

Feminist Statement on Guaranteed Living Income

LEE LAKEMAN, ANGELA MILES AND LINDA CHRISTIANSEN-RUFFMAN

Every issue of *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* involves gathering women from various locations to meet and read together and discuss the potential contents. Always that is a useful educational opportunity for those on the editorial board, for students, for the profession of women's studies, for activists, and for the women's movement as a whole.

But in these times of great and increasing pressure on women and their activism, more is necessary. Editorial board members, potential authors, and readers are all feeling under attack. Women's places in the academy, centres, projects, and wings of the movement as well as women's livelihood, dignity, and autonomy are financially threatened in new ways. To write and to think creatively with political ingenuity and wisdom is difficult but essential in these circumstances.

The editorial board responded to the challenge. Some of us were able to meet in person to discuss articles. Others contributed long distance using new technology. We recalled reliable women, encouraged discouraged women, suggested new names and new ideas from our various contacts to seek out points of view that might be helpful to the whole. We sought the work of academics and activists, of women workers, and recipients of social programs and benefit programs. As usual, we have drawn out the connections among them.

For this issue we also had a rare opportunity to bring activism, research, and theory together in a specifically feminist process of knowledge creation. Two members of the *Canadian Woman's Studies* Executive Board and two members of the Guest Editorial Board for this issue were able to meet in Pictou, Nova Scotia with feminists from across the country for two days of intense dialogue around the themes of this issue. The mix of significant numbers of national groups with a substantial regional grassroots presence proved inspired.¹

As a movement we are in need of much more contact with each other. We need a fuller discussion amongst our-

selves that can renew our understanding of our shared feminist agendas for action. We need to restate the relevance of each of our demands to each other's campaigns. It is in that coming together of our demands and actions that our hope emerges and is sustained. We had that opportunity in Pictou and we rediscovered there that feminism is alive and fighting in Canada and demands her share of a better world.

For our initial discussions in Pictou we divided into two groups. Using the time-honoured feminist process of starting from women's experiences, the groups tackled the question of women's economic security and autonomy from different but related angles. In one group, participants shared information about the many economic security campaigns they had been involved in and reflected on how the varied issues are connected and might be advanced from a feminist point of view. Starting from sharing information about women's lives and experiences, including our increasing economic insecurity, the other group identified/imagined what changes would be needed to ensure the security and autonomy of all women. Both groups were asked to prioritize the implications for the poorest women, Indigenous women, and immigrant women, and to include attention to international contexts. Information about the growing interest in an annual general income was provided in participants' package of materials and both groups were also invited to consider this in their discussions. Later dialogue as a whole group, informed by the themes of both groups, contributed to the articulation of a feminist position on a guaranteed livable income. This is captured in the "Pictou Statement" presented here. This statement has not been endorsed by individual participants at Pictou and they have not yet had the time to take it to their respective groups for endorsement. However, it is an exciting outcome of a rare and generative feminist dialogue. We feel it represents an important advance in feminist thinking on these issues and are pleased to be able to present it here.

Feminist Statement on Guaranteed Living Income Pictou, Nova Scotia, Sept 18-20, 2004

For millennia women's work, along with the free gifts of nature, has provided most of the true wealth of our communities. Women's work has been central to individual and collective survival. In all our diverse communities women can be seen to work on the principle that everybody is entitled to economic and physical security and autonomy and a fair share of the common wealth.

Women in every community, context and racial group are still denied our rightful political power over the economics governing these communities and our world. To paraphrase "A Women's Creed," for thousands of years men have had power without responsibility while women have responsibility without power. This situation must change.

Feminists insist that all activities of government and business in our nation(s) and our diverse communities should be assessed in the light of the prime value of sustaining life and social priorities of universal entitlement, human security, autonomy and common wealth. Social priorities of universal entitlement, human security, autonomy and common wealth must become central in social life and in public policy.

We refuse to accept market measures of wealth. They make invisible the important caring work in every society. They ignore the well-being of people and the planet, deny the value of women's work, and define the collective wealth of our social programs and public institutions as "costs" which cannot be borne. They undermine social connections and capacities (social currency).

We reject policies that sacrifice collective wealth and individual security in the interests of profit for transnational corporations.

Women in Canada expect full and generous provision for all people's basic needs from the common wealth. Social and collective provision for sustaining life must be generous and secure in Canada and must be delivered through national mechanisms appropriately influenced and controlled by the women of our many specific communities.

We expect all people's full and dignified participation in society including full individual and social sharing of the work and responsibility of sustaining life that has so far been gendered. Men must share equally in this work within and beyond monetary measures.

We expect our rightful share of the wealth we have created. Women's work must be recognized and valued both within and beyond monetary measures. We expect sustained and expanding collective provision for people's needs.

Women demand an indexed guaranteed living income for all individual residents set at a level to enable comfortable living.

We expect this statement will resound in the diverse member groups of the World March of Women, in the World March of Women charter events next spring, in labour and anti-poverty struggles, and in diverse grassroots women's groups across the country struggling on a daily and urgent basis with these issues. It will surely sugar the yeasty uprising of political activity among women refusing poverty and rewardless toil for all of us.

Groups interested in establishing a network for ongoing dialogue and future actions around guaranteed livable income, please contact the CWS/cf office at <luciana@yorku.ca>.

¹Participants at the meeting held in Pictou, NS, Sept. 18-20, 2004 included: Louise Aucoin, New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity; Linda Christiansen-Ruffman, CRIAW-NS, Atlantic Women's FishNet, FemJEPP, FAFIA; Brenda Cranney, *Canadian Woman Studies*; Karen Dempsey, National Council of Women; Sue Genge, Canadian Labour Congress (CLC); Michelle Genge Harris, Women's Network PEI; Lucille Harper, Antigonish Women's Centre, FemJEPP; Lee Lakeman, Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres (CASAC), World March of Women; Barbara Legault, Federation des femmes de Québec (FFQ); Bernadette MacDonald, Pictou Women's Resource Centre, FemJEPP; Angela Miles, *Canadian Woman Studies*, Toronto Women for a Just and Healthy Planet; Doreen Paris, Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women; Katharine Reed, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), Antigonish Women's Centre; Angela Regnier, Canadian Federation of Students; Luciana Ricciutelli, *CWS/cf*; Michelle Ridgeway, Women's Network PEI; Jane Robinson, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW)-NFDL; Jenny Robinson, YWCA Canada; Gwen Wood, National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO).

"Eight million Americans permanently unemployed and not about to be made employable by any patchwork politics now being thrown around by the Johnson administration.

They call for the universal right of income in America!

It is, to say the least, a revolutionary demand. A correct one, a thrilling one. Technology has not waited for our sociopsychological adjustment for even those like me. The time of superabundance is here.

The mind entirely flips over in the face of such pronouncements. They are indisputable. They are the articulation of the former mere expectations of generations of prophets of human destiny. But to have it here—and to have to deal with it—shakes one and all the conventions on which one's life is built. Labor, 'sacred Labor'—is not!" (July 17, 1964).

—Lorraine Hansberry, To Be Young, Gifted and Black, New American Library, 1969: 257.

About the Guest Editors

Pat Armstrong is Professor, Department of Sociology and School of Women's Studies, York University. She is co-editor (with Caroline Andrew, Hugh Armstrong, Wallace Clement and Leah Vosko) of *Studies in Political Economy: Developments in Feminism* (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 2003).

Doreen Demas is a feminist activist for women with disabilities, and continues to serve on the board of Disabled Women's Network of Canada (DAWN).

Sylvia Fuller is a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Izaak Walton Killam postdoctoral fellow at the University of British Columbia. Her current research explores the relationships among changing employment relations, policy frameworks, and gendered patterns of inequality and precariousness in employment.

Lee Lakeman has spent more than 20 years doing front-line anti-violence work. She is the representative for British Columbia and the Yukon on the board of the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres (CASAC) and member of the World March of Women.

Angela Miles teaches in the Adult Education and Community Development Program at OISE/University of Toronto. She is the author of *Integrative Feminist Perspectives: Building Global Visions, 1960s-1990s* (Routledge, 1996) and an active member of Toronto Women for a Just and Healthy Planet.

Willi Nolan is a community developer, business-woman and ecopreneur. She has a particular interest in the prevention of environmental destruction and health related issues, using citizen action and education as key tools for successful initiatives.

Karen Pederson is as a young beekeeper from Cut Knife, SK. She has worked with the National Farmers' Union for many years holding the positions of Youth President, Women's Vice President and, currently, Women's President.

Linda Christiansen-Ruffman is a committed feminist activist. She teaches women's studies, international development studies, and Atlantic Canadian studies at Saint Mary's University in Nova Scotia.

Laurell Ritchie is the National Representative in Canadian Auto Worker's (CAW) Union's Work Organization and Training Department.

Lorina Serafico is an active member of the Committee for Domestic Workers and Caregivers' Rights in Vancouver, B.C.

Leah F. Vosko is Canada Research Chair in Feminist Political Economy, School of Social Sciences, Atkinson Faculty, York University. She is the author of *Temporary Work: The Gendered Rise of a Precarious Employment Relationship* (University of Toronto Press, 2000).