no choice - welfare exists but workfare does not. So far all proposals for full employment have not included us.

The Democratic Party must develop a national policy for Full Employment that does include us. Create a choice. Don't talk about one that has never existed.

So:

- First: count us when developing a policy for full employment.
- Second: don't create jobs that I don't qualify for. Remember that traditional qualifications of white and male exclude me.
- Third: a job that forces me to abandon my children to the streets is not acceptable. A job must provide a decent wage so that health care and child care are possible.
- Fourth: employment for all will not occur overnight. If a woman is not adequately compensated in the home the family will be weak and a new generation of welfare created. Only nationwide application of adequate compensatory grants will avoid this.

We, like you, believe in the bootstrap theory. But remember it is a cruel jest to tell a bootless person to pick herself up by her own bootstraps.

In short, this Great Party must face up fully to the fact that most welfare mothers have been discriminated into welfare, and then discriminated against for being there. We have always been ready to move out, but the barriers have to be replaced with bridges. Let us today start the building here. THANK YOU.