

Women's Liberation Today



Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'Action socialiste in the Canadian state celebrated International Women's Day with a webcast on March 4, 2021.

This booklet presents the participants' remarks.

To see and hear the entire recorded event, please go to YouTube and type Socialist Action Canada, and/or visit:

www.socialistaction.ca

**On the 110th
Anniversary
of IWD for
Feminism
and
Socialism!**

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The statement below was presented by Socialist Action Treasurer Elizabeth Byce to lead off the SA webcast on March 4, 2021.

A women's conference of the Socialist International in Copenhagen in 1910 launched International Women's Day globally in 1911. Trotskyist parties, including the predecessor organization of Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'Action socialiste in the Canadian state, re-launched the modern IWD in Canada forty-three years ago, in 1978.

We did this for good reason. Women's oppression is rooted in the capitalist system. As it does with heterosexism, racism, environmental destruction and war, capitalism profits from discrimination, dispossession and wasteful plunder of natural resources.

We march for bread ... and for roses too! We do so in the face of escalating attacks on basic human needs – a vicious pandemic that is linked to an unstable, unequal and unsustainable economy. Women have lost most of the jobs curtailed due to COVID-19.

Establishment claims that women have 'achieved equality' are nothing but a sick joke.

- On average, women are paid 25 per cent less than

men – \$7,200/year less than males. The gap would be bigger if not for the fact that male workers' wages have stagnated, or declined.

- 27 per cent of employed women work fewer than 30 hours per week, more than double the 12 per cent of men who work part-time. 7 out of 10 part-time workers are female.

- Low paid women increasingly hold more than one job to survive. This is particularly apparent in the health sector, including in Long Term Care, where female front-line workers have fallen victim to the global pandemic. 56 per cent of multiple job holders are women. 2.4 million women and girls (13.8%) lived on a low income in 2016.

- Aboriginal women and girls suffer shameful economic and social conditions. They are systemic victims of racism, inequality, physical assault, disappearance and murder.

- Most women still bear the double burden of doing most of the domestic labour, in addition to work outside the home.

While trillions of dollars are wasted globally on corporate bail-outs and militarism, women and girls are denied adequate education, economic opportunities, clean water, health care, reproductive

choice and personal security. From Palestine to Haiti, from Guatemala to Syria to Kashmir, women and children are disproportionately the casualties of wars and military occupation in which Ottawa is directly involved or complicit. Millions of women and men have demonstrated against the corporate agenda which threatens to increase sexism, racism, homophobia and exploitation on all levels.

To transform society our demands must be sharp and clear: No money for war. RCMP off Wet'suwet'en land! Imperialist Hands Off Venezuela! Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against the Zionist apartheid state! Canada Out of NATO! End all subsidies to Capital. Tax big business and the rich. Fund health care, education and social services. Provide universal, free, quality child care and pharma care. Enforce equal pay and equal access to good jobs. No two-tier wages/benefits. Restore funding to women's social justice organizations, emergency shelters and legal aid. Build quality social housing. Raise E.I. rates and ensure real access for part-time workers. Legislate a \$20 per hour minimum wage. End precarious employment. Provide paid sick leave to all, especially front-line workers. Nationalize private, for-profit Long Term Care companies.

Phase out the Alberta Tar Sands development. No new pipelines. No reconciliation without restitution for Indigenous people. Conscript corporate profits

to fund the conversion of industry, business, homes and schools to renewable green energy power.

For public ownership of the commanding heights of the economy under workers' and community control. For a Workers' Government. Fight for working class political independence and for socialist policies in labour unions and the NDP. Women's Liberation through Socialist Revolution. No socialism without Women's Liberation.

If you agree,

join Socialist Action /

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Women in Ireland Up Against the Church and State

by Anne Conway (March 4, 2020)

This presentation covers the 2018 abortion referendum, the Cervical Screening Scandal, the Campaign Against Church Ownership of Women's Health Care, and Catholic Church/State abuse of women and children.

The Referendum to Repeal the Constitutional Amendment on Abortion.

The stunning landslide victory in the 2018 abortion referendum vote that removed the ban on abortion from the Irish constitution was international news headlines.

It was a historic moment and a resounding victory for prochoice campaigners and the Irish people in general. Years of hard campaigning led to the victory but a catalyst was the tragic death of a young Indian woman dentist denied an abortion. Her avoidable death shook the country giving rise to huge mobilizations, particularly of young women, demanding the removal of the constitutional amendment forbidding abortion. It was a planned pregnancy that resulted in a danger to her health

and she was still denied an abortion which she had requested. It showed the reactionary nature of it all, that she was denied an abortion of a foetus that had at best days left. Her name was Savita Halappanaver. She died from sepsis.

The referendum results astounded the country. In the capital city Dublin, more than three quarters voted for repeal. Several working-class Dublin areas registered a massive 80% prochoice vote. The urban-rural divide crumbled with almost two thirds voting to get rid of the hated so-called pro-life amendment and this despite the fact that the pro repeal movement was sparse in rural Ireland. However, the most significant statistic was that 87% of those aged 18-24 old voted for repeal throughout the country.

I must add that massive working class support was also recorded in the marriage equality referendum in 2015. 90% in the disadvantaged working class area of Jobstown, however the final result was watered down by the middle class areas of the constituency voting against the referendum.

The landslide repeal vote demonstrated the sea change in attitudes that had taken place in Ireland. In 1983, at the time the referendum that inserted the amendment into the constitution was held, church attendance was around 80%. In the exit poll in the

2018 referendum just 12% said their religious views were an influence on how they voted. The long record of church abuse led to a massive decline in Mass attendance. The widespread revulsion at the horrendous litany of abuse of children, women and men by the Catholic church and religious orders was a definite factor influencing the vote.

The repeal vote represented a crisis for the Catholic Church, it had been the reliable base for conservatism through its control of schools and major hospitals, including maternity hospitals.

The Catholic Church record of abuse

From the mid-1990's there were continuous reports of abuse of women and children in orphanages, in industrial schools, in Mother and Baby homes, in addition to clerical sex abuse where paedophile Catholic priests were moved around from parish to parish to continue abusing vulnerable children with the Church refusing to pay compensation to their victims.

In a report issued just four days after the referendum, the Minister for Children announced that between 1946 and 1969, tens of thousands of children were illegally adopted. Mothers were told their babies had died. Fake birth certificates were used, and the nuns were paid for the adopted child, some of whom

were sent to the U.S. The state was complicit and had been covering up the issue for several years. A TV programme on March 4 this year aired explosive revelations of the illegal stealing and selling of babies of unmarried women, showing collusion between church, state and prominent consultants - one consultant was the son of the former President Eamon de Valera.

In February of this year a report on the findings of a commission on the Mother and Baby homes was issued. Government politicians on the national airwaves attributed almost equal blame to bigoted backward misogynist attitudes prevailing in wider society during the years the abuse occurred as opposed to placing the responsibility for the horrors revealed in the report at the door of the Catholic church and the state. Their mantra was we are all to blame, society knew what was going on. The state wants to avoid compensating the victims. There was outrage from the survivors and society in general to the handling of the report by the government, which includes the Green Party. The religious orders who abused and enslaved women and children are guilty of crimes against humanity and should be prosecuted and stripped of their assets.

A quote from a Mother and Baby home survivor compared the institutional abuse suffered by women and children to the Holocaust.

I'm old enough to remember the stultifying repressive climate that existed in the 1960's as a result of the domination of society by the Catholic church, the state and the powers that be. Their domination resulted from the defeat of the revolutionary forces in 1916 and subsequently and gave rise to a reactionary clerical-controlled state where the working class, the poor and women were subjugated and powerless.

The Cervical Screening Scandal

Hot on the heels of the scandal of the religious orders abuse came the shocking revelations from terminally ill women about the cover up of their cervical screening results.

Women had not been informed of numerous irregular smear results over a number of years and some developed and died of cervical cancer. The story was only revealed when a terminally ill woman sued the U.S. corporation to which the smear tests had been outsourced. The country's Health Service Executive colluded with the US corporation. Several women have already died as a result of this, and terminally ill women were forced to campaign outside government buildings for support and compensation. Consultant doctors at the time of the outsourcing raised concerns about the substandard smear testing results from the corporation in question. A public inquiry on the

smear testing scandal vindicated the women but to receive compensation seriously ill women were dragged through the courts for their cases to be heard.

To add insult to injury, late last year, the National Screening Service Communications management saw fit to remove the word woman from its screening literature to be replaced with the wording 'anyone with a cervix'. Following an outcry on the national airwaves, women's organizations and a leading prochoice consultant the word woman was reinserted alongside anyone with a cervix.

Campaign against Church Ownership of Women's Healthcare

A further major scandal arose in the months following the repeal victory, it involved the government handing over the ownership and control of a new proposed state funded National Maternity Hospital to the Sisters of Charity. This order was involved in one of the gravest child abuse baby-selling scandals and had failed to pay their share of compensation to the victims. There was outrage and a campaign aptly named the Campaign against Church Ownership of Women's Healthcare was launched and won widespread national support for its demand that the new hospital be secular and public. It continues to organize on the issue.

As the repeal movement largely disappeared from political activity after the repeal vote, with the exception of hard-core activists, there was limited involvement from former activists against the state handing over the new maternity hospital to the nuns.

Where do we go from here?

The repeal campaign, like the marriage equality campaign in 2015, mobilized tens of thousands of activists but these mobilizations were not enduring after the votes were won in the respective referendums.

The leadership of the repeal campaign consisted of predominantly reformist and bourgeois women whose focus was repealing the amendment, however, exit polls showed the public were ahead of the campaign with almost two thirds of respondents supporting a woman's right to choose.

This prochoice mass sentiment was not tapped into by feminist activists or indeed generally by the left in the campaign and an opportunity to rebuild a women's movement with a strong working-class base was lost. This was a missed opportunity as we saw the working class voted massively for abortion rights.

Women workers have been to the forefront of struggles in recent years. Nurses mobilized militantly during their national strike in 2019 for better pay and working conditions. Teachers and again nurses on the covid frontline organized for safe working conditions and better pay for student nurses. The unions who are charged with defending them, let them down time and again, as they have been in partnership with successive governments for decades.

Women united with workers, the oppressed and marginalized will be necessary to overthrow the rotten system that gives rise to ongoing scandals and oppression and bring about the liberation of women.

I want to acknowledge the profound influence my comrade and partner, Kevin Keating who passed away last May, has on my contribution. He supported and campaigned alongside me, as appropriate, in all of the main struggles on women's issues I was involved in from the late seventies.

My Revolution Begins in the Body

The Vagina Monologues.

Read aloud by Emily Steers on March 4.

*My revolution begins in the body
It isn't waiting anymore
My revolution does not need approval or permission
It happens because it has to happen in each
neighbourhood, village, city or town
At gatherings of tribes, fellow students, women at
the market, on the bus
It may be gradual and soft
It may be spontaneous and loud
It may be happening already
It may be found in your closet, your drawers, your
gut, your legs, your multiplying cells
In the naked mouth of taut nipples and overflowing
breasts
My revolution is welling from the insatiable drumming
between my legs
My revolution is willing to die for this
My revolution is willing to live big
My revolution is overthrowing the state
And the state of mind called patriarchy
My revolution will not be choreographed although it
begins with a few familiar steps.
My revolution is not violent but it does not shy away
from the dangerous edges where fierce displays*

of resistance tumble into something new
My revolution is in this body
In these hips atrophied by misogyny
In this jaw wired mute by hunger and atrocity
My revolution is
Connection not consumption
Passion not profit
Orgasm not ownership
My revolution is of the earth and will come from her
For her, because of her
It understands that every time we frack or drill
Or burn or violate the layers of her sacredness
we violate the soul of our future
My revolution is not ashamed to press my body down
On her mud floor in front of
Banyan, Cypress, Pine, Kalyaan, Oak, Chestnut,
Mulberry
Redwood, Sycamore trees
To bow shamelessly to shocking yellow birds and
rose blue setting skies, heart exploding purple
bougainvillea and aqua sea
My revolution gladly kisses the feet of mothers and
nurses and servers and cleaners and nannies
And healers and all who are life and give life
My revolution is on its knees
On my knees to every holy thing

*And to those who carry empire-made burdens in and
on their heads and backs and
hearts*

My revolution demands abandon

Expects the original

*Relies on trouble makers, anarchists and socialists,
poets, shamans, seers, sexual explorers*

*Tricksters, mystic travelers, tightrope walkers and
those who go too far and feel
too much,*

My revolution shows up unexpectedly

Its not naïve but believes in miracles

Cannot be categorized targeted branded

Or even located

Offers prophecy not prescription

Is determined by mystery and ecstatic joy

Requires listening

*Is not centralized though we all know where we're
going*

It happens in stages and all at once

It happens where you live and everywhere

It understands that divisions are diversions

It requires sitting still and staring deep into my eyes

Go ahead

Love.



Queer Women Demand Equality

by Hannah Lechnitz

I will be speaking on the specific issues which queer women face. While all women are affected by sexist legislation limiting our freedoms, the issues that women face will of course differ by demographic. It is not true that every single woman will face the same oppression, and upper-class women will not be affected in the same way lower class women will; this means that the wage-gap (which is a proven phenomenon which varies by region and field) will, of course, have a much more demonstrable material effect on the working class who need the money in order to pay their bills and feed their family.

Different forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia are all compounded under capitalism. Therefore, it should follow that those who fight capitalism also fight these other overlapping forms of oppression. This would be a sensible solution. However, it has not historically been that way; even within progressive and leftist circles, we have not always been accepting of queer women. The American feminist writer Audre Lorde, who was a black, gay, leftist in the 70s and 80s, wrote that her roommate was publicly scorned at

a Communist Party meeting just for living with a lesbian.

We recognize that women of colour, queer women and trans women are much more likely to be discriminated against than straight, white cis women. We know that a black woman is more likely to be turned down a job than a white woman; a queer woman is more likely to experience workplace harassment than a straight woman; and a transgender woman is more likely to be homeless or denied housing than a cisgender (that is, not transgender) woman.

By some estimates, anywhere from 25–40% of all homeless youth in Canada are queer¹ as a study done by Youth Services Bureau in Ottawa² 50% of all homeless youth in the capital city are queer. While some of these numbers are speculative, the picture they paint is very clear: queerness has a demonstrable impact on the living conditions of Canadians. Should a young queer woman end up on the street, there are very few options for her moving forward—even more so if she is uneducated (a situation which compounds itself in our society

1 <https://www.the519.org/education-training/lgbtq2s-youth-homelessness-in-canada/in-canada>

2 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/half-of-homeless-ottawa-youth-identify-as-lgbtq-1.1699604>

dominated by for-profit postsecondary studies). She will likely have her job applications rejected, she will have her lease applications denied due to poor credit or lack of income, and she is much more likely to be the victim of sexual assault.

The Canadian state offers some remedies, but the waiting lists for socialized housing can be extremely long, and the bureaucracy surrounding welfare programs can be hard to navigate. Capitalism has nothing to offer but the Girl Boss and the utilization of rainbow logos during one month of the year.

See here that the economic system itself is the problem. It is only natural that our current economic system has no solution; the ruling class directly benefits from the retention of this unequal status quo. Because of this, working within the system will always limit our possibilities for positive change.

Therefore, any remedy to these issues must come from outside this unethical economic system and must seek to dismantle it.

The solution which we on the socialist left propose to these issues needs to be intersectional, to recognize the compounding effects of different types of oppression. All of these forms of oppression are interconnected. To fight capitalism is to fight racism; to fight capitalism is to fight sexism, homophobia

and transphobia. We cannot truly liberate the working class unless we recognize the issues that all members of the working class face, including queer and trans women.

The raising of the minimum wage to at least 20\$/hour with no exceptions, the institution of easily accessible social housing, the institution of free higher education, the institution of free universal pharma care, and the institution of a more rigorous sex education program in public schools will all aid in improving the living conditions of queer and trans working class women. We must fight for gender equality in the workplace, for the empowerment of women not just inside of the capitalist system. Our struggle must be for the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a more just economic system and way of life.

Feminism and Socialism Go Together

by Georgia Bradley

I am from Halifax, Nova Scotia. I would like to begin by noting that International Women's Day began as a fundamentally socialist project. Nowadays, however, this day of recognition of women and their work has been totally diluted, torn away from its radical roots, reduced to pink decorations and celebrations of "women in power" such as Margaret Thatcher.

Despite the rise of female capitalists and "girl boss" culture, women in the workplace continue frequently to tolerate worse working conditions than their male counterparts, such as lower wages, workplace sexual harassment and often being passed over for promotions due to their sex. This is especially true in non-unionized workplaces as well as non-traditional occupations. In just one example, recently there has been a wave of reports from women working in the fisheries industry in Canada about the harassment and assault they have faced while working on ships.

When they reported this abuse to their employers, they were met with intimidation and threats. Stories like these make it clear that women's liberation cannot exist within a capitalist framework, as often

the way patriarchal systems directly harm women is through economic means.

The pandemic has been especially hard on women, many of whom work in hospitality and service jobs with little protections and which were the first to go in the wake of the pandemic, and have no guarantee that they will return. As well, we no longer live in an economic era where it is feasible for only one parent to work, leaving women who joined the workforce responsible for both traditional labour outside the home, while being expected to perform the domestic labour inside the home. The lack of accessible childcare in Nova Scotia is preventing women from participating in other aspects of society.

I, along with many other socialists, believe that the goal of Marxist feminism is to break down the divisions that have been created between women and men (such as unequal division of labour as well as wage inequality) as much as is possible. This is one of the reasons why access to abortion is vital to gender equality. While there is a myriad of social constructs that must be torn down which keep us divided and hinder effective organizing, biological realities such as access to abortion and other health concerns are paramount to gender equality. This is why it is disgraceful that it took 35 years following the legalization of abortion in Canada before they were able to be performed in PEI due to lack of

access. Up until 2017, to have an abortion, Island women would have to travel to New Brunswick or Nova Scotia, which obviously affected poor and working class people the most, who did not have the resources to take time off of work or afford the costs associated with traveling.

During the pandemic, rates of violence against women have increased dramatically, leaving shelters for abused women overwhelmed, and paired with the housing crisis we are facing here in Nova Scotia, victims of intimate partner violence are being forced into highly dangerous situations. The housing crisis must be recognized as a profoundly feminist issue, as well as one which cannot be separated from class. This is an example of an issue which requires real intersectionality, rather than the buzzword that led to its co-option by mainstream liberalism. Something that seems to be a surprise to our politicians is that the solution to homelessness is housing. Unfortunately, our government has left the responsibility of housing for women fleeing intimate partner violence up to overstretched charities, choosing instead to remain loyal to the developers building increasingly expensive buildings here in our city, rather than working people who are being priced out by these developments. The economic burden of leaving an abusive partner is rarely considered when the ignorant question "why didn't she just leave?" is asked. It is imperative that we create a

system of universal housing.

“Women hold up half the sky” is a quote oft repeated during these discussions. I believe that we must act on that sentiment, as unfortunately there exists those who believe one can be a Marxist without being a feminist. It is important that we do not reproduce the same social conditions which exist for women in capitalist societies within our struggle and within our organizations, such as relegating female comrades to “women’s work”, excluding them from leadership positions, and not taking harassment seriously. To liberate the proletariat from capitalist oppression means also liberating women from the patriarchal oppression spurred on by this economic system, and to break down the superficial barriers created to alienate men and women from each other. Only then will we have true equality, both in Atlantic Canada and throughout the world.

I look forward to a future without systems of exploitation, and I am grateful that I get to work with like-minded people to achieve this.

Happy International Women’s Day!

IWD – from Grenada to Canada

by Sandra Griffith-Bonaparte

On March 13, 1979, Grenada's Prime Minister Eric Gairy was ousted in an uprising organized by the New Jewel Movement, led by Maurice Bishop. Bishop became Prime Minister of the newly established People's Revolutionary Government. For years, dictator Gairy ruled through violence and fear. His secret police, the Mongoose Gang, waged war on the Grenadian people and were known to beat up women.

Before the revolution, many women struggled to balance their home and work life. Many of them performed a double day doing menial jobs as servants to the rich, cooks or maids in hotels, on their farms or as road workers. Most of these women were still responsible for cleaning, cooking, washing, ironing, among other things in the home. They were also responsible for taking care of their family's physical, educational, emotional, and in many instances, spiritual well-being while their husbands or common-law partners went out for a drink with the boys. With the coming of the revolution, circumstances changed for women.

The People's Revolutionary Government formed many committees, including the National Women's Organization, which trained and educated Grenadian women in diverse areas. International Women's Day was a week-long celebration with daily radio programs devoted to Grenadian women's achievements and progress since the revolution. It culminated with a massive rally in the island's countryside. Several buses transported people to the venue. The women would break out in singing folk songs and other cultural songs. There were many poets giving tributes to the Grenadian women. One year Angela Davis, an American political activist, philosopher and author, was the keynote speaker. In 1980 Kenneth Kaunda's wife Betty Kaunda was the keynote speaker for the IWD. It was a grand celebration, and Grenadian women felt included, uplifted and part of the struggle. They were side by side with the men and not behind them. The NWO played a pivotal role in the upliftment of women nationally. Today Grenadian women are occupying important positions in every stratum of the Grenadian community. Because of the Revolution, many Grenadian women have become doctors, lawyers, teachers, dentists, and women of power.

In 2001 I became a federal public service worker in Ottawa. I immediately began advocating for women's rights and gender equality in the workplace and society at large.

Every international women's Day, I would send out a message to all the awesome women in my life, especially those on my local executive, to celebrate their achievements.

I have also been a panellist for Assistant Deputy Minister (Materiel) speaker's corner in 2017 for the IWD celebration advocating for Justice for women workers. Bob Marley puts it this way: "we've been trodding on the winepress, much too long - Rebel, rebel! We've been taken for granted. Babylon system is the vampire, falling empire suckin' the blood of the sufferers."... Women, let us stand together. Please stand up and let our voices echo over the hills and mountains, ridges and valleys, resounding in a triumph crescendo until we are heard. We will not be silenced. We won't give up!

How Socialists Helped to Build the Feminist Movement

by Judy Koch

I have long been a feminist. As a feminist I joined the Young Socialists/Ligue de Jeune Socialistes in 1967 and the League for Socialist Action a few years later. I joined the second wave of the feminist movement. Our first action, organized by the League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvriere in Montreal, was a demonstration at a pub that served men only. We demanded that they serve women as well. This was an uphill battle. Was involved in the struggle for abortion rights from the start. This movement was in support of Dr. Henry Morgentaler. He provided women with therapeutic abortion and fought for legalization of the procedure. Illegal abortions resulted in the death and maiming of women. I remember going to Parliament Hill from Toronto in the middle of a snowstorm. The LSA also revived International Women's Day. I was involved in the campaign for women to have jobs in industry. These were among the highest paying jobs women could obtain.

After I left the Trotskyist movement in the mid-80s, I was on the executive board of the Toronto Disabled Women's Network. I did volunteer work

from home. I was also a leader of the employment equity movement.

I rejoined the Trotskyist movement in 2003. In Socialist Action I was included in the planning of International Women's Day and helped staff the literature table and sell newspapers on that day.

Here are a few books that I recommend. Frederick Engels wrote "The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State". It was based on the study of Indigenous People in North America, He pointed out that the family, which entrenched the oppression of women, began only with the emergence of class-divided society. Trotsky wrote "Women and the Family", which dealt with the liberation of women in the early Soviet Union. Evelyn Reed, a leading feminist in the Socialist Worker's Party, wrote "Problem's of Women's Liberation", which dealt with various aspects of women's oppression, and "Women's Evolution" which dealt with the matriarchy in pre-class society in depth. She pointed out that women invented many things in that era.

Today, Socialist Action joins feminists in fighting for \$20 an hour minimum wage, unionization of women, continuation of abortion rights, the end of homelessness and eviction, an end to missing and murdered aboriginal women, an end to violence against women which is increasing during the

pandemic, an end to women's poverty, decent treatment of seniors in nursing homes, for immigration rights in Canada and the end to deportation, for Palestinian rights, free healthcare including pharmaceutical care, and sexual liberation and science.

SA encouraged me to take responsibility by coordinating press and literature sales, and by doing outreach to members and contacts. It is also concerned about my health. SA urged me not to go to demonstrations after COVID started because I had underlying conditions such as diabetes which would make COVID worse. It is always concerned about the health needs of members.

It is an honour to be a member of Socialist Action. In fact, it is one of the best ways to put feminism into practice. I urge all women who want an end to patriarchy, oppression and exploitation to join Socialist Action.

Women's Liberation from an Immigrant perspective

by Agnieszka Marszalek

To begin, I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking from Grassy Narrows Ojibway First Nation, Treaty 3 territory.

I grew up in Poland in the 70s and 80s, and remember that the Communist Party that was in power at the time, though not perfect, had in place many programs and policies to actively support the working class. The education and health care systems were free (entrance to higher learning was merit based), work was guaranteed, paid vacation was available. For all intents and purposes, Poland was a welfare state. Was there democratic freedom? - No, but as far as the society was concerned the working class was taken care of.

In the early 80s with the start of Solidarity and the strike in the shipyards of Gdansk, the push for change had begun. The Communist Party started to lose its grip on the society and the increasing push of the Catholic Church onto the political arena was becoming very clear. The Polish Constitution of 1952 was amended in December 1989 and to me, us youth, the biggest change was the introduction of

religion as a subject taught in all, and I mean ALL, of the elementary and secondary schools. Even though Polish Constitution stated that there was a separation of church and state and there was religious freedom, religion was a required subject and you needed to pass it in order to advance in your studies. For me, this was a moment of radicalization in terms of religion. This was also the time when women's rights were being re-evaluated and, with a huge support of the Catholic Church, women's fundamental freedoms were being taken away feeding into capitalism and patriarchy alike.

Immigration to Canada (from lull to second radicalization)

In 1992, amidst huge social, political and economic changes taking place in Poland, my family moved to Canada where I joined the ranks of high school students and later on, university. Whether I wanted to admit it or not, it was a culture shock for me. I was used to vibrant political and social debate among my peers and the adults in Poland, and missed that terribly in Canada. So other than my brief visits to Poland every year or so, the first 16 years in Canada were a lull. Until I started working as a teacher on a First Nation reserve. There, I saw first hand, how the original people of Canada were living. It made my blood boil. Even more so, because of how this demographic was perceived by the rest of Canadian

society. This was the onset of my second radicalization in terms of feminist and racial ideologies.

First Nations, Metis and Inuit women are essentially functional matriarchs who are living to serve the patriarchy

On various FN reservations and Inuit communities across Canada, I observed that the majority of work was and still is being done by women, however the most visible or prestigious positions were and still are held by men. Women get little recognition for all the work they have been doing; however, they do the majority of this work. FNMI women are essentially functional matriarchs who are living to serve the patriarchy. As an outsider, coming from a background where religion had trampled women's rights, I cannot understate how much of an impact the Residential Schools and Christianity have had on the original people's societal structure. In general, many women are not only working professionally / earning wages, they also take care of the children and provide respite care to other community members in a traditional role of caregivers and nurturers. Many times, this gives them little opportunity to take care of themselves and to take a more meta look at the situation in order to be able to affect real lasting change. This is where my passion is to connect our understanding of the Social Reproduction Theory to help women overthrow the patriarchy. I find that

though as a woman, I am having more meaningful connections with individual women, however as an outsider, my ideas are seen as foreign and treated with mistrust.

Concluding, What now:

The ones who are going to make the biggest difference in terms of the socialist revolution, as of this webcast, aren't old enough to vote. Because they are still voiceless and generally exploited in our society, Women's Liberationists need to start incorporating Youth Liberation into their ideologies. Women, including all my Sisters identifying as women, as mother figures or nurturers, are especially obligated to better represent the youth.

Just as the working class must unite to liberate itself from the shackles of capitalism, so must women unite to liberate women and children from the shackles of the patriarchy. The approach that I am taking is to network and collaborate with other feminists and youth liberation activists to develop and implement practical solutions for dismantling the patriarchy.

The American Roots of IWD

by Ann Montague

Thank you for inviting me to this celebration of International Women's Day.

The United States is one of the few countries in the world that does not celebrate International Women's Day. This is ironic because International Women's Day has its roots in the February 28, 1909 march to commemorate the 1908 strike of female immigrant garment workers in New York City. It was organized by the Socialist Party of America and proclaimed as National Women's Day.

During the heyday of red baiting in the 1950s the U.S. government worked to erase working class history so they created Labor Day as a holiday to honor labor at the beginning of September to replace May Day, and also created Mothers Day in May which came to replace International Women's Day.

Today I want to talk about the challenges women are facing, and the glimmer of hope we can see in the struggles of working class women. All of the major fights today are exacerbated by the COVID Epidemic.

The Gender Pay Gap in the U.S. is huge, even though pay discrimination is technically illegal. In 2020

women need to work 25% more time than men to make up the difference. And the situation of Black, Hispanic and Native Americans is worse.

Today, in the midst of the pandemic women hold one in every three jobs which are deemed essential. These workers who are at risk everyday predominantly are women. Non-white women are more likely than anyone else to be doing essential jobs that are underpaid and under valued.

Look just at jobs in healthcare. Nine out of ten nurses, nursing assistants, respiratory therapists, pharmacy aides, and technicians are women. There are 19 million In Home Care Workers who are 90% women.

At the same time huge numbers of women are working from home, responsible for children's education, meals, maintaining a home in isolation. While they are already isolated within the nuclear family.

There are 2 million women who have lost their jobs entirely in the last year.

Capitalism will never solve these economic problems.

Today women's right to abortion has for decades been been attacked state by state. The most basic right to control our own bodies. In the midst of the pandemic politicians in 5 states are banning abortions outright by characterizing abortion as

non-essential ..This started first in Texas followed by Iowa, Alabama and Oklahoma.

Violence against women is on the rise and has become a pandemic within a pandemic. For women living with abusive partners, living in lockdown has made a difficult situation worse. Hospitals are seeing huge increases of women being admitted for strangulation, stabbing, serious burns.

In addition, violence against lesbians and transwomen has been on the increase in every country. Lesbians have not only been victims of violence, but there is a resurgence of what used to be called, reparative therapy, but now is clearly called by its name "corrective rape". In Chechnya for instance corrective rape is a governmental policy.

If we look at the intensified oppression of women it is clear there are systemic problems we face that will never be solved by capitalism or their political parties.

It is only our struggles as working class women that empower us. The bright spot this year in the U.S. has been the fight of women workers. The first workers to fight back as COVID was exploding and taking over all the space in our hospitals were nurses protesting the lack of personal protective equipment.

National Nurses United in April demonstrated saying "PPE NOW.

People before profit".

Protests grew outside their hospitals in New York City. And throughout California the California Nurses' Association in Alameda, Torrance, Orange, Santa Monica and other cities nurses picketed with the slogan.."we are essential not sacrificial!"

In Ann Arbor..Michigan "PPE Over Profit" AND there were Massive nation-wide protests May Day last year at the White House.

More recently Nursing Home workers are going on strike demanding sick pay, equipment, and staffing and pay increases.

Remembering the history of International Women's Day should always remind us that it is empowered working class women who show us the way.

A year after that NYC garment workers' strike was memorialized, Clara Zetkin, a revolutionary socialist in Germany, called an international Socialist Women's Conference and proposed that March 8 be honored every year as International Working Women's Day. It was approved by over 100 women from 17 countries. The following year a million women marched world wide for the 40th anniversary of the Paris Commune, which was a radical socialist government that briefly ruled in France. Women played a leadership role in

the Commune.

In March 1913 working class women in Russia demonstrated on International Women's Day to demand the right to vote.

On March 8, 1917 Russian women working in the massive textile factories walked off the job demanding bread and a demand to bring the soldiers home from the battlefields of the First World War.

This women's strike inspired a general strike of all workers the very next day with the same demands for bread and peace. Two hundred thousand workers were in the streets. In two days, Czar Nicolas was overthrown. By March 10 the Romanov Dynasty was over, the provisional government granted women the right to vote. The groundwork for transforming society had been laid.

Rosa Luxembourgh famously said the choice is "Socialism or Barbarism."

We need women who are committed to creating a socialist society. The concept that once capitalism, a society based on profit, is gone that our oppression will melt away is a fiction. To achieve what we need in a revolution we have to be at the center of making it happen! We need socialist women in the independent mass movements as they arise. We need to be leaders of mass working class organizations. In unions and other working class formations. Women's oppression will not be on the

agenda unless we are there.

At the same time an end to women's oppression can only be achieved in a socialist society which will give us the freedom to re-think power, and eliminate the material roots of our oppression.

Both Socialist Action in the US and in Canada are committed to women's struggles today and going forward to the socialist future.

Reproductive Health and Justice

by Karen Hanan

I'm a cis-gender woman and I use she/her pronouns. I identify as an artist, although I have not had a formal practice since I completed my BFA in 2014. Much of my work in the past centred on women's issues – of the body, sexuality, identity, reproduction, relationships and choices. While the ideas worked themselves out of me with some clairvoyance, the truth is I was processing experiences and trying to understand my place in the world as a woman. Today I'm going to briefly touch on reproductive health and justice, a huge, important topic that can't all fit into 7 minutes.

I want to first acknowledge that not all women have a uterus and not all people who have a uterus are women – we are all more than our parts. I know the language of reproductive health can be problematic and can exclude those who do not fit cis-gender norms.

I grew up in an evangelical, right wing Christian community in Winnipeg. I went to the private school run by the church until the end of Junior High where I received an abstinence education that taught me nothing about my body or consent and everything

about submission as a virtue.

I remember asking about why, if god made me, I should fight against my flesh. I received no answer. Many young people go through the same experience. Here in Toronto where I now reside, there are likely more than 90,000 students who are offered abstinence education through the publicly funded Toronto Catholic District School Board. While still required to teach the Ontario curriculum (albeit through a religious lens), parents can request to have their children exempted from Human Development and Sexual Health instruction, resulting in students who may not be receiving any education about their sexual health. My parents did not go out of their way to shelter me from learning about sex, however the culture we subscribed to did not deem it necessary for me to be in the loop.

The short story is: abstinence education leaves young people unequipped to safely explore their sexuality, reinforces stereotypical gender roles, and alienates LGBTQ2+ students.

At the age of 18, I was sexually assaulted by a close friend, however I did not have the life experience or the emotional capacity to name it assault until almost half a decade later. Around the same time, my family went through a brutal excommunication from the church as a result of my mother standing

up to the fascism and patriarchy of the church.

As I was ill-equipped to process these experiences on my own, I entered a time of chaos, rejecting religion and trying to reclaim my sexuality as my own, with shame as an overpowering filter for the journey.

I believe that reproductive justice starts with comprehensive sex education. It is impossible to have bodily autonomy and make consenting choices when you don't understand what those things mean. There are many reasons that a high quality, comprehensive sex education curriculum is important for the health of young people. Comprehensive sex ed reduces risk taking, increases the use of contraception, reduces teen pregnancy rates and STIs, improves gender equality, reduces gender-based violence and results in safer spaces for LGBT2Q+ students.

When people are provided with knowledge to understand how their bodies work, what healthy relationships look like, and what consent means, the result is informed decision making for better sexual and mental health outcomes.

Canada is failing young people by not providing teachers with resources to give students a comprehensive sex education.

If someone had told me as a teenager that painful periods are not, in fact, normal, I may have received a diagnosis for my endometriosis 10 years sooner, instead of receiving band-aid solutions for years. If I had received a comprehensive sex education, maybe I would have known that painful sex is not, in fact, normal. And if physicians were truly educated in women's pain, they would, in fact, accept it is real.

There is a quiet and ugly nature of reproductive and women's health issues under capitalism. Most women know how much work goes into self advocacy as patients in a biased healthcare system, and modern gynecology itself was built on racism, costing the lives of countless people who were enslaved. Biases from centuries ago continue to shape the ways women receive care.

It is empowering to see women and allies coming together en masse around the world to fight for reproductive rights and justice, like we saw in 2020 with the green wave movement in Argentina in their victory in the pro-choice movement and the large protests led by the All-Poland Woman's Strike against Poland's further restrictions in already prohibitive abortion laws. Of course, we must acknowledge reproductive health issues are worker's issues. Only when we rally support, and recognize the interconnectedness across movements will we see the socialist revolution we need.

Reproductive justice is not achieved unless we fight for the rights of women everywhere. We cannot achieve reproductive justice until existing biases are rejected and our mental, physical, spiritual, social and material needs are met.

Challenging Sexism in the NDP

By Yvonne Hanson

I want to talk about my experiences as a woman in the New Democratic Party, and then more generally about women and sexism in politics.

This was my first experience at a British Columbia NDP Convention.

I missed the first few minutes of the convention, so I was disoriented when I entered the hall. The Young New Democrats spent the previous day planning their activities at the convention. When I walked in, I see basically everyone I know standing behind a speaker at the mic. The speaker is a woman for whom I have enormous respect. I am still getting my bearings, realizing there is a somewhat heated exchange happening between the speaker and the chair / host of the convention who is on the stage.

Then the speaker, and everyone I know in the room pointedly walk out of the convention hall. I follow, not knowing why, but knowing that if they are making a point, I want to be behind them.

It turns out that the speaker and the YND had submitted a resolution calling on the BCNDP to

take bolder measures to address, call out, and condemn sexual and gendered harassment in BCNDP workplaces. The BCNDP was not doing enough to address allegations, and many women felt uncomfortable in spaces that should NOT be gendered or toxic environments.

BCNDP officials said that they are doing everything adequately, and that there really is nothing more to be done to address these issues.

This resolution had been assigned to the dregs of the resolution book. I tried to find my copy, but it is lost in my storage closet unfortunately, so I can't say for sure, but I recall it was at the back, like #76 or something. In a place that it would never be heard or voted on at convention.

Side note: there were a lot of "fluffy" resolutions in the front of the book, like "Be it resolved that we try to win a majority in the next provincial election" (seriously?) in prime-time spots, and a lot of important, impactful resolutions were put at the back of the book, in places where they would never get a chance to be heard on the floor. The resolution, imploring the BCNDP to take a systematic, serious approach to eradicating sexual harassment in their workplaces was among those at the very end.

The final adjudication on this issue was to put it to

the floor to vote on whether or not the resolution should be moved up. The floor voted no.

So that was my first experience with the leadership of the BCNDP.

That was not a great first impression.

I have experienced what you could call gendered harassment while at NDP events. I was once told to “wear heels and a dress while working the door” at a student NDP club event because, they said, that would draw more folks in to the party.

I have been told that my pretty face attracts votes. I have heard stories from my female friends in the NDP. I have heard about certain high ranking NDP officials – elected politicians - calling female staffers “hysterical” after gaslighting them for weeks and refusing to provide them with the information necessary to do their jobs.

I have seen well-known misogynists hired into prominent campaign roles, invited to NDP socials, despite their negative reputations.

I have heard these stories and I see these things only because women whisper them to me behind closed doors, and because I am, myself, a woman in politics.

You may not have heard any of these things because

standing up and calling them out in person, making a scene, naming names and making yourself known, is basically career ending for a woman in this system.

Even being on this webcast right now, talking about this, is probably jeopardizing my chances of running for the BCNDP in the future. Honestly.

I don't want to give the names of the men because I don't want to be seen as a trouble maker, I don't want to give the names of the victims because I don't want to jeopardize their political careers.

The fact that calling out sexism in politics is potentially, probably, career ending is obviously a huge issue.

The fact that speaking up about gendered harassment in this party and in this system then prevents victims from playing a role is a barrier to advancing women's safety and equality throughout the political system.

And as long as those barriers exist, we will not have equality. Without equality, we will not have socialism, and without socialism, we will not have a planet to live on for much longer.

I want to make it clear- this isn't solely an NDP issue. This is a politics issue, a societal issue.

I have experience in the NDP, which is why I am talking about the NDP specifically. I am sure, pretty much certain, that other parties are worse. I can't imagine the Conservative Party is a particularly great place to be a woman.

But it is important to call it out in the NDP, because many like to believe that because the NDP is a progressive party, that must mean it is free of these issues. But it isn't.

Being progressive and wanting the right things doesn't mean being active in producing the right results.

Much like how white folks who don't want to be racist can still be extremely racist, people who don't want to be sexist can still participate in gendered discrimination and harassment if they are not mindful of their thoughts and actions and educate themselves on the topic.

I would argue that everyone on that convention floor who voted against moving the resolution up was being an accomplice to sexual harassment, though I suspect very few of them knew it.

Once we decide we have conquered a problem, we feel inclined to ignore and argue against any evidence to the contrary.

The BCNDP has decided that it has conquered the problem of sexism, and so it is ignoring all evidence and all testimony that indicates it has not.

I'm sure other parties are worse. I can almost guarantee they are; but that kind of what-aboutism should NOT prevent us from calling it out where we see it.

Much like how many people think we here in Canada have conquered racism, and now refuse to believe or even hear the testimonies of POC - especially black and indigenous folks - so too many have decided that we have conquered sexism.

The result is that women are called liars, attention seekers, manipulators, and trouble makers when we try to speak out.

And how silly is that? "we have conquered sexism, so stop being such a lying, attention-seeking whore about it." Nothing sexist about that, eh?

But that is really the dominant attitude in much of the political system. STILL. In 2021.

I really want to caution everyone in every organization, Socialist Action included, to NEVER let yourself believe that the group has conquered these social issues. No group or individual, anywhere has

conquered these issues.

That said, in my experience Socialist Action has been very welcoming and comfortable for me as a female comrade. Nonetheless, overcoming sexism, like overcoming racism, is a constant, intentional, and mindful process. It is about calling out your own behaviour and thought patterns at every step, taking criticism with a "thank you", and striving to do better, not ignore the problem. It will be a LONG time - not in any of our lifetimes - before it is, if ever, overcome completely.

It is also about standing firmly, unwaveringly, beside those who dare to come forward, speak up, and call out the discrimination they are experiencing.

Advancing socialism means advancing the rights and equality of all. It means calling out systems that allow and perpetuate inequality, and making a concerted effort to fix them and prevent injustices from occurring.

It means providing a platform for voicing frustrations - not silencing them.

A big thank you to Socialist Action for doing just that today, for providing a platform for women in politics to discuss the issues that face women in politics. I'm very happy to have been able today to discuss this.

One closing thought.

When we say we want more women in politics- is it because we want the opinions, perspectives, and experiences of women to be better represented in our political system? To shape and colour our political decision making? To balance and counter “traditionally male” ways of doing business? Or is it because its bad for optics when the slate is all men? Do we want women as diversity tokens, or do we actually want a new way of doing politics?

Thank you all for listening, and I hope all my comrades out there have an excellent, and mindful International Women’s Day.

Information about the presenters

Anne Conway in Ireland has been politically active for decades, commencing with the International Marxist group in the 1970s in London where she worked as a nurse, then in union, women's rights and anti-imperialist activities. Anne returned to Dublin in 1980 and joined Socialist Democracy of which she is now a supporter. She worked as a teacher for 25 years and is currently involved in the Free Julian Assange Ireland campaign.

Emily Steers sang "Union Maid". Emily Steers is a leading member of Socialist Action Canada, based in Guelph, Ontario. She helped to organize a union for teaching assistants at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, and now sings in the community and works as a music teacher.

Hannah Leichnitz is a history student at Carleton University. She lives in Montreal, is currently the acting secretary of the Socialist Action branch in Montreal, and is a strong advocate for queer liberation and equality rights.

Georgia Bradley is a student at St. Mary's University and a member of Socialist Action in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Sandra Griffith-Bonaparte sang “No Woman No Cry”, by Bob Marley. Sandra emigrated in 1988 to Canada from Grenada in the south-east Caribbean. She got a job in the federal public service and became involved in the Union of National Defense Employees, a component of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. As President of PSAC Local 70607 for 12 years, Sandra’s outstanding leadership attracted envy and hatred from some white members in her region, especially when she gained accolades as a union spokesperson and educator on subjects like Black History Month. Her bigoted opponents filed false charges of harassment against her. The UNDE brass removed her from office for ten months, but Sandra is back now. She is a member of Socialist Action in Ottawa. Welcome, Sandra.

Judy Koch is a long-time activist with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, the NDP Socialist Caucus, and is a strong feminist and advocate for the rights of people with physical and mental challenges. She joined Socialist Action in 2003 and was a member of the League for Socialist Action in the 1970s.

Agnieszka Marszalek is an elementary school teacher at Grassy Narrows Ojibway First Nation in northern Ontario. She is a member of the Workers’ Action Movement and Socialist Action.

Ann Montague is a member of the Socialist Action,

USA Political Committee. She is a long-time activist in the Service Employees' International Union, Local 503, and was a Leader of Oregon's State-Wide Pay Equity Rolling Strike. Ann is a founding member of SEIU Lavender Caucus (1988) which advocates for Lesbian, Gay, and Trans workers' rights.

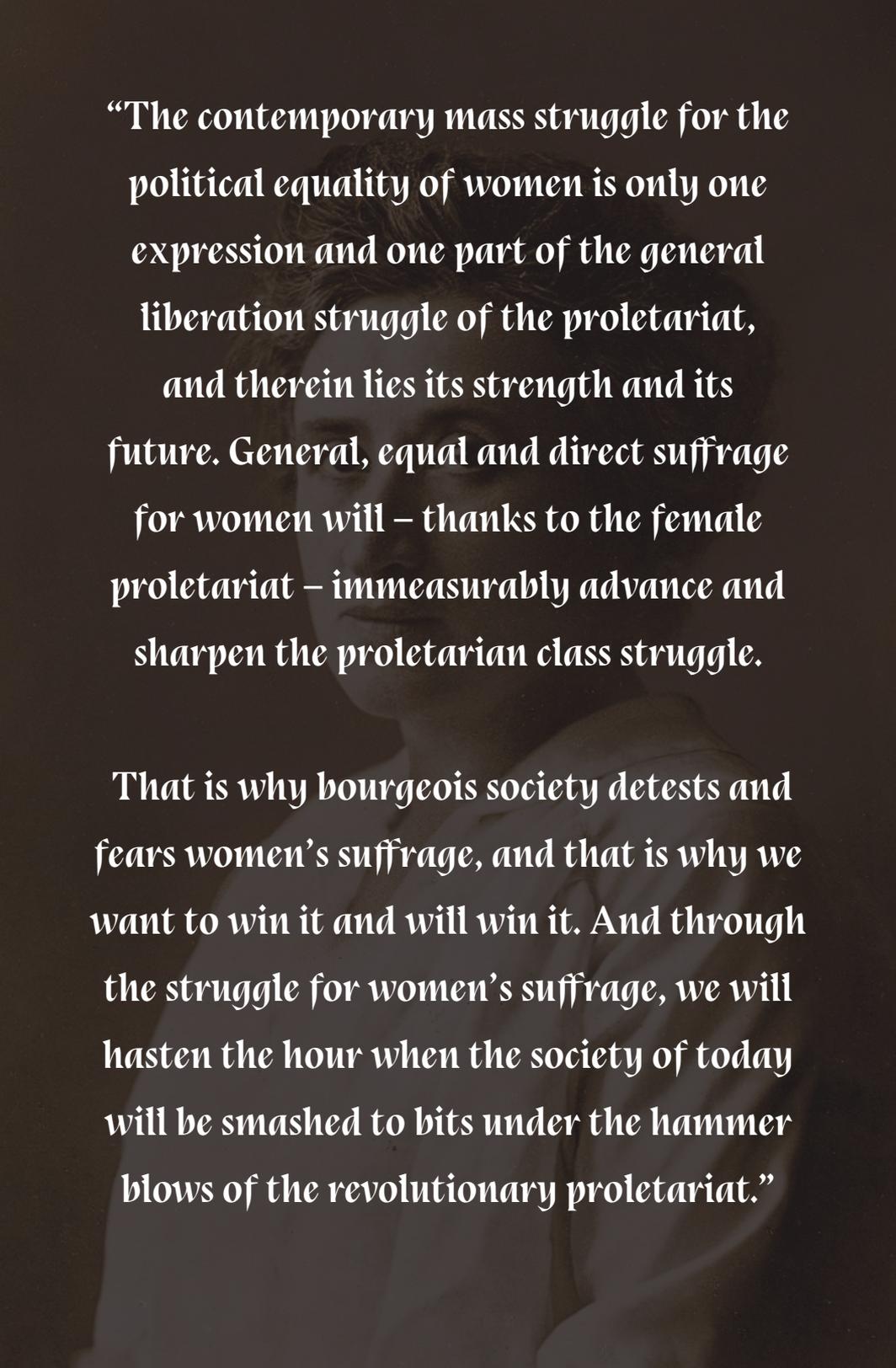
Karen Hanan is an office worker by day and an artist by night. She is a member of Socialist Action in Toronto. Pictured below is a 2013 art piece by Karen: Untitled (Drowning), Soda fired stoneware, glaze, sticks.

Yvonne Hanson in British Columbia is a public service worker and was the NDP candidate in Vancouver Granville in the October 2019 federal election. She is chair of the Vancouver Socialist Unity Assembly, and is a leading member of Socialist Action.

Elizabeth Byce made these closing remarks.

Special thanks go to Anne Conway, Agnieszka Marszalek, Emily Steers, Georgia Bradley, Judy Koch, Yvonne Hanson, Ann Montague, Sandra Griffith-Bonaparte, Hannah Leichnitz, Karen Hanan, and to Kurt Young, our wonderful technical producer in Mississauga, and to Barry Weisleder, SA Federal Secretary and the political producer of SA webcasts. Once again, if you liked this show, please subscribe to this Socialist Action YouTube channel.

I want to close with the words of Rosa Luxemburg who campaigned, over a century ago, not only against imperialist war, and for women's right to vote, but for women's self-organization inside the revolutionary socialist movement. In this context she wrote these words in 1912:



“The contemporary mass struggle for the political equality of women is only one expression and one part of the general liberation struggle of the proletariat, and therein lies its strength and its future. General, equal and direct suffrage for women will – thanks to the female proletariat – immeasurably advance and sharpen the proletarian class struggle.

That is why bourgeois society detests and fears women’s suffrage, and that is why we want to win it and will win it. And through the struggle for women’s suffrage, we will hasten the hour when the society of today will be smashed to bits under the hammer blows of the revolutionary proletariat.”

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