From the Royal Commission on the Status of Women to the National Action Committee

Introduction

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The roundtable in this issue, "From the Royal Commission on the Status of Women to the National Action Committee," marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (nac). In April of 1972, over 500 feminists met in Toronto for the "Strategy for Change" conference sponsored by the National Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Women. Some Ad Hoc Committee organizers had been involved in the Committee for the Equality of Women (cew), which had demanded that Prime Minister Lester Pearson's government appoint a royal commission to document women's status and find ways to rectify gender inequality. Following the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (rcsw) in 1970, the Ad Hoc Committee resolved to hold the government's feet to the fire, making sure that the report's recommendations were implemented. The rcsw and nac were thus closely linked, though nac took on a life of its own, changing in organization, politics, methods, and outlook over time – a story told by other researchers.[1] Because the rcsw and nac were connected, this

1. A few examples include Jill Vickers, Pauline Rankin and Christine Appelle, *Politics as If*

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roundtable addresses them together. Of course, given the political context of the early 1970s, an organization like NAC might have evolved on its own. A resurgence of feminism on a global scale as well as within Canada, plus the proliferation of new varieties of feminism, led some activists to consider ways to foster a national conversation across the provincial, linguistic, and cultural boundaries that had often kept Canadian feminist organizing quite localized.

Historians have assessed both the RCSW's and NAC's origins, meaning, impact, and legacy. In some writing, the RCSW is portrayed as a "watershed" for the women's movement, supposedly initiating "second-wave feminism."[2] Skepticism about both the "three wave" model of feminism and the triggering prominence of this one event, however, suggests such claims are exaggerated. The RCSW did not singularly invent or resurrect feminism, but it did represent a transitional moment, and one that provided historians with a treasure trove of documents, archives, and media coverage that allows us to probe not only the economic and social context of gender, race, and class relations framing the RCSW, but also the public discussion that followed it.[3] Indeed, the RCSW's archival footprint itself is of interest: depending on which sources historians use – briefs, letters, media coverage, government documents – their conclusions can vary.[4]

Women Mattered: A Political Analysis of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Caroline Andrew and Sanda Rodgers, eds., *Women and the Canadian State* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); Mary Jo Nadeau, "The Making and Unmaking of a 'Parliament of Women': Nation, Race and the Politics of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, 1972–1992," PhD thesis, York University, 2005; Nancy Worsfold, "An Organization and Its Discontents: The National Action Committee on the Status of Women," MA thesis, Concordia University, 1990; Lynne Marks, Margaret Little, Megan Gaucher and T. R. Noddings, "'A Job That Should Be Respected': Contested Visions of Motherhood and English Canada's Second Wave Women's Movements, 1970–1990," *Women's History Review* 25, 5 (2016): 771–790; Jessica Weiser, "Ruling Relations and Representations: The Toronto Star's Depiction of NAC, 1983–1997," MA thesis, OISE, 1998.

2. Freda Paltiel, "State Initiatives: Impetus and Effects," in Andrew and Rodgers, eds., *Women and the Canadian State*, 27.

3. Cerise Morris, "No More than Simple Justice: The Royal Commission on the Status of Women and Social Change in Canada," PhD thesis, McGill University, 1982; Jane Arscott, "'More Explosive Than Any Terrorist's Time Bomb': The RCSW, Then and Now," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Montréal, 2 June 2010; Arscott, "Twenty-Five Years and Sixty-Five Minutes after the Royal Commission on the Status of Women," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 11 (Spring 1995): 30–56; Kimberly Speers, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women: A Study of the Contradictions and Limitations of Liberal Feminism," MA thesis, Queen's University, 1994; Kathryn McLeod, "Laying the Foundation: The Women's Bureau, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and Canadian Feminism," MA thesis, Laurentian University, 2006. See also many of the essays in Andrew and Rodgers, eds., *Women and the Canadian State*.

4. Annis May Timpson, "Royal Commissions as Sites of Resistance: Women's Challenges on Child Care in the Royal Commission on the Status of Women," *International Journal of*

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Critiques of the RCSW appeared as soon as it issued its report, especially by radical and socialist feminists who rejected its embrace of male-defined success, its failure to address the structural basis of women's oppression within capitalism, and its milquetoast recommendations.[5] Even during RCSW hearings, Indigenous women and women of colour challenged the royal commission's ability to comprehend their specific oppression.[6] Reflections written in the 1990s by key RCSW players and some feminist reformers were more positive: commission head Florence Bird and research director Monique Bégin argued for its success as a necessarily pragmatic reform effort that "changed the course of social history."[7]

Over time, scholars have provided a more complex balance sheet of the RCSW's meaning and impact, including its limitations and insights, and its inherent and problematic assumptions, in relation to its recommendations, the commissioners' politics, the federal bureaucracy, the social landscape, and political possibilities of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The RCSW's failure to address gendered violence, its evasion of questions of sexuality, its lack of

Canadian Studies 20 (Fall 1999): 1–24; Joan Sangster, "Women's Experience as Evidence: Letters to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women," in *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women's History* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2011), 359–90; Barbara Freeman, *The Satellite Sex: The Media and Women's Issues in English Canada, 1966–1971* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2001); Shannon Stettner, "'He Is Still Unwanted': Women's Assertions of Authority over Abortion in Letters to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 29, 1 (2012): 151–171.

5. Newspaper clippings, Royal Commission on the Status of Women fonds, RG33-89 (hereafter RCSW), vol. 44, Library and Archives Canada (LAC). See also "Pie in the Sky," in *Women Unite! An Anthology of the Canadian Women's Movement* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1972), 40–42; Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1984), 135–140; Pat Marchak, "A Critical Review of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women Report," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 9, 1 (1972): 73–96.

6. Carrie Best quoted in *Victoria Province*, 17 April 1968, and *Pictou Advocate*, 18 September 1968; Newspaper clippings, RCSW, vol. 41, LAC; Mary Anne Lahache, RCSW, vol. 17, brief 394, RCSW, LAC. On the RCSW in the North, including northern Indigenous women answering back to colonial views, see Joan Sangster, *The Iconic North: Cultural Constructions of Aboriginal Life in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), 223–273.

7. Monique Bégin quoted in Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 236. See also Monique Bégin, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada: Twenty Years Later," in Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty, eds., *Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 21–38; Bégin, *Ladies, Upstairs! My Life in Politics and After* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018); Florence Bird, *Anne Francis: An Autobiography* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1974). There are also articles on specific issues the RCSW raised: for example, Lorna Marsden, "The Role of the National Action Committee in Facilitating Equal Pay Policy in Canada," in Ronnie Steinberg Ratner, ed., *Equal Employment Policy for Women* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 242–260.

attention to immigration, and especially its colonial and racist assumptions of a "white" Canada have all been part of this conversation.

Similarly, NAC too has been the subject of personal and historical reflection, though such writing has been less thorough than that concerned with the RCSW, in part because of NAC's much longer and far more complex existence.[8] There is simply more to analyze; indeed, some topics remain tantalizingly open for question. The NAC, unlike the RCSW, was an evolving, living organization that altered over time. Established as an autonomous, non-partisan entity with membership by affiliated organization (rather than individual), it initially focused on research, lobbying, and public education, developing a strategic but still limited "parliamentary activism."[9] However, it increasingly expanded its understanding of equality issues, moving away from the original focus on implementing the RCSW's recommendations. Its politics and internal dynamic shifted over decades, shaped by the political culture, the economic context, other social movements, the unexpected in political life – and crucially, by the agency of NAC activists themselves.

From the beginning, NAC managed multiple feminisms under one roof, though it was consistently concerned with cementing ties with Québec feminists and engaging with Indigenous women. To optimists, NAC's pluralism was its strength: NAC's longevity, "ideological diversity and ability to bridge generations of feminists" were proof of a uniquely "Canadian" version of feminism.[10] As Jill Vickers, Pauline Rankin, and Christine Appelle also argue, NAC politics shifted considerably by the 1980s, as it encompassed broader equality goals and, pressed by leftist members, paid more attention to the needs of working-class women. More protest-oriented politics were grafted onto its lobbying role. If NAC represented some ideological diversity, it did not initially embody racial diversity. Internal and external pressures forced NAC to address the marginalization of women based on race and ethnicity, as well as sexual orientation and disability, within its own ranks and to rectify NAC's failure to develop antiracist perspectives and politics.[11]

This roundtable covers a few of the many themes that emerged in the RCSW and in the early NAC. It is worth noting, in a labour studies journal, that the concept and experience of work were fundamental to both the RCSW and NAC, even if their definitions of work entailed omissions and oversights, such as the RCSW's inability to come to terms with women's unpaid domestic labour,

8. For just two interviews/reflections, see "Interview with Judy Rebick," *Studies in Political Economy* 44, 1 (1994): 39–71; "Sunera Thobani: A Very Public Intellectual," interview by William K. Carroll, *Socialist Studies/Études socialistes* 8, 2 (2012): 12–30.

9. Nadeau, "Making and Unmaking."

10. Vickers, Rankin and Appelle, *Politics*.

11. Vijay Agnew, *Resisting Discrimination: Women from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean and the Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

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analyzed in this roundtable by Meg Luxton. Defined expansively, labour involved unpaid work, unemployment, motherwork, volunteer work, and of course paid labour, along with all the social institutions and issues that went with it, such as child care, family responsibilities, welfare, the tax system, education, and so on. Yet there is no doubt that paid labour often dominated its agenda, despite the RCSW's stated purpose of validating women's work in the home. This is not surprising, given the economic and social context. The RCSW emerged in a period when women's labour force participation was shifting considerably, as more women, especially those with families, joined the workforce. This emerging, incremental change in where and how women laboured increasingly had radical implications for women's consciousness, collective organizing, and interactions with political, economic, and social institutions.

Also, the impetus for the RCSW came in large part from women who were concerned with discrimination in the workforce, a resilient sexual division of labour, women's lower pay, and lack of occupational choice. Although many were professional or white-collar workers, trade union and working-class women were represented on the Committee for the Equality of Women, also pushing for a royal commission. Work for pay was subsequently interpreted by the RCSW staff and commissioners as an important feminist issue – in contrast to their view that sexuality was a "private" concern.

However, the RCSW did not analyze women's work within a class framework; it was firmly ensconced within a liberal feminist outlook, which meant the commission did not see the class structure (or capitalism) as inherently unequal, exploitative, or problematic. This, in turn, led to an implicit assumption that women could make a choice to labour within the home or (also) outside of it, when for working-class and racialized women, it was economic necessity, and not idealized free choice, that shaped their decisions. Nor did the RCSW explore the connections between motherwork and poverty, which, as Margaret Little argues here, was out of step with attention at the time, through the federal Croll Senate Committee on Poverty, to poverty issues. The RCSW also ignored the connection between work, ethnicity, and race. Whiteness was again taken for granted and the particular needs of immigrant women also accorded less visibility.

The growing numbers of unionized women, most especially in the public sector; the circulation of feminist ideas; the disjuncture women felt between the rhetoric of union equality and their actual second-class status; and especially the jarring juxtaposition between the reigning male breadwinner ideal and the reality of women's essential breadwinning role all provided fertile ground for the growth of labour feminism revealed in RCSW hearings and briefs. Although the trade-union movement was incensed that no labour-movement person was appointed to the commission (unlike the similar Kennedy Commission on women in the United States), unions devoted considerable effort to their briefs and public presentations, some of which were quite forward thinking.

Since the earlier 1960s, some unionists had been collaborating with feminists in productive, if temporary, alliances; women in the United Auto Workers, for example, supported an Ontario liberal feminist lobby for legislation banning sex-based seniority and job advertising. Unions with a progressive leadership, such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) – which notably had a feminist president, Grace Hartman, and a supportive research director, Gil Levine – became more vocal about gender equality. Reflecting a changing climate, in 1968 the Canadian Labour Congress *finally* added prohibitions against sex discrimination to its constitution.[12]

Paid labour was a recurring theme in RCSW briefs, internal research studies, women's letters, and the commission's final recommendations. Whether it was discussion of maternity leave, the sexual division of labour, unionization, lack of promotion, unequal pay, sexist work cultures, educational training, or reform of the federal civil service, the RCSW was interested in hearing from women in the paid labour force. There were some significant differences in women's presentations; only unions, for example, emphasized collective bargaining as one of the most important routes to gender equality. Internal discussions within the house of labour, hidden from the press, could nonetheless be quite fraught. Within the labour movement, conflict between some labour feminists and male leaders simmered over what constituted a "labour" issue to be included in official briefs. Feminists in the Canadian Labour Congress committee working on their brief to the RCSW wanted abortion in; other leaders did not.[13]

Given the influence of the RCSW's recommendations on the original NAC, the ever-increasing numbers of women in the paid labour force, and the growing influence of labour feminism, paid labour was also central to the initial NAC's agenda. Again, this took in many issues such as pay equity, human rights protections, pensions, child care, the tax system, and later, immigration and free trade. While the RCSW could only make recommendations for new legislation covering the small percentage of workers under federal jurisdiction, NAC had a much wider perspective and reach. In many cities and provinces, local "status of women" committees, tied loosely or firmly to NAC, emerged, pursuing a more focused local agenda. In Ontario, for instance, the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women – founded in 1971 as a collaboration of liberal (and Liberal), social democratic, and union women – wrote to national

12. Pamela Sugiman, "Unionism and Feminism in the Canadian Auto Workers Union, 1961–1992," in Linda Briskin and Patricia McDermott, eds., *Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy, and Militancy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 172–190; Susan Crean, *Grace Hartman: A Woman for Her Time* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1995); Meg Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall 2001): 63–88.

13. On the RCSW and the labour movement, see Joan Sangster, "Tackling the 'Problem' of the Woman Worker: The Labour Movement, Working Women and the Royal Commission on the Status of Women," in *Transforming Labour*, 233–268.

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corporations like Air Canada and the banks urging them to alter their sexist practices, but they also presented briefs to the Ontario government, pressed for pay equity, and supported strikes dominated by women workers at Dare, Fleck, and other workplaces.[14] Across the country, similar "status of women" action committees took up workplace, legislative, and social issues of paid labour, as well as welfare reform, accessible and affordable child care, better human rights protections, and a multitude of other issues. Some sparked initiatives that reverberated across the movement for some time. Vancouver Status of Women, initially established as an effort to ensure implementation of the RCSW's recommendations, began publishing a BC-based newspaper, *Kinesis*, in 1972. The publication evolved as an innovative avenue for feminist communication and debate, not only in British Columbia but beyond, covering a wide range of concerns including prison activism, domestic violence, wage labour, and colonialism – and far more. Like other new feminist newspapers, *Kinesis* also devoted considerable attention to uncovering the *history* of women's varied labours – a topic previously marginalized not only in mainstream media and educational venues but also within the labour movement.

Even in its first decade, as NAC tackled the RCSW's recommendations, debates surfaced within its ranks, sometimes relayed in its newsletter, *Status of Women*; how pensions should be reconstructed to reflect women's unpaid caring labour and less linear workforce participation was just one of many. The narrow agenda of *how* to implement the RCSW opened up questions of *why* certain policies were promoted and others not, as well as whose economic and social interests they favoured within the overgeneralized category of "women."

Even as NAC shifted course in the 1980s and 1990s, work-related issues remained central. Not only were union, labour, and socialist feminists determined to make NAC a voice for working-class women, but antiracist feminists also knew that "work" – and indeed, class relations – could not be abstracted from the racism and xenophobia that women experienced. The issue of what a "feminist" concern *was* also re-emerged, not for NAC but for the governments it lobbied. When NAC waded into the free trade debate, arguing that capital would be the winners and working-class women the losers from free trade, Marjorie Cohen, a NAC vice-president, remembers the reaction: as long as NAC spoke to recognizable "women's issues" such as daycare, its voices were accepted, but when it talked about the budget, privatization, or trade policy, "we were going too far."[15]

14. Beth Atcheson and Lorna Marsden, eds., *White Gloves Off: The Work of the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2018).

15. Marjorie Griffin Cohen, "The Canadian Women's Movement and Its Efforts to Influence the Canadian Economy," in Backhouse and Flaherty, eds., *Challenging Times*, 218; Cohen, *Free Trade and the Future of Women's Work: Manufacturing and Service Industries* (Toronto: Garamond, 1987). See also Sylvia Bashevkin, "Free Trade and Canadian Feminism: The Case of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women," *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques* 15, 4 (1989): 363–375.

These roundtable essays, marking the 50th anniversary of NAC's establishment, focus on the RCSW and the early years of NAC. They are revealing precisely because they show how assumptions and weaknesses of the RCSW were translated, reproduced, and sometimes challenged in NAC. Sarah Nickel's essay shows a connection between the RCSW and NAC but also a pivot into new territory as NAC struggled to be an ally of Indigenous women. This was a complex endeavour, not the least because, as Nickel shows with some nuance, Indigenous women themselves were debating which political direction to take, especially vis-à-vis changing the "marrying out" clause of the *Indian Act*. Non-Indigenous feminists sought to overcome a shameful past of not addressing colonialism, though they sometimes could not shed colonialist attitudes.

As Meg Luxton's contribution indicates, the RCSW's liberal feminist framework and acceptance of capitalist social relations inhibited a full understanding of social reproduction. The RCSW rhetorically validated the economic contribution to society of housewives' work but contradictorily remained wedded to the ideal of a privatized, nuclear family household, leading to the commission's inability to create policy alternatives that might truly address the inequities of both paid and unpaid labour – and this only worsened in increasingly neoliberal times.

The RCSW's idealized notion of choice about waged work that Luxton critiques is echoed in Lisa Pasolli's discussion of child care. Pasolli also directs our attention to the importance of tax policy in the RCSW's approach to child care. Because much political attention was focused on feminists' subsequent demand for state-funded universal child care, we can forget that many presentations to the RCSW called for a tax solution, specifically, a tax deduction for women using child care. The commission's report called for an overhaul of tax policies as one crucial instrument, among others, to aid working women needing child care, though the government ignored these recommendations, instead adopting a childcare tax deduction that the RCSW had *not* endorsed because it recognized that this measure would favour more affluent women workers.

The liberal feminist outlook of the commission meant education was a very significant concern for the commissioners and for many individuals and organizations that made presentations or contributed briefs. As Rebecca Coulter shows, improving institutional education was seen as a critical means of preparing women for better, and equal, opportunity in the labour market, and even those feminists disappointed with the commission's liberal orientation saw the RCSW as a "strategic opportunity" to press debates about education and work in new directions. Coulter concludes with an important point: pedagogy meant far more than educational policy or institutions, as the women's movement itself became a force of feminist, transformative pedagogy.

Finally, Margaret Little's piece brings our attention back to the RCSW's inordinate focus on improving women's lives in the world of paid work and its surprising silence about women's poverty, despite receiving a few presentations

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containing both policy and experiential material from sole-support parents. In the commission's report, there was a lacuna of recommendations addressing poverty, such as the guaranteed annual income, a concept circulating at the time and certainly discussed in relation to the contemporaneous Croll hearings. Little also looks at the briefs of ethnic and racialized organizations, noting that Indigenous women recognized poverty as a critical issue of concern. Connecting the RCSW and NAC, Little contends that the latter's antipathy to groups like Wages for Housework reflected an ongoing inability of many feminists of different political views to listen to the demands of single mothers' antipoverty groups.

These five pieces are snapshots, rather than a comprehensive picture, of this topic, and most especially of NAC. More research, grounded in multiple methodologies, including an exploration of the extensive primary sources that are increasingly available in archives, is needed. All of these contributions remind us that the history of feminist organizing in the later 20th century is an ongoing, rather than a settled, question – one that needs to take into account the interplay between changing material, social, and ideological contexts and the ideas, strategies, and actions of the multiple, varied feminist efforts that made up the women's movement.

"We Now Must Take Action": Indigenous Women, Activism, and the Aftermath of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women

Sarah Nickel, University of Alberta

In 1980, Kanien'kehá:ka woman Mary Two-Axe Earley rose to address delegates at the annual meeting of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). Prefacing her comments by confirming that Canada was a great place to live, she nonetheless highlighted the sexism and racism that Indigenous women experienced:

> We Indian women stand before you as THE LEAST MEMBERS OF YOUR SOCIETY. You may ask yourself why? First, we are excluded from the protection of the Canadian Bill of Rights or the intercessions of any Human Rights Commission as the Indian Act supersedes the laws governing the majority. Second, we are subject to a law wherein the only equality is the inequality of treatment of both status and non status women. Third, we are subject to the punitive actions of dictatorial chiefs half-crazed with newly acquired powers recently bestowed by a government concerned with their self-determination. Fourth, we are stripped naked of any legal protection and raped by those who would take advantage of the inequities afforded by the Indian Act.[1]

Continuing, Two-Axe Earley explained that section 12(1)(b) of the *Indian Act* prevented First Nations women from being buried beside their mothers and fathers on-reserve if they had married outside of their communities. These women were also subject to eviction and expulsion from tribal roles, forfeited inheritances and property, and were divested from the right to vote in band elections. Chiefs "steeped in chauvinistic patriarchy" ruled them, she argued, and these women were unable to pass their "indianness and Indian culture by mother to her children."[2] Two-Axe Earley made clear that the sexism codified in the *Indian Act* and internalized in Indigenous community leadership needed to be eliminated.

This presentation to the NAC was not her first. Two-Axe Earley had been involved in this volunteer organization since its inception – in 1972, in the aftermath of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW), to coordinate member groups in the bid for women's quality.[3] And earlier, in 1968,

1. "Mary Two-Axe Earley speaks to the NAC annual meeting," 1980, Indigenous Women Reports and Correspondence, 1979–82, Equal Rights for Indian Women, National Action Committee on the Status of Women fonds (hereafter NAC fonds), box 81, file 6, Canadian Women's Movement Archives, University of Ottawa (hereafter CWMA).

2. "Mary Two-Axe Earley speaks."

3. "National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC)/Comité canadien d'action sur le statut de la femme (CCA)," n.d., *Rise Up! A Digital Archive of Feminist Activism*, accessed 12 November 2021, https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/activism/organizations/

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she gave a similar address to the RCSW with the support of a delegation of 30 Kanien'kehá:ka women from both sides of the Canada-US border, when she was just beginning Equal Rights for Equal Women – the Indigenous women's organization that would become synonymous with the status issue (and a precursor to Indian Rights for Indian Women).[4] Along with Two-Axe Earley, Indigenous women across Canada were taking up the opportunity to advocate for their rights in new feminist forums, and they would not back down.

Exploring Indigenous women's activism through organizational records and reports from Indigenous women's organizations, the RCSW, and the NAC provides critical insight not only into how Indigenous women understood their own marginalization in terms of race, gender, and class but also into how others around them, including allies in the mainstream women's movement, supported them and helped advocate for change. Drawing from these sources, I demonstrate how participation in and outcomes of Indigenous women's activism in other feminist circles could be uneven, such as when the RCSW failed to explicitly address colonialism as a key factor in Indigenous women's experiences and did not account for Indigenous women's existing political work in their own organizations. The NAC, too, could flatten Indigenous women's broader political concerns into the singular issue of status under the *Indian Act*, which undermined the depth and breadth of women's struggles. But women also learned from one another and worked within the channels available to them as best they could. Indigenous women were vocal about what they needed, and non-Indigenous women listened and used their networks to amplify Indigenous women's voices. In some cases, non-Indigenous women were dedicated allies who could bear the brunt of advocacy work, allowing Indigenous women to direct their efforts elsewhere and to continue to grow their independent political movement. The complexity of women's interactions, relationships, and political mobilizations is critical to better understanding feminist action during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Indigenous Women and the Royal Commission on the Status of Women

Indigenous women's involvement in feminist organizing around the RCSW appears almost negligible at first glance. There were no throngs of Indigenous women sending letters and briefs en masse to the RCSW, nor were there hordes of women intent on giving testimony at public hearings. But Indigenous women were present and, in many cases, simply built their participation in the commission onto their existing and ongoing political work. In addition to Two-Axe Earley, representatives of groups and organizations that took part

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4. Indian Rights for Indian Women did not supersede Equal Rights for Indian Women. The latter organization, which Two-Axe Earley also took part in, was national, but she often continued to refer to the original organization as well.

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in the RCSW in 1967 and 1968 included Mary Ann Lavallée (a driving force in the creation of the Saskatchewan Indian Women's Association) and Alice Steinhauer, June Stifle (Maria Campbell), and Christine Daniels (on behalf of the Alberta Native Women's Conference, which initiated the Voice of Alberta Native Women's Society).[5] These women participated just as their organizations were developing to create space for their political work.

In fact, in November 1967, Lavallée helped organize a conference in Saskatoon for 60 delegates from a group calling itself the Saskatchewan Indian Women. The women who attended discussed poor living conditions for their children, and, responding to high rates of child apprehensions, they recommended shifting the jurisdiction of child welfare from the federal government to the provinces.[6] Recognizing the need to pressure for changes through a formal organization, the women created the Indian Women of Saskatchewan, a precursor to the Saskatchewan Indian Women's Association (SIWA).[7] This was a key political moment for Saskatchewan women, but it also built critical capacity across the West, as several delegates from outside Saskatchewan attended the conference including Steinhauer, Daniels, and Mary Ruth McDougall, who launched their own Alberta conference the next year based on the Saskatchewan meeting.

This First Alberta Native Women's Conference would draw women to Edmonton from across Canada, including Lavallée, who, in her keynote address, referenced the upcoming RCSW and some of the concerns "white women" were presenting. She suggested that "by the end of this conference we should come up with some suggestions and resolutions that will benefit Indian woman and her everyday world."[8] The meeting, held just a month

5. Individual Indigenous women also took part in the RCSW, writing briefs and providing testimony about their personal experiences with racial and gender-based discrimination. Together, representatives from status and non-status First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities were united in calling out systemic barriers to education, inadequate living conditions, improper health care, lack of self-government, and, for First Nations, unequal legal status through sexist *Indian Act* provisions.

6. The Indian Women of Saskatchewan, Mrs. Rose Ewack, and Mrs. Mary Ann Lavallée to the Honorable Cy McDonald, Minister of Welfare for Saskatchewan, and the Honorable Arthur Laing, Minister of Northern and Indian Affairs, 14 November 1967, Regina Voice of Women (VOW) fonds, Brief to the Saskatchewan Government by the Indian Women's Conference, 1967–68, R-138, file VI.4, Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan (hereafter PAS).

7. Indian Women of Saskatchewan, Ewack, and Lavallée to McDonald and Laing, PAS; Marjory Mulvagh, Secretary, House of Commons, Office of the Leader of the Opposition, to Irene Blewett, Secretary, Regina Voice of Women, 16 April 1968, Regina VOW fonds, Brief to the Saskatchewan Government by the Indian Women's Conference, 1967–68, R-138, file VI.4, PAS; FSI Annual Conference, News for Saskatchewan Indian Women, October 1969, Muriel J. Clipsham fonds, Saskatchewan Indian Women, 1969–70, R-298, file 14.b, PAS.

8. Mary Ann Lavallée, "The Role of Native Women – Past, Present, and Future," paper presented at the Alberta Native Women's Conference, Edmonton, 12–15 March 1968, PR1999.0465, file 78, Provincial Archives of Alberta (hereafter PAA).

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before the royal commission began its hearings, attracted over 300 delegates to Edmonton, and while organizers admitted not knowing much about the RCSW, they agreed it would be useful to take their conference resolutions to it. So they did.

The resulting RCSW submission demanded better housing and sanitation services, Indigenous control over child welfare services, the extension of medical services into isolated areas, and cultural training for teachers, to provide less racially biased education.[9] The group also highlighted the discrimination and criminalization of young Indigenous women moving into urban areas, leading it to suggest (and the RCSW to ultimately recommend) establishing halfway houses in the cities to provide short-term housing and guidance on employment possibilities, city services, and educational opportunities.[10] And while the women were open to considering the commission as an audience for their work, they were also thinking beyond it to other political avenues.

Not only did the First Alberta Native Women's Conference lead to the creation of the Voice of Alberta Native Women's Society (VANWS), which advocated for women's and children's rights for the next two decades, but the group also presented its resolutions to Premier Ernest Manning and to the April 1968 Indian Association of Alberta conference.[11] Indigenous women knew to cast their nets wide to see results, and they were not pinning their hopes only on the royal commission (which, as mentioned, they were not familiar with) or the male-dominated Indigenous organizations (which often excluded them). Instead, they prioritized meeting together in large conferences to identify problems, strategize feasible solutions, and then seek whatever outside support they might need.

Still, the resulting report of the RCSW was disappointing in that Indigenous women's concerns were subsumed within wider thematic sections largely concerned with non-Indigenous women. Joan Sangster has argued that the commission was genuinely concerned about the marginalization of Indigenous women and had ongoing conversations about how best to ensure their representation and inclusion in the process, but some of the commissioners' actions could be flawed. This was the case when the commission enlisted the RCMP to track an Indigenous woman down who had submitted a letter but was not

9. Canada, Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) – Submission, brief submitted by Alberta Native Women's Conference (Edmonton), brief 310, vol. 15, RG33/89, LAC; Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Ottawa 1970), 330–331.

10. Canada, RCSW – Submission, brief 310; Canada, *Report*, 330–331; Canada, RCSW, Precis of Public Hearings, Edmonton, 26 April 1968, Alberta Native Women's Conference, Spokesmen, Mrs. Donils [Daniels], Mrs. Steinhowser [Steinhauser], Mrs. Stiple [Stifle], brief 310, vol. 10, exhibit 74, RG33/89, LAC; Alberta Native Women's Conference, 12–15 March 1968, Recommendations, Conferences and Training Courses, 1967–68, GR1979.0152, box 8, file 0084, PAA.

11. Alberta Native Women's Conference, Recommendations, PAA; "Brief to Manning: Natives Protest Meddling" (editorial), *Lethbridge Herald*, 16 March 1968.

planning to attend the hearing in Yellowknife.[12] Here, and elsewhere, the commission reproduced rather than challenged settler-colonial dynamics.

Indeed, Benita Bunjun insisted that the RCSW is a "colonial archive" that "furthered nation-building projects while crystallising Indigenous women and women of color as the Other … reproduc[ing] nation-building discourses of essentialism, racialization, and exclusion."[13] This was similar to Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond's 20th-anniversary assessment of the commission, which she labelled "patriarchy and paternalism," noting that the entire premise of the commission – what she branded "equal opportunities for women" – was culturally and conceptually inappropriate for Indigenous women.[14] Barbara Freeman also noted sexist and racist media coverage of Indigenous women's involvement in the commission, including by CBC reporters who portrayed many as naïve; in one case, CBC reporter Ed Reid covered Lavallée's presentation and praised her competency as if it was some sort of shock.[15] These scholars also stressed the exclusion, misrepresentation, and essentializing of Indigenous women's needs and realities – particularly the ways in which white settler women talked "about" Indigenous women's needs solely in terms of education and poverty without reference to colonial realities.[16]

Afterwards

Nevertheless, Sangster and others have noted that Indigenous women carved out spaces to "answer back" to the stereotypes and misrepresentations of them held by commissioners and participants alike, and that this "answering back took on more assertive public forms in the 1970s."[17] This was certainly the case with VANWS president Bertha Clark's 1971 letter to Robert Stanbury, Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State, in which Clark insisted that "the recently published report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women of Canada provides an opportunity for Native, Indian and Eskimo women to give their opinions and expressions on the development of the role of women in Canada. Our grandmothers have paved a great role in their early

12. Joan Sangster, *The Iconic North: Cultural Constructions of Aboriginal Life in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), 229.

13. Benita Bunjun, "The Making of a Colonial Archive: The Royal Commission on the Status of Women," *Education as Change* 22, 2 (2018): 1.

14. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, "Patriarchy and Paternalism: The Legacy of the Canadian State for First Nations Women," in Caroline Andrew and Sanda Rodgers, eds., *Women and the Canadian State* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 175.

15. Barbara Freeman, "Same/Difference: The Media, Equal Rights and Aboriginal Women in Canada, 1968," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 18, 1 (1998): 99–100.

16. Bunjun, "Colonial Archive," 8.

17. Sangster, *Iconic North*, 225.

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struggle for a way of life. We now must take action to maintain this way."[18] For Clark and others, this was a critical juncture in the Indigenous women's movement, with several Indigenous women's organizations emerging, and the RCSW provided a key opening for their voices to be heard.

In the aftermath of the RCSW, Indigenous women looked both inward and outward to seek solutions, much as they had during the commission. They tended to their own budding provincial organizations to pursue immediate action on the most pressing issues in their communities, outlined in their briefs and presentations, but by the early 1970s, just as the NAC formed, the Indigenous women's movement too was shifting toward building a national organization. To facilitate this, women held two important national conferences: the first hosted by VANWS in Edmonton in 1971, and the second the following year in Saskatoon, where two bodies emerged – the National Steering Committee for Native Women and the National Committee for Indian Rights for Indian Women (IRIW).[19] These meetings confirmed that most Indigenous women favoured coming together to secure political recognition and better conditions for their communities, but they disagreed on vital issues such as women's status under the *Indian Act* and what a permanent national forum would look like, and this would frame their activism throughout the 1970s.[20]

For instance, at the Saskatoon conference, SIWA president Lavallée refused to recognize IRIW as a legally organized body capable of facilitating changes to *Indian Act* membership rights, insisting that only bands had the authority to address band membership. She likewise challenged the RCSW's recommendations to allow women and their children to retain status on marrying out, demanding the "offending paragraph be stricken from the records of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women." For Lavallée and her supporters, "this

18. Bertha Clark, President, Voice of Alberta Native Women's Society, to the Honourable Robert Stanbury, Department of the Secretary of State, 8 January 1971, Canadian organizations – Alberta Native Women's Society, 1968/07–1972/07, RG6-F-4, box 95, 1986-87/319 GAD, LAC.

19. Members of the temporary National Steering Committee for Native Women consisted of representatives from provincial and territorial organizations who attended the First Native Women's Conference in Edmonton. It was chaired by Jean Goodwill and signing officers included Irene Tootoosis, president of the Saskatchewan Indian Women's Association, and Elizabeth Paul, conference coordinator. The committee eventually led to the formation of the second national Indigenous women's organization, the Native Women's Association of Canada. National Steering Committee for Native Women, grant application form, Secretary of State, Citizenship Branch, n.d., Canadian Organizations – National Steering Committee of Native Women, 1986-87/319 GAD, RG6-F-4, box 96, file 10, LAC; Monica Turner, Member of National Steering Committee for Native Women, to James McGuire, Thunder Bay, 26 January 1972, Indians – Women – General, 1986-87/319 GAD, RF6-F-4, box 12, file 2, LAC. IRIW was incorporated in 1971 and NWAC in 1974.

20. C. Keeper, "Grant Recommendation," memorandum to Minister of State, 17 November 1971, Canadian Organizations – National Steering Committee of Native Women 1986-87/319 GAD, RG6-F-4, box 96, file 10, LAC; "The List," *Bulletin: Canadian Association in Support of the Native Peoples: An Independent Journal on Native Affairs* 18, 4 (1978): 44–45.

recommendation was presented to the Commission by persons without the express authority of the Indian Women of Saskatchewan," and they did not "in any way, shape, or form, [give] our consent to anyone to present a resolution, petition, or directive to the Royal Commission."[21] But not everyone shared Lavallée's sentiment. The diversity of the Indigenous women's movement was both a strength and a liability, and it certainly framed the movement's engagements with the NAC in the following years.[22]

Coalition Building: National Action Committee on the Status of Women

By 1973, when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled against Jeannette Lavell's bid to have her status reinstated, the two national bodies and several provincial associations were NAC members; together, IRIW, the Steering Committee, and the NAC hosted a national demonstration to mourn the death of the Canadian Bill of Rights in response to the disappointing Lavell decision.[23] The main demonstration, held in front of the Pacific Centre building in Vancouver on 22 October 1973, was well attended, demonstrating the growing strength of feminist coalition building and the NAC's willingness to publicize its position on Indian status issues.[24] Over the next few years, provincial Indigenous women's organizations continued to join the NAC as official members and to participate in meetings with the advisory council.

Nationally, IRIW continued actively working with the NAC on the status issue, pressing for change wherever possible. In spring 1977, a Senate Committee was considering the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (Bill C-25), which would make discrimination based on sex unlawful, but it did not have Indigenous women's unique legal relationship to sexism within its purview – that is, until the NAC pressured the Senate Committee to also consider First Nations women's sex

21. Mary Anne Lavallée, address to the National Native Women's Conference, Hotel Bessborough, Saskatoon, 23 March 1972, Canadian Organizations – Indian Women of Sask [Saskatchewan], 1971/10–1972/08, 1986-87/319 GAD, RG6-F-4, box 97, LAC.

22. "Indian Rights for Indian Women," *Bulletin: Canadian Association in Support of the Native Peoples: An Independent Journal on Native Affairs* 18, 4 (1978): 7–9.

23. Citizenship Sector – BC Native Women's Society Special Meeting, 1989-90/157 GAD, RG6-F, box 1, file 9120-G, LAC; Grants files – Indian Homemakers of British Columbia, Pacific Regional Office – Citizenship Branch, Grants Secretariat, 1986-87/186 GAD, RG6-F-4, file 0023, box 1, LAC; Sharon Donna McIvor, "Aboriginal Women Unmasked: Using Equality Litigation to Advance Women's Rights," in Susan B. Boyd, Margot Young, Gwen Brodsky and Shelagh Day, eds., *Poverty: Rights, Social Citizenship, and Legal Activism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 98–99.

24. "BC IHA Progress Report," 31 December 1972–1 November 1973, Urban Planning – Provision of Group Receiving Homes for Native Indian Children – British Columbia Indian Homemakers' Association, 1972/05/02–1975/03/07, 1987-88/056 GAD, RG56, file 116-3-604, box 90, LAC. IRIW member Philomene Ross led a sister demonstration in Edmonton. IRIW, Minutes, 1973–75, Leonard and Kitty Maracle fonds, box 4, file 4-18, ref. code 1351-4-18, Rare Books and Special Collections, University of British Columbia.

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Mary Two-Axe Earley and Jenny Margetts at a NAC meeting, March 1977.
10-024-S11-F2-I6, Canadian Women's Movement Archives, University of Ottawa.

discrimination under the *Indian Act* as part of its deliberations.[25] Meanwhile, in March IRIW representatives Jenny Margetts and Mary Two-Axe Earley addressed members of the House of Commons demanding the removal of section 12(1)(b) from the *Indian Act*.[26] Both women's groups were particularly incensed that the federal government chose to consult with the mostly male National Indian Brotherhood when revising the *Indian Act*, but women's organizations and, more importantly, enfranchised Indigenous women were not included in these discussions.[27] Together the NAC and IRIW wrote to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to demand women's involvement,

25. "NAC Press Release," *Status of Women News* 4, 1 (1977): 8, *Rise Up! A Digital Archive of Feminist Activism*, https://2ogewo36a26v4fawr73g9ah2-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/NAC-statusofwomennews-vol.4-1.pdf; IRIW, press release, 22 June 1977, NAC fonds, box 125, file 21, Indian Rights for Indian Women, correspondence, June 1977–December 1983, CWMA.

26. "Joint Research Project on Indian Women Announced," *Status of Women News* 4, 1 (July 1977): 8.

27. IRIW, press release, 22 June 1977.

and by the summer of 1977, bolstered by this collective work, the groups announced a three-year joint research project to study status discrimination.[28]

Progress was slow, however, particularly in the face of government resistance to women's advocacy. In 1976 and 1977, Indian Affairs ministers Judd Buchanan and Warren Allmand censured the NAC for its stance on Indian status. In their lengthy, patronizing, and, in places, identical letters to NAC president Lorna Marsden and NAC secretary Brigid Munsche, Buchanan and Allmand insisted that NAC members – and, by extension, Indigenous women – did not fully understand the law around Indian status and lands reserved for Indians, so they cited the same sections of the *Indian Act*, explaining the process for women's status loss.[29] Insisting to Marsden and Munsche that they too shared concerns about women's status, Buchanan and Allmand ignorantly assured the women they had nothing to fear, as the Department of Indian Affairs was consulting with the National Indian Brotherhood about *Indian Act* changes.[30] In many ways, the paternalism within these responses struck at the heart of what was wrong with Canadian Indian policy and those who upheld it. It failed to account for women's perspectives and experiences and placed decision-making firmly in the hands of Indigenous and non-Indigenous men. The NAC's dedication to this cause caught the attention of Two-Axe Earley, who insisted Marsden's letters to the prime minister and the ministers of Indian and Northern Affairs (which had precipitated Buchanan's response) "were just fantastic," and she was grateful to Marsden for writing on Indigenous women's behalf.[31]

By April 1982, despite consistent efforts including letter-writing campaigns and meetings with government ministers, little had changed, and Indigenous women and their allies donned black armbands and once again took to the streets in demonstrations of mourning in Ottawa, Toronto, Edmonton, and Vancouver regarding the yet-unresolved status issue. A NAC press release highlighted women's collective frustration: "It has been 14 years since the issue of equal rights for Indian women was raised in the report of the Royal

28. R. G. L. Fairweather, Chief Commissioner, Canadian Human Rights Commission, to Kay Macpherson, President, NAC, 18 October 1977, NAC fonds, box 81, file 1, Indigenous Women's Rights, CWMA; Kay Macpherson, President, NAC, to Hugh Faulkner, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, 27 September 1977; Joan B. Neiman, Senator to Kay Macpherson, President, NAC, 12 July 1977; Lorna Marsden, President, NAC, to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, 21 May 1976, all in NAC fonds, box 81, file 2, Indigenous Women, Mary Two Axe Earley Correspondence (hereafter Earley Correspondence), CWMA; "Joint Research Project," 8.

29. Warren Allmand, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, to Brigid Munsche, Secretary, NAC, 22 July 1977, NAC fonds, box 81, file 1, Indigenous Women's Rights, CWMA; Judd Buchanan, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, to Lorna Marsden, President, NAC, 12 July 1976, NAC fonds, box 81, file 1, Indigenous Women's Rights, CWMA.

30. Allmand to Munsche, 22 July 1977; Buchanan to Marsden, 12 July 1976.

31. Mary Two-Axe Earley to Lorna Marsden, President, NAC, 14 July 1976, NAC fonds, box 81, file 2, Indigenous Women, Earley Correspondence, CWMA.

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Commission on the Status of Women." Calling on government to repeal the offending *Indian Act* section, the group insisted that "Indian women are discouraged and angered by the empty promises and the facade of equal rights for women and men in Canada."[32] Of course, Indigenous women's experiences with legislated gender inequality stretched back much further; still, highlighting the number of years that had passed since the RCSW also demonstrated a long and growing partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, at least in public.

Challenging the NAC

Despite outward appearances of feminist solidarity, Indigenous women's relationship to the NAC was not without challenges, and, in part, this was owing to the diversity of the Indigenous women's movement itself. Many organizations joined the NAC as official members, kept in communication, and expressed appreciation for the NAC's efforts.[33] But there were detractors, too, including Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) president Marlene Pierre-Aggamaway, who in late May 1981 criticized the NAC's "single-minded approach" when it came to Indigenous women. Prefacing her concerns about the NAC's plan to "develop a campaign to aid the fight of Native women in removing discrimination against them, as legislated in the *Indian Act*" with the reminder that NWAC "works on behalf of all Native women regardless of their government imposed status or where they live," Pierre-Aggamaway explained that NWAC's concerns were broad. She continued, pointing out that "many non-Native women viewed the problems and concerns of Native women as being directly related to section 12 (1) (b) of the *Indian Act*, and conversely, that the removal of that clause would remove all discrimination." She disagreed, noting that this would simply be one solution of many needed to adequately address Indigenous women's marginalization.[34]

Beyond an innocuous correction, Pierre-Aggamaway maintained that "because of the differing opinions about emphasis and solution, we have found our interaction with non-native women's groups frustrating, and to be quite frank, of little support to the activities engaged in by our membership at the

32. NAC, press release, 13 April 1982, NAC fonds, box 81, file 9, Indigenous Women's Reports and Interviews, 1981–82, CWMA. Elsewhere I explore the emotional labour of women's political activism; see Sarah Nickel, "Therapeutic Political Spaces: Collective Resistance among Indigenous Women in British Columbia," in Lara Campbell, Michael Dawson and Catherine Gidney, eds., *Feeling Feminism: Activism, Affect, and Canada's Second Wave* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2022), 73–95.

33. Colleen Glenn, IRIW, to Kay Mcpherson, NAC, 10 March 1978, NAC fonds, box 125, file 21, Indian Rights for Indian Women, correspondence, June 1977–December 1983, CWMA.

34. Marlene Pierre-Aggamaway, President, Native Women's Association of Canada, to Jean Wood, NAC, 28 May 1981, NAC fonds, box 81, file 8, Indigenous Women Correspondence, Invitation, 1981–82, CWMA.

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community level." What this meant was that the broad efforts of the NAC (and by extension, IRIW) to support Indigenous women was missing the mark in terms of meaningful engagement, at least for Pierre-Aggamaway. She did not dispute the important "leadership role" IRIW provided for the status issue but felt the only real solution to gender inequality was Indigenous sovereignty. In the meantime, she insisted, the NWAC would focus on short-term solutions to address community needs in the form of "transition houses, daycare centres, employment counselling, crisis intervention, and health and lifeskills education."[35]

Unpacking Pierre-Aggamaway's critique requires us to understand the multiplicity and autonomy of the Indigenous women's movement, whereby organizations followed mandates determined by their own delegates – mandates that did not always align with those of other associations. It is also unclear what the broader context of her criticism is: if it is grounded in frustration with the Indigenous women's political movement or the NAC as an organization. But given her role as president of the only other national Indigenous women's organization, it is worth exploring her appraisal.

In some respects, this criticism was warranted. In surveying the National Action Committee on the Status of Women fonds at the University of Ottawa Archives and Special Collections, outgoing correspondence from the NAC office is dominated by advocacy around the *Indian Act*, largely related to garnering publicity and support from government ministers, senators, the Canadian Human Rights Commission, and other sympathetic organizations to repeal the offending section. Correspondence ranges from form letters sent out en masse to government ministers, which lack detail but call for changes to the *Indian Act*, to impassioned letters highlighting individual cases of women and children being evicted from their homes by band councils.[36] Records also detail the NAC's demonstrations around the status issue and participation in a joint research project with IRIW. The NAC additionally passed a resolution at its 1976 annual meeting calling for the Bill of Rights to apply to Native women and forwarded materials about Indigenous women's legal discrimination to Amnesty International, which had been criticized for "not tak[ing] much action as regards rights of Indigenous people."[37]

35. Pierre-Aggamaway to Wood, 28 May 1981.

36. Kay Macpherson, President, NAC, to J. Y. Ranger, Assistant Deputy Minister, Indian and Eskimo Affairs, 13 October 1977; J. Y. Ranger to K. Macpherson, 4 October 1977; Hellie Wilson, Assistant Correspondence Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister, to Kay Macpherson, 31 August 1977; Kay Macpherson to Andrew Delisle, Chief of Band Council, Caughnawaga, 23 September 1977; Joan Anne Gordon to Kay Macpherson, 15 September 1977; NAC to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Warren Allmand, 29 August 1977, all in NAC fonds, box 81, file 2, Indigenous Women, Earley Correspondence, CWMA.

37. Fairweather to Macpherson, 18 October 1977; Macpherson to Faulkner, 27 September 1977; Neiman to Macpherson, 12 July 1977; Marsden to Trudeau, 21 May 1976; Lynn McDonald to Jean Wood, 26 June 1981, NAC fonds, box 81, file 6, Indigenous Women Reports and

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Yet, the NAC also made interventions on behalf of Indigenous women in other areas – such as lobbying for organizations like IRIW to be better funded, since it received marginal funding in comparison with Indigenous men's organizations and in a May 1976 letter to Prime Minister Trudeau, the organization positioned itself wholly in favour of Indigenous women in the movement to patriate the constitution.[38] For these issues, the NAC placed itself in direct conflict with the male-dominated Indigenous Rights movement, which proved largely unconcerned with gender inequality. And this was no small thing. Through the late 1970s, the NAC was also increasingly concerned about Indigenous child welfare, passing a resolution to pressure governments for Indigenous children to be placed in Indigenous homes rather than in non-Indigenous foster homes, by providing foster-parent funding for relatives to support the children.[39] In these instances, the NAC provided important support for issues that Indigenous women's organizations prioritized and agreed upon.

It is also important to remember that the NAC advocated for issues deemed appropriate by at least some Indigenous women, and IRIW's key role with the NAC meant that it followed the status question. But it was also deeply concerned about satisfying the two national Indigenous women's organizations, with president Jean Wood noting that if the NAC failed to do this, it would be difficult to attract other Indigenous women's groups. Thus, Pierre-Aggamaway's critiques were significant.[40] In fact, just a few weeks prior to receiving Pierre-Aggamaway's letter, Wood spoke with NAC executive member Caroline Ennis (who was also a noted Tobique activist) to develop a plan with IRIW (and NWAC if it was amenable) for improving the status of Indigenous women, and even offered $5,000 donations to each organization despite the NAC's own limited funding.[41] Central to their correspondence is Wood's anxious assertion that the NAC needed to engage with IRIW and NWAC about any advocacy plans before they went forward. Wood and others, then, were already aware of the tenuous terrain they were operating on, and they did their best to be good allies.

Correspondence, 1979–82, CWMA.

38. Lynne McDonald, President, NAC, to Pierre Juneau, Under-Secretary of State, 22 May 1980, NAC fonds, box 107, file 12, Secretary of State Funding for Native Women's Programmes, 1980–81, CWMA; Marsden to Trudeau, 21 May 1976.

39. Resolutions passed at the annual meeting of NAC, 14–17 March 1980, NAC fonds, box 81, file 7, Indigenous Women Correspondence, Reports, Memos, 1980–82, CWMA.

40. Jean Wood, President, NAC, to Caroline Ennis, 11 May 1981, NAC fonds, box 81, file 8, Indigenous Women Correspondence, Invitation, 1981–82, CWMA.

41. Wood to Ennis, 11 May 1981.

Conclusion

This brief investigation into Indigenous women's participation in the RCSW and the NAC makes clear the need for nuance when examining women's movements to ensure women are not siloed into separate arenas when in fact their work and experiences were often overlapping and mutually informing. It follows Sangster's examination of 100 years of Canadian feminism and Lara Campbell's *A Great Revolutionary Wave: Women and the Vote in British Columbia*, which are just two of the most recent examples of what is possible when we soften the edges of movements to see how women moved out of their respective groups to engage with others.[42] Indeed, Indigenous women inserted themselves in the RCSW and the NAC when and where it made sense to them, but they integrated their involvement with these organizations into their increasingly formalized activism and did not always agree on which issues to take up and how to mobilize with non-Indigenous women.

Indigenous child welfare issues, for instance, garnered significant agreement and co-operation among Indigenous women who had witnessed the devastating effects of high rates of child apprehensions in their communities. They were united in addressing this through several interrelated efforts, including creating more Indigenous foster homes, seeking administrative control over child welfare, opening shelters and daycares to prevent apprehensions, and pressing governments to provide better financial support to families. Where there was less agreement was on the *Indian Act* status issue, as many feared the impact that reinstated status might have in terms of not only material resources in communities but also family and community dynamics. And yet, despite the division and diversity across the Indigenous women's movement, women understood the benefit of uniting within national organizations such as NWAC and IRIW to ensure their voices were heard at a national level. They had learned that it was all too easy for government officials to ignore calls from local and regional organizations and that by combining their efforts, they would see greater results.

The non-Indigenous women's movement was likewise diverse and evolving, with members holding multiple positionalities and political views that shaped the ways they engaged with Indigenous women in the RCSW and the NAC. Many were deeply influenced by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, including the Red Power movement, which opened their eyes to racial injustice in addition to gender oppression, and this is visible (if imperfect) within the RCSW. Organized efforts shifted with this awareness, and we can see how the NAC, for instance, became less of a benign pressure group and more protest oriented throughout the 1970s and 1980s. And while it was not always possible for non-Indigenous women to escape their own positionalities and internalized

42. Joan Sangster, *Demanding Equality: One Hundred Years of Canadian Feminism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021); Lara Campbell, *A Great Revolutionary Wave: Women and the Vote in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020).

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colonialism, they were genuine and thoughtful in their engagement with their peers and united in their efforts to press for Indigenous women's rights.

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Familiar Constraints: The Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the Challenge of Unpaid Work in the Home

Meg Luxton, York University

When the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada released its final report in 1970, that report affirmed the commission's mandate to "ensure for women equal opportunities with men."[1] It began by recognizing that the existing social norms and values about ideal family forms and sex/gender divisions of labour were central to the existing inequalities between women and men. It called for an equal partnership in marriage – a position affirmed in its starting principles and reiterated in its numerous recommendations.

However, its liberal feminist framework limited its capacity to imagine public policy changes that might really foster the potential for gender equality while leaving intact the basic divisions of labour between households and paid employment. As a result, despite some remarkably progressive recommendations aimed at promoting women's equality, the report was unable to imagine ways of actually ensuring "for women equal opportunities with men." Instead, the legacy of the policy framework proposed by the report posed contradictions that continue to shape public policy, challenge feminist organizing initiatives, and leave many women (and increasing numbers of men) struggling with incompatible demands on their lives.[2]

In 1970 there was a significant correlation between predominant social norms and values and actual practices of a majority of women. Prevailing ideas valued heterosexual marriages and nuclear-family households where the man was the income earner and the woman was an economically dependent wife and mother primarily responsible for running the home:

> The traditional wife-and-mother role in the Canadian family is to manage the household, to give affection and backing to the husband, whose occupational life may be largely impersonal and competitive and, in an emergency, to earn money and act as a substitute for the husband. Above all she is expected to carry the major share of rearing the children who consequently often assume prime importance in her life. These are important duties but insufficient prestige is attached to them. (*Report*, 228)

As the report documented, most married women were primarily involved with child bearing and rearing, responsible for running their households, and economically dependent on their husbands for significant periods of their lives.[3]

1. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Ottawa 1970), xi (hereafter cited in the text as *Report*).

2. The report examined "women" and "men" without problematizing that binary.

3. Canada, *Report*, 31; Monique Proulx, *Five Million Women: A Study of the Canadian*

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Strategy session before the May 1990 National Action Committee annual general meeting, May 1990, Ottawa.
Courtesy, Alice de Wolff.

The report reflected those values and practices, devoting extensive discussion to marriage, family, divisions of labour, and child care as they related to women's status in society. Three of its four starting principles dealt with women as wives and mothers, and these consistently informed not only the commission's analyses and recommendations relating to unpaid work in the home but also its more general analyses:

1. Women should be free to choose whether to take employment outside their homes.
2. Care of children is a responsibility to be shared by the mother, the father, and society.
3. Society has a responsibility for women because of pregnancy and childbirth, and special treatment related to maternity will always be necessary.[4]

The central contradiction reverberating through the report starts from its first principle, that women should be free to choose whether to take employment

Housewife (Ottawa: Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1978); Meg Luxton, *More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1980).

4. Canada, *Report*, xii.

outside their homes. Despite its strong support for women's right to be, as the report put it, "employed full-time in the care of their families and homes" (*Report*, 31), it also relied on the economic model typical of welfare-state policies at the time – that is, the assumption that paid employment is the most appropriate way for most people to make a living and that the "economy" or the "market" will provide good jobs:

> We confidently expect that the situation of women will be generally improved in the future experts foresee. A shorter work day will make it easier for married women to work full-time, thereby avoiding some of the problems part-time work often presents. The combination of a shorter work day and available shift work will allow husbands and wives to work at different times so that they can take turns looking after their family and still spend time together … We hope that the adoption of our recommendations will help more women to find satisfaction in paid work. (*Report*, 158–159)

In advocating policies that gave "married women a free choice between staying at home or entering the labour force" (*Report*, 293), the report challenged prevailing cultural norms, illustrated by, for example, a 1976 survey in which 75 percent of people in Canada who responded said women should stay home with their children.[5] It also challenged prevailing assumptions about women's work in the home, presciently anticipating later feminist analyses.

The report was unusual both in its assertion that women's activities in the home involved work and in its criticism of the widespread devaluation of housewives and their activities. It noted that full-time housewives "comprise one of the largest occupational groups in the economy. Yet they are repeatedly asked, 'Do you work or are you a housewife?'" (*Report*, 33). In contrast, it was very careful to respect housewives and the women who "chose" that as their full-time option. The report also made a point of recognizing that most employed women were also housewives, combining their paid work with domestic responsibilities.

The report stressed the extensive amount of work involved in running a home, and it recognized how isolating and exhausting this endless work could be. It was remarkable in insisting that even full-time housewives should be able "to get away from responsibilities on a fairly regular basis" (*Report*, 36). In addition, it argued that there was a need for trained and adequately paid visiting homemakers to provide support and emergency help. However, it did not comment on how the majority of households might be able to afford such services, naively claiming, "A greater supply of homemakers and trained household workers, and extended day-care services, can do much to meet the general requirements of child care by offering strong support to the basic responsibility of the parents" (*Report*, 275).

Even more unusual was its assertion that women's unpaid work in the home was more than just an individual family matter; rather, the report recognized

5. Marylee Stephenson, ed., *Women in Canada*, rev. ed. (Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing, 1977).

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that this work contributed significantly to the national economy. "The housewife who remains at home," the report insisted, "is just as much a producer of goods and services as the paid worker" (*Report*, 38). It objected to the exclusion of women's unpaid work in the home from economic calculations: "The Gross National Product, as measured, fails to reflect a large proportion of women's work, the full-time production of goods and services by over one-third of the adult population." The report continued, "In terms of hours spent in production, the omission may have even greater significance. More than one expert has estimated that the number of hours spent every year in household functions alone is greater than the number worked in industry" (*Report*, 31).

The report summarized the findings of one of the substudies prepared for the commission, which "estimated that the work of housewives amounted to 11 percent of the Gross National Product. In 1968, 11 percent of the Gross National Product in Canada would have been about eight billion dollars."[6] However, the report was reluctant to pursue economic measures of women's work in the home, partially because "there are problems in evaluating the unpaid production of goods and services in money terms for inclusion in the Gross National Product" (*Report*, 31) and more importantly, "To view the housewife's work in the economic sense that money determines value is to distort the picture of her contribution to the economy.[7] Such a concept, even if it imputes a money value to her work, fails to recognize those of her functions that can never be measured in money terms" (*Report*, 32). Instead, the report went on, "Since these functions arise from her relationship with other members of the family, we deal with them in the Chapter on the family" (*Report*, 32). Despite the report's objection to the lack of economic accounting for women's work in the home, it offered no suggestions as to how federal policies might take such contributions into account or how women might be recognized or compensated for their labour. It did not ask whether or how this labour could be recognized and valued in public policies. However, as activists subsequently organized around this issue, they identified a range of options, starting with measuring the amounts of work done and evaluating their contribution to national economies.[8]

6. Francois D. Lacasse, *Women at Home: The Cost to the Canadian Economy of the Withdrawal from the Labour Force of a Major Proportion of the Female Population* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1970), 32.

7. Lacasse explored this position, noting that studies evaluating the contribution of women's unpaid work to the economy "have been rare and have encountered little success." Laccasse, *Women at Home*, 5. Subsequent work, however, has proved to be very successful; see, for example, Meg Luxton, "Women, the United Nations and the Politics of Unpaid Work," in "Concepts of Home," special issue, *Women's Studies International Forum* 20, 3 (1997): 431–439.

8. Gaëlle Ferrant, Luca Maria Pesando and Keiko Nowacka, "Unpaid Care Work: The Missing Link in the Analysis of Gender Gaps in Labour Outcomes," OECD Development Centre, December 2014, https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid_care_work.pdf.

Despite its explicit efforts to recognize and value women's work in the home, the report was clearly sympathetic to the emerging trend of women opting for paid employment outside the home. It noted the challenges that prevailing norms and changing practices posed for many women:

> The widespread assumption that wives are responsible for the home has particular repercussions in today's world. It is apparent that many wives feel they are being torn between conflicting values. On the one hand, the traditional division of labour makes the care of the home and family the woman's responsibility. On the other hand, the need for more workers with the skills that some housewives possess is being emphasized in many quarters. With experts offering advice on all sides, even the best adjusted wife is likely to wonder whether or not she is on the right course. (*Report*, 52)

Accordingly, many of the report's recommendations concentrated on access to paid labour and on the removal of barriers facing women in the paid labour force. While it documented the extensive discrimination facing women who entered the paid labour market, and made numerous recommendations intended to provide women with the same opportunities as men, one of the most challenging obstacles it noted was child bearing and child care. Notably, care for frail seniors or sick or disabled adults was not included in its concerns, although women were clearly providing this care at the time.[9]

The report's second starting principle stated that "care of children is a responsibility to be shared by the mother, the father and society" (*Report*, xii). This assertion that child care is not exclusively a family responsibility but also a social responsibility was perhaps the report's most significant challenge to existing norms. Arguing that "society may be legitimately called upon to contribute to community services for its younger generation," it called for financial support for all dependent children "whether the mother stays at home or works outside" and whether the costs are measured "in cash outlays or in time devoted to care and supervision or both" (*Report*, 261, 302). It noted that "for the mother who works at home, this cost might be valued in terms of the cash income she foregoes by looking after children at home instead of taking paid employment" (*Report*, 302). It also called for a guaranteed annual income for one-parent families with dependent children (Recommendation 135), a recommendation still debated today but never implemented.[10] A national program for the provision of daycare, regardless of parents' employment status – at the time a remarkably forward-looking and radical suggestion – was similarly recommended (see Lisa Pasolli's contribution to this roundtable). The report's third starting principle maintained that "society has a responsibility for women because of pregnancy and child-birth, and special

9. This issue may have been overlooked because there was little public protest at the time or because it fell under health care, which is under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. In general, government engagement with home care only started in the 1970s and became a more visible issue as the number of seniors increased. See Canadian Healthcare Association, *Home Care in Canada: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, policy brief (Ottawa: CHA Press, 2009).

10. Canada, *Report*, 414.

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treatment related to maternity will always be necessary" (*Report*, xii). Based on this, it called for paid maternity leaves for women employed in the federal public service, since it could only make legislation recommendations for those workers covered by a federal labour mandate, although it clearly supported a wider system of maternity leave.[11]

In many ways, the report's approach reflected a classic liberal feminist position, supporting women's right to make the choice to stay at home or seek paid employment. This position echoes those of many advocates of women's rights who have called for women's equality with men in education and in the paid labour force while supporting women's choice to be at home, especially with their children; recognized that independent income earning is important for women's equality while also recognizing that mothers depended on support from husbands and their community; and called on fathers and society to take responsibility for children without examining what that might involve in practice.[12]

The limitations of a liberal feminist approach are revealed more clearly by analyzing some of the report's unexamined assumptions. It did not address the contradiction inherent in its own position between its recognition of the important contribution of women's unpaid work to the economy and its assertion that, except for child care, that work is a private matter. Instead, it explicitly insisted that for childless couples the work involved in running a home, the labour provided by one spouse for another, and particularly a wife's economic dependency on her husband were private, personal choices for which "the decision and responsibility belongs to them" (*Report*, xii). There was no recognition of the contribution of this labour to the larger society. Instead, while recognizing the extent and importance of women's work in the home, the report acknowledged, "Unfortunately we have no over-all solution for the financial dependency of housewives" (*Report*, 37–38). This failure is reflected in its recommendations. Only one (Recommendation 2) referred directly to full-time housewives, calling for amendments to the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans "so that the spouse who remains at home can participate in the Plan, and (b) the feasibility be explored of (i) crediting to the spouse remaining at home a portion of the contributions of the employed spouse and those contributions made by the employer on the employed spouse's behalf, and (ii) on an optional basis, permitting the spouse at home to contribute as a self-employed worker" (*Report*, 395).

The report also did not address the issue of supports for those responsible for adult care – frail seniors, people with ongoing illnesses or disabilities – and offered little analysis of the other domestic responsibilities that constrain

11. Canada, *Report*, 87.

12. For early examples of advocates for women's rights, see Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Harriet Taylor, *The Enfranchisement of Women* (1851; London: Virago Press, 1983).

women's options. It was even less imaginative about supporting women in their work in the home or critiquing the limitations and consequences of the housewife's economic and social dependence. It offered few suggestions as to how men might take more responsibility for domestic labour. Other than maternity leaves and child care, few recommendations were designed to help people manage the competing demands of paid employment and domestic responsibilities. It did not consider that a negative form of gender equality in paid employment might develop as men's jobs became more precarious. Its call for equality with men failed to consider the inequalities among men based on class and race.

Its assumptions that the labour market would provide jobs for the influx of women seeking employment, and that those jobs would not conflict unduly with domestic responsibilities, did not anticipate the growth of precarious employment introduced by the decline of the Fordist accord and the turn to neoliberal policies and practices. It did not anticipate that a national childcare plan would remain feminist wishful thinking for more than 50 years. While it did expect women to enter the labour market in increasing numbers, it did not predict the extent to which their former unpaid domestic labour would be outsourced and commodified as profit-seeking businesses employing cheap, often immigrant and racialized labour to produce goods and services to replace the labour that women previously provided in the home: prepared meals, delivery and taxi services, dog walking, and housecleaning, for example. Its call for "trained and adequately paid visiting homemakers to provide support and emergency help" did not consider whose idea of adequate pay might prevail or which households might be able to afford such help. Instead, there has been a growth in demand for low-paid immigrant caregivers in private households and in both public and for-profit long-term care facilities.

The report did not identify the economic imperatives that force some women into income-generating work even when they have extensive domestic responsibilities. It did not ask whether men should also be free to choose whether to take employment outside their homes and what policies might be needed to make that a realistic possibility. It ignored the economic importance of the subsistence labour of many Indigenous women.[13] It took for granted heterosexual nuclear families or single-parent families in private households, even though at the time, as the report noted, feminists had developed extensive critiques linking those particular arrangements to women's subordination, and different divisions of labour, family forms, and household arrangements were increasingly possible and practised.[14] It left unexamined issues it considered

13. Rebecca Jane Hall, "Reproduction and Resistance: An Anti-colonial Contribution to Social-Reproduction Feminism," *Historical Materialism* 24, 2 (2016): 87–110.

14. Canada, *Report*, 2; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949; New York: Vintage, 2011); Peggy Morton, "Women's Work Is Never Done … Or the Production, Maintenance and Reproduction of Labour Power," in *Women Unite*, Discussion Collective no. 6 (Toronto:

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"private matters," such as sexuality, and did not address violence against women. It avoided reporting on – or, more controversially, itself envisioning – alternatives to private family household responsibilities for domestic labour.

Most problematically, the report was silent on the various circumstances in which women at the time were prevented from having and looking after their children. Indigenous women lost their children to residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and other government assimilation policies.[15] Many immigrant women were not allowed to bring their children to Canada.[16] Young unmarried women had their babies forcibly removed from them and put up for closed adoptions.[17] Other women, especially if they were poor, Black, or Indigenous, were subject to forced sterilizations.[18] Lesbians risked losing custody.[19] Many women were unable to have the children they wanted because they lacked the material resources to provide for them. Constrained by the report's inattention not only to class inequality but also to race and colonialism, the report's recommendations did not address such concerns. Instead, its vision of equality in the paid labour force promised that women "will be able to make a greater contribution to the economy than ever before," and it celebrated its conviction that "their position, successes and difficulties will be the same as those of working men" (*Report*, 159).

Fundamentally, the report's liberal feminist commitment to nuclear-family households and its uncritical acceptance of capitalist social and economic relations rendered it unable to recognize the ways in which unpaid labour in the home – by producing and sustaining the labouring population – is essential to capital accumulation.[20] It was therefore unable to resolve the contradictions between paid employment and domestic labour. Its conclusion to its discussion of "the housewife" illuminates the limits of its vision: "However, if these

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Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1972), 46–68.

15. In his 1983 report, Patrick Johnson coined the term "the sixties scoop" to refer to the widespread forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities by the child welfare system. Johnson, *Native Children and the Child Welfare System* (Toronto: James Lorimer/Canadian Council on Social Development, 1983); Canada, *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa 1996).

16. Abigail Bakan and Diva Stasiulis, *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

17. Valerie Andrews, "White Unwed Mother: The Adoption Mandate in Postwar Canada," MA thesis, York University, 2017, http://hdl.handle.net/10315/33571.

18. Karen Stote, *An Act of Genocide: Colonialism and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women* (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Press, 2015).

19. Rachel Epstein, *Who's Your Daddy and Other Writings on Queer Parenting* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2009).

20. Meg Luxton, "The Production of Life Itself: Gender, Social Reproduction and International Political Economy," in Adrienne Roberts and Juanita Elias, eds., *Handbook of International Political Economy of Gender* (Cheltenham: Edwin Elgar, 2018), 37–49.

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responsibilities are shared between husband and wife, the full-time housewife of the future will probably have more time for the creative and challenging aspects of her work" (*Report*, 40).

In the decades since the release of the report, the daily circumstances of most women and their families have changed significantly, but they continue to juggle the competing demands of paid employment and domestic labour. More women are in the paid labour force, but as the COVID-19 pandemic made dramatically clear, their positions, successes, and difficulties are not the same as those of men. Socialist feminists have made detailed critiques of the limitations of liberal feminist positions, and activists in Canada have struggled at the national and international levels to develop public policy to improve conditions for those doing unpaid domestic labour, with few successes. Although some activists called for "wages for housework," and welfare rights and single mothers' groups fought for their rights and the resources to be at home with their children, the National Action Committee (NAC) – the main umbrella organization of the women's movement, formed to respond to the recommendations of the commission's report between 1972 and 2001 – focused primarily on women's employment, in part because such policies were more likely to be implemented but also because there was no agreement as to what kinds of more transformative policies might be politically viable.[21] NAC debated, and supported, calls for pensions for housewives and a national child-care plan – both very tangible policies addressing housewives' concerns. The first socialist feminist analyses of domestic labour were available at the time of NAC's founding;[22] however, most NAC member organizations lacked the theoretical and ideological tools to understand social reproductive labour and its centrality to capitalist economics. Since then, feminist theorists have developed extensive critiques of the economic models that currently inform public policy, showing how unpaid domestic labour is central to social reproduction and serves as a subsidy for capital accumulation.[23] Still, there has been little popular support for more radical reforms and, to date, they have not generated alternative public policy proposals. The liberal feminist framework prevails, leaving issues related to women's unpaid work in the home unresolved. As

21. Louise Toupin, *Wages for Housework: A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972–1977*, trans. Käthe Roth (Vancouver: UBC Press; London: Pluto Press, 2018); Lynne Marks, Margaret Little, Megan Gaucher and T. R. Noddings, "'A Job That Should Be Respected': Contested Visions of Motherhood and English Canada's Second Wave Women's Movements, 1970–1990," *Women's History Review* 25, 5 (2016): 771–790.

22. Margaret Lowe Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Monthly Review Press* 21, 4 (1969): 13–27.

23. Susan Braedley and Meg Luxton, "Social Reproduction at Work, Social Reproduction as Work: A Feminist Political Economy Perspective," *Journal of Labor and Society*, advance online publication (15 November 2021): https://doi.org/10.1163/24714607-bja10049.

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the COVID-19 pandemic revealed, women are paying a high price for the constraints imposed by the unresolved competing demands of paid employment and domestic labour.

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The Royal Commission on the Status of Women and Child Care

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Perhaps one of the best-known recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (rcsw) was the one calling for a national Day-Care Act.[1] Or, at least, it is the one receiving a lot of attention these days because of the federal government's recent promise to devote more than $30 billion to an early learning and child care (ELCC) system. Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, who announced the government's ELCC plans in her April 2021 budget speech, invoked the rcsw as the beginning of the movement for universal child care in Canada and promised that her government would be the one to realize the demands of "this half-century of struggle."[2] As Freeland's speech signals, the rcsw shifted the terrain of Canadian childcare politics fundamentally and permanently. Fuelled by feminist demands, it gave legitimacy to the idea of child care as something to which *all* women, not just the deserving poor working out of economic desperation, were entitled. The rcsw was the first in a long line of national studies and task forces to recommend a national approach to daycare and a major feminist reorientation in what Rianne Mahon has called the "never-ending story" of the struggle for universal child care in Canada.[3] The call for a national daycare program, in other words, looms large as an as-yet-unrealized legacy of the rcsw.

Less often acknowledged, however, is that the rcsw daycare proposals were embedded in a comprehensive set of reforms to family policy that included changes to both taxation and social security. The commissioners saw daycare legislation, tax reform, and enhanced social security as moving parts in a greater whole, the whole being mothers' rights to a meaningful choice between paid work and caregiving. Meaningful choice meant public support for both options. The commissioners insisted on public funding for daycare to create more, and more affordable, spaces, but their daycare proposals also hinged on new "compensatory measures that combine[d] specific allowances

1. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Ottawa 1970), 271.

2. Department of Finance Canada, "Budget 2021: Address by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance," 19 April 2021, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2021/04/budget-2021-address-by-the-deputy-prime-minister-and-minister-of-finance.html.

3. Rianne Mahon, "The Never-Ending Story: The Struggle for Universal Child Care Policy in the 1970s," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, 4 (2000): 582–622; Annis May Timpson, *Driven Apart: Women's Employment Equality and Child Care and Canadian Public Policy* (Vancouver: ubc Press, 2002).

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with a revised taxation system."[4] Specifically, they proposed a $500 per child "child-care allowance," which, combined with tax reforms, would put more cash in mothers' hands, thereby allowing them to pay, on a sliding scale, their fair share into the new daycare system. The allowance would also give mothers who wanted to remain home to care for their children the security to do so without being entirely dependent on a husband. Thus, with public support for both paid work and caregiving, leveraged through an interlinked package of social programs and tax reform, the commissioners hoped mothers would be free to follow whichever path they desired.

My aim in this short piece is twofold. First, it is simply to revisit and unpack the RCSW recommendations with respect to these intertwined measures. I want to shine a light in particular on the report's often-overlooked chapter 5, "Taxation and Child-Care Allowances," and to point to the significance of the overlap between the RCSW and the substantial tax reform undertakings known as the Carter-Benson process.[5] Second, I want to invite some reflection on how the linked childcare/taxation/social security recommendations have been remembered and, perhaps more accurately, forgotten. What does it mean, for example, that the depth of the RCSW's attention to tax reform is so rarely foregrounded (and sometimes not even mentioned) in histories of the commission? This is an especially important question because demands for tax relief appeared so often in women's submissions. Indeed, as Annis May Timpson has shown, "calls for tax relief for child care outstripped all other policy demands."[6] One possibility, I think, is that such forgetting reflects a broader tendency in the scholarship to focus on the "big prize" – that is, a national daycare plan. In comparison, bits and pieces of tax reform can seem relatively inconsequential. But even seemingly minor tax measures can have significant implications in the long term, as we will see below. The RCSW understood this and called for weaving a durable policy web to meaningfully support mothers as they reconciled paid work and caregiving. The commissioners were conscious, moreover, that pulling on one strand of the web (offering childcare-based tax relief to middle-class working mothers who demanded it, say) could tear a hole elsewhere, thereby weakening support to another group of women (like low-income mothers who did not qualify for tax deductions and who, over time, saw fewer childcare options because tax breaks subsidized individuals rather than systems). As historians continue to

4. Canada, *Report*, 293.

5. The Carter-Benson process began with the Royal Commission on Taxation (the Carter Commission, 1962–66), resulted in Finance Minister Edgar Benson's white paper, "Proposals for Tax Reform" (1969), and culminated in significant reforms to the *Income Tax Act* in 1971. See Shirley Tillotson, "Policy Forum: Then and Now – A Historical Perspective on the Politics of Comprehensive Tax Reform," *Canadian Tax Journal* 66, no. 2 (2018): 363–374.

6. Annis May Timpson, "Royal Commissions as Sites of Resistance: Women's Challenges on Child Care in the Royal Commission on the Status of Women," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 20 (Fall 1999): 134.

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excavate the history of child care, I think the RCSW offers a useful starting point, and not just because of its groundbreaking call for a national daycare plan. The commission prompts us to consider all the major and minor strands woven into the web of support for working mothers, the national programs and tax technicalities alike that determined women's abilities to reconcile work and care. As we move toward building a national system of ELCC, these careful histories will be more important than ever.

Married women's place in the paid labour force was at the centre of the RCSW's investigations.[7] Journalist Gordon Donaldson told viewers as much when he introduced them to the recently commenced RCSW on CBC Television's *Newsmagazine* in March 1967. Women were partially liberated by their experiences in World Wars I and II, Donaldson explained; nevertheless, "the emancipation process is still going on, and the biggest question left is whether married women should work or stay at home."[8] Donaldson's coverage signalled that the public discourse around working women still had a decidedly moral cast. Monique Bégin later explained that in the years leading up to the commission many Canadians were still preoccupied with "whether it was good or bad or right or wrong to have mothers working in paid employment."[9] Not wanting to lead the RCSW into these moralistic debates, and also wanting to avoid areas of provincial jurisdiction, Prime Minister Lester Pearson's mandate for the commission did not include an investigation of child care, nor did he call for a more general inquiry into women's care obligations as a potential barrier to equal status in the labour force. He singled out issues of training and education as among the "special problems of married women in employment" and asked the commission to consider how the federal government might support married women in re-entering professional or skilled work.[10]

The hundreds of women who made written submissions to the RCSW, however, forced the commissioners to take on the issue of women's childcare challenges. The overwhelming consensus to emerge from the formal written briefs, as well as women's private letters, was that working motherhood was a new social reality, one that demanded attention from all levels of government.[11] The written briefs were more likely to include specific policy

7. Joan Sangster, "Invoking Experience as Evidence," *Canadian Historical Review* 92, 1 (2011): 139.

8. "Canadian Feminists Fight for Change," CBC *Newsmagazine*, broadcast 28 April 1967, https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/canadian-feminists-fight-for-change.

9. Quoted in Timpson, "Royal Commissions," 126.

10. Timpson, "Royal Commissions," 125–126.

11. Timpson's analysis focused on the written briefs, while Sangster analyzed the more than 1,000 private letters.

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recommendations. In her close analysis of 350 briefs, Timpson found that 202 raised specific issues of women's employment and the provision of child care. Just over half of these "called for policies to facilitate non-maternal care," ranging from many unspecific calls for more and better daycare services and household help to specific demands that the federal government establish a national system of child care.[12] The latter came primarily from existing daycare organizations; for example, Victoria Day Care Services in Toronto called for "the need for a nation-wide pattern of services for daytime care of the children of working mothers. Such services should be established within the framework of legislation embodying standards, regulations, and financing provisions."[13] Just under half of the briefs were more "ambivalent" about mothers' full-time work, often including alongside discussions of child care a call for measures to make it easier for mothers to work part-time or to spend more time at home. And while most briefs identified the lack of availability and high cost of child care as mothers' main challenges, very few called for free universal child care – a demand that was just beginning to circulate in the wider feminist movement. Timpson explains, "most briefs called either for child care places to be subsidised with the mother paying according to her income, or for the mother herself to be subsidised through tax deductions to offset the cost of child care."[14]

Indeed, it was the latter demand, for childcare-based tax relief, that dominated. The wider sex discrimination in the *Income Tax Act* extended well beyond childcare-related issues but working women's inability to deduct the costs of child care was a remarkably frequent objection. After all, many of these women pointed out, businessmen could deduct the costs of their lunches and travel. Surely child care was just as necessary for earning a living and therefore should be eligible as a deduction from taxable income. "While the employer enjoys his well-earned and tax-deductible martinis with a customer," the Manitoba Bar Association asked, "what is the position of his secretary, who is the sole support of two children?"[15] Several others pointed out that working women who hired in-home help faced "double taxation" because they paid tax on their entire income in addition to Canada Pension Plan contributions for their housekeeper.[16] This tax unfairness was, in fact, a long-standing grievance of working women's organizations and particularly those that represented middle-class and professional women. Through the 1950s and 1960s, working women had lobbied finance ministers and used the courts to

12. Timpson, "Royal Commissions," 126.

13. Victoria Day Care Services, brief 168, 1968, vol. 13, RG 33-89, Royal Commission on the Status of Women Papers (hereafter RCSW), Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

14. Timpson, "Royal Commissions," 127, 134.

15. Manitoba Bar Association, brief 80, 1968, vol. 11, RCSW, LAC.

16. For example, Mary Y. Carter, brief 10, n.d., vol. 11, RCSW, LAC.

challenge the *Income Tax Act* on this point, with little success. Ottawa had always held firm that paying for child care was a personal spending choice and thus not tax deductible.[17]

But organizations like the Canadian Federation of University Women and the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, as well as many individual professional women, used the RCSW as an opportunity to push again for a childcare deduction. And for many of them, the RCSW was actually the second opportunity to air their grievances before a royal commission, the first being the 1962–66 Royal Commission on Taxation (the Carter Commission).[18] The groups and individuals that submitted to the Carter Commission tended to represent a narrower sample of women, namely reform feminist and well-to-do professional women (many lawyers, for example) who almost invariably talked about deductions for housekeepers and nannies rather than daycare centres.[19] RCSW submissions contained the same demands but, on the whole, represented a broader scope of women's experiences with child care. What emerged from the RCSW, in other words, was not just a chorus of demands for individual tax breaks but a series of proposals that positioned tax relief as one lever in a more comprehensive overhaul in the redistribution of care in Canadian society. Take the submission from the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, for example. Like many professional women, they protested the inability to deduct a housekeeper's wages. However, for them, housekeepers and nannies were not just the more desirable option for well-heeled women suspicious of daycare centres; they were one option among many needed to meet the range of working women's care needs. Housekeepers could provide child care for those who worked night and evening shifts, for example.[20] Similarly, a group of "average housewives" from Ottawa pointed out that tax-deductible in-home care was necessary in "remote areas and areas where it is not feasible to set up centres." These housewives also advocated for generous tax deductions to support all women in the meantime as governments worked toward the "ideal goal" of a robust, publicly operated network of daycare centres.[21]

17. Rebecca Johnson, *Taxing Choices: The Intersection of Class, Gender, Parenthood, and the Law* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 23–25.

18. Many women's groups outlined their tax grievances to both the RCSW and the Carter Commission on Taxation. See, for example, Canada, *Royal Commission on Taxation*, submission 54, 1 April 1963, vol. 2, file 520-15-63, reel C-2163, RG 33-65, LAC.

19. Canada, *Royal Commission on Taxation*, submission 132, 10 July 1963, vol. 4, reel C-2164, RG 33-65, LAC. On professional and working women's organizations, see Joan Sangster, *Demanding Equality: One Hundred Years of Canadian Feminism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021), 126–131.

20. Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, brief 26, January 1968, vol. 11, RCSW, LAC.

21. Sue Sullivan, Marie Ullyet and Sylvia M. Williams, brief 247, 21 March 1968, vol. 14, RCSW, LAC.

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What did the commissioners make of these submissions? Their recommendations on tax reform were developed in close deliberation with the Carter Report (released in 1966) and, especially, Finance Minister E. J. Benson's white paper on tax reform, released in 1969. Benson adopted the child care expense deduction (CCED): he proposed that working mothers could deduct up to $500 in childcare expenses per under-fourteen child per year, up to $2,000 per family.[22] In a departure from years of federal tax policy, Benson was willing to accept that child care was "more than just personal" and indeed a "real cost of earning income," citing Ottawa's responsibility to help working women.[23] For the RCSW commissioners, Benson's report was encouraging in that "any tax recognition of child care is welcome."[24] But, they said, Benson's proposed CCED was ultimately a futile gesture toward a much deeper problem: the extent to which the tax system as a whole "unfairly discriminates against married women who work for pay and acts as a disincentive to their entering the labour market."[25]

For the commissioners, then, tax reform had to go much deeper. They recognized, too, that tax reform was a tricky business. "Is it possible," they asked, "to remove the existing disincentive without at the same time creating a positive incentive for all married women to work outside?"[26] For help in striking the "extremely delicate balance" of giving "married women a free choice between staying at home or entering the labour force," they commissioned a report from University of Toronto economics professor Douglas G. Hartle. Hartle reinforced the delicacy of the task: "Tax changes can, of course, result in the removal of one kind of discrimination, say between men and women, and thereby create other kinds of discrimination, say between women in

22. Hon. E. J. Benson, *Proposals for Tax Reform* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969), 15. The total deduction could not be more than two-thirds of the income of the lower-earning parent, there could be no parent at home, deductions had to be supported by receipts, and if care was provided by a dependent of the taxpayer no deduction was available.

23. Johnson, *Taxing Choices*, 26; Benson, *Proposals for Tax Reform*, 10. Benson's recommendation was a departure from Carter, which had recommended a tax credit for children.

24. Canada, *Report*, 301.

25. Canada, *Report*, 291. Two other disincentives they studied closely were the married status exemption and a husband's deduction of a wife's wages in a business. A husband's personal exemption of $1,000 was reduced dollar-for-dollar for his wife's earnings above $250. In other words, if a wife earned $1,250 or more in a year, her husband's personal exemption was eliminated. This amounted to a tax "penalty" that discouraged women from working. Husbands who employed wives in unincorporated businesses (a wife working as a nurse in her physician husband's clinic was a common example) were not allowed to deduct the wife's wages as a business expense, adding yet another layer of discrimination, especially against small family businesses, partnerships, and professions. For a comparison of RCSW and white paper proposals, see Canada, *Report*, 305.

26. Canada, *Report*, 293.

different circumstances. In deciding whether such a change would constitute an improvement in the tax system a painful choice would have to be made."[27]

Hartle recommended the taxation of "imputed" income, which the commissioners ultimately rejected. However, they adopted his calls for a reduction in the married-status exemption and the option for joint filing and income splitting.[28] They also joined Hartle in rejecting the CCED. The deduction, they said, would indeed resolve one kind of unfairness for some working women, but it would also add to the unfairness experienced by stay-at-home mothers who received no tax benefits. Moreover, the tax deduction would create unfairness between women at different income levels. The value of a deduction increased with a taxpayer's income, thus offering more benefit to higher-income earners – and no benefit at all to women whose incomes were below the taxable threshold.[29]

But if a CCED was out of the question, what should childcare-based tax relief look like? The commissioners considered and rejected a tax *credit* for children, as well as a "substantial increase" in exemptions for dependants, neither of which resolved the fairness problem. The solution they arrived at was to eliminate the dependant exemption entirely, as well as family allowances. In their place, they suggested, should be a new social security measure: a taxable childcare allowance, somewhere in the order of $500 per dependent child per year, available to all mothers irrespective of employment status.[30]

Crucially, the commissioners also recognized that more cash in hand was not the be-all and end-all. More money was meaningless without the high-quality services this new money could purchase. The third prong in their approach, then, was the national daycare act.[31] Parents' contributions were an important piece in the financing puzzle for the RCSW's proposed national childcare system; the commission estimated that the annual cost of a space was $1,200 and that "parents' contributions would defray much of the cost."[32] Moral as well as financial imperatives were at play in this suggestion. Having parents pay was important, they explained, because it helped "lift day-care out of the context of poverty." But, as the submissions had so clearly shown,

27. Douglas G. Hartle, *Taxation of the Incomes of Married Women*, Studies of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1971), 9.

28. Canada, *Report*, 301.

29. Hartle, *Taxation*, 77–78, 87.

30. Canada, *Report*, 302.

31. For more on the place of child care in the RCSW and its aftermath, see Freda L. Paltiel, "State Initiatives: Impetus and Effects," in Caroline Andrew and Sanda Rodgers, eds., *Women and the Canadian State* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 31–35.

32. Canada, *Report*, 268.

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child care was unaffordable for many families. That's where the new childcare allowance came in.[33]

With this package of reforms, most of the commissioners were confident that they had achieved their first principle: that "women should be free to choose whether or not to take employment outside their homes."[34] Two dissenting commissioners, Jacques Henripin and John Humphrey, were less sure and worried that the focus on public daycare would make housewives feel like "social parasites."[35] Yet, in the end, the proposals of the RCSW represented an impressive consolidation of submissions and research, taking into account the needs and desires of women of different classes and marital statuses. They moved away from a straightforward liberal feminist embrace of a CCED and developed a more thorough overhaul of the social policy and tax landscape, one that supported all (or at least more) of women's choices with respect to work and care.

The federal government, however, had little interest in such a thoroughgoing process of reform. Though state feminists worked hard to "transform" childcare policy toward a universal approach, they could not, as Mahon explains, uproot the welfarist orientation to daycare.[36] As for the taxation/social security side of the story, the only relevant reform Ottawa adopted in the aftermath of the RCSW was the one the commissioners had specifically recommended *against*: the CCED, implemented as part of 1971 tax reforms. The federal government heeded Benson's advice to implement the new deduction, in large part so the government could be seen to be taking seriously its need to support working mothers.

Unsurprisingly, as working mothers began taking advantage of the CCED throughout the 1970s, it proved to have exactly the disproportionate effect the RCSW had warned about. One Toronto report from 1978, for example, documented the greater tax savings of women with higher incomes – the "upside down" effect of all tax deductions – but also, more worryingly, that the CCED provided no benefit at all for women with below-taxable incomes, who tended to be lone mothers most in need of childcare support. This report also found that about 70 per cent of mothers who paid for daycare in Toronto were not provided with receipts from their caregivers, leaving them unable to claim the expenses on their tax returns.[37] As many feminist legal scholars have pointed

33. Canada, *Report*, 267–270.

34. Canada, *Report*, xii.

35. Canada, *Report*, 434. These minority reports also defended daycare as a welfare service and worried about federal encroachment on an area of provincial jurisdiction.

36. Mahon, "Never-Ending Story," 599–614.

37. Anna Fraser, "The More You Have, the More You Get: An Examination of Section 63 of the Income Tax Act, the Child Care Deduction," Project Child Care Working Paper no. 5 (July 1978), file 2538, fonds 1040, City of Toronto Archives. Fraser surveyed 2,500 households and 300 providers of in-home care.

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out, over the long term these measures had a concerning effect on the bigger picture of child care. The CCED worked to reinforce the notion that care was, fundamentally, an individual, private, and familial responsibility, not a collective responsibility to be provided as a rights-based public service.[38] As the RCSW had advised, tinkering with one small piece of the tax system, pulling on one strand of the web, affected the entire structure of public support for working mothers, sometimes in ways that left most working mothers worse off than before.

Curiously, though, although the CCED (not to mention other child-related tax measures) had a significant effect on the evolution of Canadian childcare policy, it is not often given much attention in histories of Canadian child care. While we know plenty about the failed moves toward a national childcare program, we know much less about, for example, how child-based tax measures redistributed income through public and private channels, making care easier for some women to access.[39] Perhaps this a symptom of the fact that tax deductions are the "hidden" parts of social policy, escaping the attention of scholars as well as the public.[40] But, for the RCSW – and, indeed, for the hundreds of women who made submissions to the commission – tax measures were not hiding in the shadows. The tax system was regarded as one of the most important levers in organizing care in society, for better or worse. Fifty years later, as scholars look back on the RCSW, its attention to the tax–social policy nexus should be one of its legacies. Not only did it mark an important milestone in the long struggle for universal child care (though that is certainly central to its importance, too), but the commission's report also serves as something of a blueprint for feminist historians, laying bare all the connected elements of tax and social policy that work to support rights-based understandings of women's work and care. It alerts us to the threads that historians still need to unravel in the history of child care in Canada.

The RCSW also offers an early indication of how important the notion of "choice" would become in childcare politics and advocacy. The RCSW had tried to find a middle ground, taking the position that a mixture of tax breaks, program funding, and social security measures created an environment in which a mother could meaningfully choose whether and how to combine paid work and care. As others in this roundtable point out, the RCSW's liberal feminist notion of choice was far from ideal because it tended to ignore economic constraints; that its childcare plan was still dependent in part on a mother's financial contributions fits with that critique. At least, however, the

38. Claire F. L. Young, *Women, Tax and Social Programs: The Gendered Impact of Funding Social Programs through the Tax System* (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 2000), 28.

39. Lisa Philipps, "Taxing the Market Citizen: Fiscal Policy and Inequality in an Age of Privatization," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 63, 4 (2000): 111–132.

40. Neil Brooks, *The Hidden Welfare System: A Report by the National Council of Welfare on the Personal Income Tax System in Canada* (Ottawa: National Council of Welfare, 1976).

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commissioners recognized that any move toward a tax-based approach was simply an empty gesture toward choice.

In the years and decades that followed, though, federal Conservative governments prioritized tax measures and have done so while co-opting the feminist language of "choice in child care" by equating more cash with a wider range of choices for mothers.[41] Feminist childcare advocates, including the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) through the 1970s and the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, formed in 1982, have pushed back against this "decontextualized understanding of 'choice.'"[42] Not only is choice undermined by the unfair redistribution inherent in tax measures, they argue, but increasing a mother's disposable income does not necessarily enhance her choices if there are no high-quality daycare options available. The latter, they rightfully point out, requires a universal program. Moreover, offering tax breaks in the name of choice tends to entrench market-based solutions to child care – solutions, like the Live-In Caregiver Program, based on the gendered, class-based, and racialized exploitation of care work and thus antithetical to any notion of choice, liberation, and equality.[43] In 2022, as we move toward a national system of child care, perhaps there is hope that choice may become more than empty rhetoric and can be realized in its true feminist meaning.

41. Martha Friendly, "The $17.5 Billion Question: Has the Universal Child Care Benefit Given Families 'Choice in Child Care'?," Childcare Resource and Research Unit Briefing Notes, 15 October 2013.

42. Katherine Teghtsoonian, "Promises, Promises: 'Choices for Women' in Canadian and American Child Care Policy Debates," *Feminist Studies* 22, 1 (1996): 119.

43. Sedef Arat-Koc, "In the Privacy of Our Own Home: Foreign Domestic Workers as the Solution to the Crisis in the Domestic Sphere in Canada," *Studies in Political Economy* 28, 1 (1989): 33–58.

The Women's Movement, That Royal Commission, and Education

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The struggle for women's equality in education has a very long history. In Canada, part of that history was made by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW), which released its final report in December 1970. The chapter on education begins with the enthusiastic proclamation that "changes in education could bring dramatic improvements in the social and economic position of women in an astonishingly short time."[1] Unfortunately, the rest of the chapter fails to show how education can ensure those dramatic improvements to women's lives. It offers no coherent policy agenda, its content undertheorizes education, and it assumes a benevolent activist state that could and would, in an unproblematic fashion, utilize education to ameliorate the oppressive conditions of women's lives. Twenty years after the RCSW reported, Monique Bégin, its executive secretary, acknowledged that the commissioners and the staff "were lacking both a feminist analysis of power and the conceptual tools for such a study."[2] But however naïve, however flawed the RCSW final report was, it nonetheless became important as a catalyst for the birth of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) and the subsequent strength of the women's movement in Canada that led to an important transformation in public consciousness about the realities of women's lives and a range of legislation that supported women's struggles for equality.

The RCSW was steered by instructions from the Privy Council that established the key goal of the inquiry: "to recommend what steps might be taken by the Federal Government to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society."[3] This set the stage for the adoption of a liberal feminist approach that avoided a sustained critique of systemic sexism in existing educational arrangements and supported adjustments and reforms within the existing structures of a patriarchal, capitalist state. That said, the RCSW did access the body of feminist literature available in 1970, including works by Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, and Margaret Benston. It also commissioned 34 studies on a range of topics related to women's lives, two of which dealt directly with education. The final report also drew on written

1. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Ottawa 1970), 161.

2. Monique Bégin, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada Twenty Years Later," in Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty, eds., *Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 31.

3. Canada, *Report*, vii.

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submissions from individuals and organizations (about 1,000 letters and 468 briefs) and the presentations given at hearings held across the country (890 witnesses). Special arrangements were made to have hearings and discussions in the North. The commission even set up a hotline telephone service so women could phone in and talk to a commissioner. As a result, the RCSW amassed a large collection of evidence pertaining to the lives of Canadian women and heard a diversity of views from a full range of geographic locations. The final report included many of the specific proposals on education and training that had been generated during the 1960s by women's organizations and by actors in the education sector including the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, the Manitoba Teachers' Society, the Saskatoon Women Teachers' Association, and the Edmonton Women Teachers' Club. Secondary school students including those of Room 301, School Class of Vincent Massey Collegiate (Winnipeg), Templeton Senior Secondary School (Vancouver), Conseil étudiant des filles, Collège de Ste-Anne-de-la-Pocatière, and Three Students from O'Leary High School (Edmonton) also submitted briefs, as did post-secondary students such as the Class of 1969 Nursing Students of St. Joseph's Hospital (Hamilton), L'Association des étudiants de l'Université d'Ottawa, and the University of British Columbia Committee of Mature Women Students.[4]

In giving instructions to the RCSW, the Privy Council also made it abundantly clear that the recommendations produced should respect the division of powers identified in the Canadian constitution. Liberal use was made of the phrase "under federal jurisdiction" when outlining specific areas of inquiry. The division of powers aspect of the constitution is especially relevant in education because legislative jurisdiction in that field is largely provincial and tends to be jealously guarded. This presented a problem for the RCSW since education was identified as a major concern for women both in the research and through the submissions and presentations. The RCSW appears to have solved the dilemma by selectively overlooking the jurisdictional problem in education and including many recommendations directed to the provinces and territories or suggesting the federal government work in co-operation with the provinces and territories.

4. Discussions of the internal politics and the work processes of the RCSW can be found in Bégin, "Royal Commission"; Monique Bégin, *Ladies, Upstairs! My Life in Politics and After* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018), chap. 5; Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Post-war Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), chap. 7. Data on public consultations can be found in the foreword of the final report of the RCSW, and lists of the commissioned research and submissions to the commission can be found in the appendix.

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Education in the Report of the Royal Commission

In general, the education chapter of the report focuses on the basic question of access to education and training for girls and women because, it argues, "education opens the door to almost every life goal."[5] In this context, the primary purpose of education is understood to be the securing of employment, both paid and unpaid. Formal education is constructed as the central mechanism through which women can make individual choices, be competitive in the workplace, and gain equal opportunities in life – a position consistent with the ideology of liberal feminism. The report offers programmatic recommendations that focus on items such as the use of fair admission criteria; the expansion of financial aid provisions; the provision of support services such as career counselling and child care; and, for schoolgirls, the removal of stereotypes in textbooks and the inclusion of positive role models in learning materials. It recommends equal treatment in school sports and physical education, comprehensive family life and sex education programs, the development of consumer education, and the use of educational television as a tool to bring learning to those in isolated areas or studying from home. There are also several specific recommendations related to the training needs of immigrant women, Indigenous women, rural women, paid household workers, and women involved in volunteer work. There is a definite emphasis on preparing women for the job market, and the references to education in other parts of the report also focus on this same goal. It is worth noting, particularly given debates about wages for housework, that the commissioners explicitly recommend that "full-time household responsibility be equivalent to participation in the labour force" when establishing eligibility for job training allowances for married women.[6]

Rather surprisingly, it is in the commission's consideration of Indigenous education that a somewhat more critical understanding of education can be found, under the heading "Native Women in the North." This section, much of which is pertinent to Indigenous women more generally and not just those of "the North," discusses how schools harmed Indigenous families through the interruption of traditional motherwork, the destruction of languages, and attacks on Indigenous value systems. Also acknowledged is the use of culturally inadequate curriculum and teachers ill suited and unprepared for their work with Indigenous communities. While the persistence of a paternalist, colonialist mentality is reflected in comments that blame parents for their children's difficulties and suggest that Indigenous people should do more to emulate the ways of the dominant society, this section does reveal the nascent insight that education can only be understood when considered within its larger social, cultural, and political contexts and that schooling played an important

5. Canada, *Report*, 161.

6. Canada, *Report*, 197.

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role in the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the destruction of Indigenous cultures, languages, and ways of life. Unfortunately, the recommendations are wholly inadequate to the task of repairing the profound damage of colonialism and the tone of some of them is condescending and patronizing. There appears to be no awareness of the fact that Indigenous peoples were already organized and engaged in planning a new approach to education in their communities, an education that was concerned not only with jurisdiction and control but with the fundamental questions of values and knowledge that ought to be inherent in the education of the young.[7]

Responses to the RCSW Report

Feminist activists tended to be critical of the RCSW report. An article in *Pedestal*, a publication of the Vancouver Women's Caucus, was representative of prevailing views. It pointed out that the RCSW "failed somehow to understand the root causes of our oppression" and called the recommendations "remarkably short-sighted."[8] Many feminists, especially those on the left, were cynical about the possibilities of meaningful change coming about as a result of the work of the RCSW and expected the report to languish on the shelves. Some, however, saw the strategic possibilities of using the report's findings and recommendations to good political purpose. Pat Schultz from the Toronto Women's Caucus, for example, argued that feminists should "recognize its potential for mobilizing women initially around its demands but eventually going far beyond. We have in this report a weapon that we can use in our coming struggles."[9]

Many feminists working in institutional settings such as schools, colleges, universities, and teacher federations certainly saw the possibilities of the final

7. Active organizing was occurring among Indigenous youth and on university campuses during the 1960s. The Canadian Indian Youth Council was established in 1965 with Harold Cardinal serving as the first president. At the time, Cardinal was also the associate secretary on Indian Affairs for the Canadian Union of Students. When Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Minister of Indian Affairs Jean Chrétien issued their infamous white paper in 1969 outlining plans that would, among other things, eliminate the *Indian Act* and abrogate treaty rights, Cardinal wrote a widely read critique, *The Unjust Society*, and he and other young people organized with their communities to resist the federal government plans. The growing militancy in Indigenous communities came to be known as the Red Power movement. In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) released the policy paper "Indian Control of Indian Education." See "Council President Says Indian Youth Refuses Passive Role," *Regina Leader-Post*, 13 October 1966; Harold Cardinal, *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada's Indians* (Edmonton: M. G. Hurtig, 1969).

8. "Pie in the Sky … Royal Commission Recipe," *Pedestal*, January 1971, reprinted in *Women Unite!* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1972), 40.

9. Quoted in Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin and Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 52.

report. Sybil Shack, a well-known Manitoba educator, activist, and former president of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, took a wait-and-see approach, commenting that "no one can predict the long-term effect of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the wide publicity being received by the women's liberation movements and other less militant groups."[10] At the same time, she observed that the work of the RCSW and the activism of women's liberation groups had brought women's discontent out into the open and given voice to their concerns. This, she said, promoted dialogue, self-respect, courage, and confidence among women. And she reported seeing first-hand the positive effects that attention to women's issues was having on the young women she taught. Jane Gaskell, in her study of the ways women worked to change education in British Columbia in the 1970s, notes that educators were well represented in the women's movement and argues that "they came to share a set of educational demands that were shaped by their own experience, texts from an international movement, and the Royal Commission Report." In fact, one of the teachers Gaskell quotes observed that "the Royal Commission Report created an enormous stir. … The BC Teachers' Federation has always looked on itself as being progressive, in the vanguard. So, of course, (they) had to have their own little commission looking at this area."[11] In British Columbia, then, the response to the RCSW report in the teachers' union was pro-active.

The response to the final report that had the most impact over the longer haul was the 1971 decision to bring together women's groups to form the National Ad Hoc Action Committee on the Status of Women, primarily for the purpose of ensuring the implementation of the recommendations of the RCSW. The Ad Hoc Action Committee had representatives from 41 organizations and claimed a combined membership of over two million women when it presented a submission to the government of Canada in February 1972. An effort to influence the government, the submission dealt with ten areas of legislation and policy raised in the RCSW report and included the recommendations on which the member organizations had reached agreement. Education was not discussed, likely because there was no desire to step into the jurisdictional problems.[12] In early 1972, "Ad Hoc" was dropped from the

10. Sybil Shack, *The Two-Thirds Minority: Women in Canadian Education* (Toronto: Governing Council of the University of Toronto, 1973), 70. Shack is a good example of a woman who provided what Jill Vickers calls "intergenerational continuity" in the space between the women's suffrage movement and the movement for women's liberation. Vickers, "The Intellectual Origins of the Women's Movements in Canada," in Backhouse and Flaherty, *Challenging Times*, 39. See Rosa Bruno-Jofré, "Life History as a Window to Understanding the Politics of Teaching and Schooling: Manitoba Teacher Sybil Shack (1911–2004)," *Manitoba History*, no. 59 (October 2008), http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/59/shack_s.shtml.

11. Jane Gaskell, "Educational Change and the Women's Movement: Lessons from British Columbia Schools in the 1970s," *Educational Policy* 18 (May 2004): 297–298.

12. National Ad Hoc Action Committee on the Status of Women, "Submission to the

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name to indicate that the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) had decided on a stable future. In April 1972, NAC held the "Strategy for Change" convention at the King Edward Sheraton Hotel in Toronto with about 500 people in attendance. There were women from each province and territory at what was essentially NAC's founding convention. As this gathering demonstrated from the beginning, NAC would, throughout its history, be confronted by tensions and ruptures caused by ideological differences as well as disagreements about purpose, strategy, and feminist process in a feminist organization. But the fuller story can be followed elsewhere.[13] Here I want to focus on the treatment of education policy.

Education for girls and women was an important topic at the Strategy for Change convention, and the workshops organized to consider that topic generated several recommendations, many of them containing multiple parts. Organized under the headings of Primary Education (which workshop participants appear to have used to discuss anything to do with schooling) and Post-secondary Education, the recommendations are generally in a rough-and-ready format, but that is likely explained by the time pressure of the agenda, which allowed only two hours for their drafting in a group setting on the afternoon of the second day of the convention. While the recommendations are important in and of themselves, they also reflect a general optimism about the possibilities of change-making through education, show the influence of debates occurring in other social movements, and reveal a belief in a responsive state.

During the period from 1960 to 1975, the federal and provincial governments were placing a renewed emphasis on the ability of education to drive the economy, build an active, responsible citizenry, and create a better world. There was new interest in, and even excitement about, the possibilities of education. Provincial school systems were rapidly expanding because of the postwar baby boom and the growing retention of students in secondary

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Government of Canada," February 1972, R*ise Up! A Digital Archive of Feminist Activism*, https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/activism/organizations/national-action-committee-on-the-status-of-women-nac/nac-adhoccommittee-submissionto-government-of-canada-1972/.

13. See, for example, Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing*, chap. 2; Jill Vickers, Pauline Rankin and Christine Appelle, *Politics as if Women Mattered: A Political Analysis of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Joan Sangster, *Demanding Equality: One Hundred Years of Canadian Feminism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021), chap. 10; Lorraine Greaves, "Reorganizing the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, 1986–1988," in Jeri Dawn Wine and Janice L. Ristock, eds., *Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1991), 101–116; Kathleen Rodgers and Melanie Knight, "'You Just Felt the Collective Wind Being Knocked out of Us': The Deinstitutionalization of Feminism and the Survival of Women's Organizing in Canada," *Women's Studies International Forum* 34 (November–December 2011): 570–581; Cheryl Collier, "Not Quite the Death of Organized Feminism in Canada: Understanding the Demise of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women," *Canadian Political Science Review* 8, 2 (2014): 17–33.

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schools. Several provincial governments set up commissions or committees to review their existing systems of education and recommend reforms. At the post-secondary level many provinces established colleges with programs most often aimed at preparation for skilled work in trades and technology or para-professional work; in Québec, pre-university programs were included. New universities, including York, Trent, and Simon Fraser, were built while established universities added new facilities to accommodate the growing demand for the post-secondary education that parents and others thought would allow more career choices for the young. Access was supported by relatively low tuition fees and the passage of the Canada Student Loan Act in 1964. And, as Josh Cole reminds us, "By the end of the 1960s, Canada was spending a larger percentage of its GNP on education than either the United States or the Soviet Union."[14]

A young population, an expanding educational system, the rise of teacher militancy, and a rich mix of new ideas about education, along with searing criticisms of traditional approaches to teaching and learning, had centred education as a core political project by the time NAC organized the Strategy for Change convention in 1972. In many ways, the recommendations coming out of the convention were disappointingly predictable, possibly because there was pressure to focus on getting the federal government to act on the report of the RCSW. The first two recommendations from the primary education workshops dealt with learning materials, defined broadly to include children's literature, toys, toy packaging, television programming, and school textbooks. The focus was on the elimination of sexism and sex role stereotyping in those materials. The third recommendation emphasized the need for provincial and federal governments to fund revisions to history textbooks to ensure the inclusion of women's history and women's contributions. It also suggested that Canadian publishers be asked for a commitment "to actively remove and positively replace prejudicial passages on the basis of sex as well as race, creed, religion and ethnicity."[15] Despite the failure to include class, surely there is a hint of awakening to what we now call intersectionality in this phrase.

The fourth recommendation dealt with teacher education and was directed to the provincial education authorities. The recommendation commended provinces where teachers were educated at universities and asked that the minimum education standard of meeting university entrance requirements be expected of all teachers employed in schools. These concerns reflect the uneven pattern of teacher education in Canada in the middle of the 20th century and

14. Josh Cole, *Hall-Dennis and the Road to Utopia: Education and Modernity in Ontario* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021), 13.

15. National Action Committee on the Status of Women (hereafter NAC), "AGM & Lobby (1972): Strategy for Change-Conference Materials," *Rise Up! A Digital Archive of Feminist Activism*, https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/activism/organizations/national-action-committee-on-the-status-of-women-nac/nac-stratchangeconf-materials-1972-ocr/.

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the differences between the professional preparation of elementary and secondary teachers in several provinces. The flawed assumption is, of course, that more education will, *ipso facto*, create teachers who understand feminism and willingly employ non-sexist, if not anti-sexist, pedagogy. The recommendation then moved directly into workplace issues by demanding that women and men have an equal opportunity to choose the age group they wished to teach and that they be paid based on qualifications and not the age of the students taught. It was acknowledged here that revisions to the education of teachers, guidance counsellors, and librarians were needed to ensure they understood and would work to eliminate sex role stereotyping and sexism in their practice. There was special concern about guidance counsellors who failed to treat girls and boys equally when giving advice about further education. Provincial departments of education were encouraged to provide in-service professional development activities for all teachers on recognizing and eliminating social and sex stereotyping. This focus on teacher education is a harbinger of what was to come with respect to what we now call gender equity in education.

For some reason, included with the fourth recommendation on teacher education was a section recommending sex education in all schools from kindergarten to the end of high school as well as family life programs that would discuss a variety of roles for all adult family members and present "a diversity of family models and life styles." It is difficult to know how to interpret this last suggestion, particularly since it is followed immediately by the sentence "This might include providing opportunity for children to visit adults at different kinds of work." Is this recommendation talking about mothers who work outside the home, fathers who stay at home to look after children and engage in unpaid domestic labour, lone-parent families, grandparents acting as parents, or foster families? Or is it acknowledging families with two fathers or two mothers or other possible arrangements? We are unlikely to ever know with certainty.

The members of the workshops considering post-secondary education brought forward nine recommendations, several of which were omnibus-like. The first recommended a National Council of Women's Affairs "to study, implement, and enforce the recommendations of [the] Royal Commission Report – at both the federal and provincial levels." The recommendation then went on to suggest each province be urged to set up a coordinating committee that would organize relationships among the various levels of education beginning with preschool and get teachers from all levels together to discuss common interests. The second recommendation was for a Bureau for Women in Continuing Education to protect the rights of female students in continuing education programs. Recommendation three prescribed women's committees for the official governing structures of every post-secondary institution, and recommendation four called for post-secondary education to "be structured so as to ensure 51% participation of women at all levels within a 5-year period." Preferential hiring of women would be used to achieve this goal. If Statistics

Canada found any discriminatory patterns in hiring, those patterns would be revealed and appropriate action would be taken, up to and including the "withholding of funds from 'guilty' institutions." The fifth recommendation set out information about how to report "specific cases of discrimination in hiring, promotion, remuneration, and tenure" to the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

The sixth recommendation supported programs to eliminate sex role stereotyping at all levels and to raise the consciousness of women at the post-secondary level and all other levels. The next recommendation urged that a principle be established to ensure only women would teach and do administrative work in women's studies programs. The final two recommendations, eight and nine, dealt with part-time study and part-time employment and argued that both should be fully integrated with full-time education and employment and enjoy the same financial support and fringe benefits. Recommendation 9 points out this would require "the provision of adequate maternity and paternity leave, adequate day-care centres, counselling facilities, and easily available abortion and birth control information."[16] These recommendations seem very prescient given the precarious nature of so much of the work in post-secondary institutions currently.

It is unclear what happened to these recommendations, although the *Globe and Mail* reported that the resolutions passed at the convention included "allocation of some of the present government money for publishing Canadian books to writers of non-sexist children's books; equal opportunity for all teachers regardless of sex and marital status; sex education in high schools; preferential treatment for women in their training and hiring at universities; extension of the financial support now available to full-time students to part-time students."[17] NAC's *Index of Policy Recommendations* for the years 1972 to 1978 contains none of the recommendations on education made at the Strategy for Change convention.[18] The six resolutions it includes all come from 1976 or 1977 and focus on offering courses for women via radio and television, media images of women, funding arrangements through grants and bursaries, the ongoing elimination of stereotypes in learning materials and counselling, and the provision of practical knowledge about women's rights through a variety of means. Admittedly, there are some problems with many of the

16. In summarizing the recommendations from the workshops on primary education and post-secondary education, I have used an occasional direct quotation. I made the decision to avoid an excess of footnotes and use this one note to acknowledge the source of all the direct quotes. All the recommendations can be found together at NAC, "AGM & Lobby (1972)."

17. Leone Kirkwood, "Sponsoring Group $8,000 in Red; 600 Women Attend Conference on Status Report Recommendations, Hear Radical Group Call Site Too Posh," *Globe and Mail*, 10 April 1972.

18. NAC, "Policy (1972–1978): Index of Policy Recommendations," *Rise Up! A Digital Archive of Feminist Activism*, https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/activism/organizations/national-action-committee-on-the-status-of-women-nac/nac-policyresolutionsfrom1972/.

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1972 recommendations, starting with confusions over jurisdiction in education and which level of government does what. Some of the recommendations show a misunderstanding of university governance, contracts of employment, and collective agreements. And, while women's anger is understandable, the suggestions for surveillance and the threat of funding cuts to universities by government as methods of enforcement are very heavy-handed and ultimately dangerous for women. That said, there are many good ideas in the recommendations and women went to much expense and gave much time to participate in the convention. The apparent disappearance of all that work done under the pressure of time must have contributed to the cycle of complaints about NAC being a Toronto organization that failed to listen to member groups and women in the other regions.

According to Marjorie Cohen, a constant tension was present in the years following the 1972 convention as women debated "which issues to pursue and which to ignore."[19] Many wanted NAC to stick with those that could readily be seen as women's issues while others wanted to address larger economic matters like wage and price controls that would have a particularly negative impact on women. By the 1980s this debate was resolving itself, and NAC shifted to a position that viewed women's oppression as structural. In a 1987 interview, Louise Dulude, president of NAC, responded to a question about the organization's direction over the past year, a clear reference to its interventions in the free trade debate, by saying, "There are few subjects that you could say are no longer women's issues."[20] As Cohen pithily observed, "Equal pay laws do not help much if you do not have a job."[21]

What happened to the education portfolio after 1972? It was difficult for a national organization to think about taking on formal education for the jurisdictional reasons already discussed. In any event, it was largely unnecessary; by the time NAC was considering what issues to focus on, female educators employed in a variety of settings and serving in many different positions had already seized the reins and were moving forward along the same lines as had been outlined by both the RCSW and the Strategy for Change convention. By "romancing the state" through processes of gentle persuasion such as lobbying, feminist educators and activists convinced elected politicians, provincial ministries of education, and government status of women agencies to implement new policies, projects, and programs of various kinds for female students and teachers.[22] In support of these efforts, teacher unions, women's

19. Marjorie Griffin Cohen, "The Canadian Women's Movement and Its Efforts to Influence the Canadian Economy," in Backhouse and Flaherty, *Challenging Times*, 216.

20. Kathryn L. deBree, "Just Who Leads NAC Anyway? An Interview with Louise Dulude, President of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women," *The Newsmagazine by Alberta Women* 2 (May/June 1987): 34.

21. Cohen, "Canadian Women's Movement," 218.

22. Nelly P. Stromquist, "Romancing the State: Gender and Power in Education," *Comparative*

groups, non-governmental organizations, foundations, and corporations often contributed additional programming and materials. Researchers employed in universities, ministries of education, status of women offices, and teacher unions documented pervasive sex role stereotyping in educational materials, the absence of content about women's lives and achievements in textbooks and curriculum, the presence of sexual harassment in schools, skewed patterns of enrolment by gender in school subjects, and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in educational institutions. This led to efforts to revise or create new learning materials, organize activities to combat sexual harassment and violence against girls and women, provide training in assertiveness and leadership for female students and teachers, and introduce some limited gender education initiatives for pre-service and in-service teachers.[23] By the late 1980s, the growing level of activity around gender equity at all levels of education, its partial institutionalization in some provincial policies and curriculum, the formalization of women's studies programs at universities, and the rapid development of feminist research encouraged the optimistic belief that transformative change was underway in education.[24] As it turned out, the struggle was far from over, but that is a tale beyond the scope of this presentation.

The Women's Movement as a Pedagogical Site

Without a doubt, access to formal education in state-operated institutions has been important for women, but equally important, or perhaps even more so, is the education for women created by women themselves. The development of feminist consciousness-raising groups and feminist organizations offered important new learning environments for women while connecting the personal to the political, and individual experiences to theory and collective

Education Review 39 (November 1995): 423–454.

23. For a more detailed discussion of the work of educators in schools and universities, see Rebecca Priegert Coulter, "Gender Equity and Schooling: Linking Research and Policy," *Canadian Journal of Education* 21 (Fall 1996): 433–452; Coulter, "'Doing Gender' in Canadian Schools: An Overview of the Policy and Practice Mélange," in Sheena Erskine and Maggie Wilson, eds., *Gender Issues in International Education: Beyond Policy and Practice* (New York: Falmer Press, 1999), 113–129; Dawn Wallin and Janice Wallace, eds., *Transforming Conversations: Feminism and Education in Canada since 1970* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018); Ruth Roach Pierson, "Education and Training," in Ruth Roach Pierson and Marjorie Griffin Cohen, eds., *Canadian Women's Issues*, vol. 2, *Bold Visions* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1995), 162–202.

24. For a range of perspectives on the development of women's studies and feminist research, see Wendy Robbins, Meg Luxton, Margrit Eichler and Francine Descarries, eds., *Minds of Our Own: Inventing Feminist Scholarship and Women's Studies in Canada and Québec, 1966–76* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008).

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action.[25] Women's bookstores "contributed to the cultural transmission of feminist ideas" and served as "spaces of activism, information exchange, and friendship."[26] The emergence of feminist publishing initiatives such as Women's Press in Canada made feminist theory and women's writing more accessible to a larger audience, and a range of new feminist newspapers and magazines popularized feminist ideas and women's activism and provided a forum for discussion.[27] The cultural production of feminist films, music, and visual art provided other arenas for understanding and critique to flourish.[28] The generation and sharing of new knowledge on these many fronts, combined with feminist activism in many locations, shifted public consciousness about women's lives and allowed critical ideas to take root in ways that exemplify popular education at its strongest. Community-based and informal feminist educational initiatives also led to more formal and institutionally based programming in continuing and adult education that came to be housed in colleges and universities and provided the foundation for credit courses and, finally, undergraduate and graduate degree programs in women's studies.

The rich stew of contributions that the women's movement made to new understandings of power and patriarchy, and to learning and pedagogy, demonstrates that education can "act as a counter discourse, counter that is to the dominant social norms that seek to instil an uncritical relation to the world of business and to the role of education in 'knowledge transfer.'"[29] The lesson

25. On consciousness-raising groups, see Ellen Messer-Davidow, "Acting Otherwise," in Judith Kegan Gardiner, ed., *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 23–51; Rhiannon Firth and Andrew Robinson, "For a Revival of Feminist Consciousness-Raising: Horizontal Transformation of Epistemologies and Transgression of Neoliberal TimeSpace," *Gender and Education* 28 (April 2016): 343–358. On feminist organizations, see Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing*; Margaret Strobel, "Consciousness and Action: Historical Agency in the Chicago Women's Liberation Unit," in Gardiner, *Provoking Agents*, 52–58.

26. Lucy Delap, "Feminist Bookshops, Reading Cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement in Great Britain, c. 1974–2000," *History Workshop Journal* 81 (Spring 2016): 172; Kristen Hogan, "Women's Studies in Feminist Bookstores: 'All the Women's Studies Women Would Come In,'" *Signs* 33 (Spring 2008): 595–621.

27. Margie Wolfe, "Working with Words: Feminist Publishing in Canada," in Maureen Fitzgerald, Connie Guberman and Margie Wolfe, eds., *Still Ain't Satisfied: Canadian Feminism Today* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1982), 265–275; Joan Sangster, "Creating Popular Histories: Re-interpreting 'Second Wave' Canadian Feminism," *Dialectical Anthropology* 39 (December 2015): 381–404; Laurel Forster, "Spreading the Word: Feminist Print Cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement," *Women's History Review* 25 (October 2016): 812–831; Philinda Masters with the Broadside Collective, eds., *Inside Broadside: A Decade of Feminist Journalism* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2019).

28. Gail Vanstone, *D is for Daring: The Women behind the Films of Studio D* (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2007).

29. Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: SAGE, 2009), 167.

here is that the debates, the dynamism, and the pedagogical power of social movement activism can be central to challenging hegemonic constructions of gender relations and creating the conditions that allow for, among other things, the ongoing critical analysis and transformation of formal, state-supported educational provision. As Gramsci argued, "Every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship."[30]

30. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 350.

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"An Unexpectedly Significant Finding": Poverty and the Royal Commission on the Status of Women

Margaret Hillyard Little, Queen's University

In April 1965 Prime Minister Lester Pearson declared "war on poverty." He promised $25 million a year to needy mothers and their children through the introduction of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP). The CAP heralded a new era in federal-provincial welfare-state expansion. It guaranteed *unlimited* cost-shared funding for provincial and municipal welfare programs, and it signalled a new level of federal responsibility for the nation's poor.[1] Yet despite this war on poverty, most provinces did not increase their welfare rates, rates that remained well below subsistence. Nor did they lessen their moral surveillance.[2]

By the mid 1960s, poverty had gained public attention as a result of a number of widely publicized reports. In 1964 the Ontario Federation of Labour declared that more than 1 million Ontarians were living in poverty. In 1965 a Canadian Welfare Council study on rural poverty found the "extent staggering." And another report the same year concluded that more than 1 million Canadians were illiterate and about 4 million (one in five Canadians) were living below the minimum poverty line. These shocking reports on poverty were headline stories in prominent daily newspapers.[3]

On 16 February 1967, following these well-publicized poverty reports, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) announced it would solicit the views of women, to encourage women's organizations and individual women to write letters and/or present briefs to the commission as it travelled throughout the country. Just ten months after this announcement, on 6 October 1968, the federal government established the Special Senate Committee on Poverty (Croll Committee) with a $1 million budget to inquire into the causes of poverty and make recommendations for its elimination. The

1. The CAP was part of the Fordist postwar compromise of mass production, mass consumption, and a consistent pattern of bargaining between labour and capital. As a result of the CAP funding, provincial governments expanded what types of low-income single mothers were eligible for welfare, but poverty persisted.

2. For a discussion of the many ways welfare administrators surveyed single mothers during the postwar era, see Margaret Hillyard Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920–1997* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), chap. 5.

3. For examples of newspaper coverage, see "Rural Poverty Report: Some Subsist on $11.71 Each Month," *Ottawa Journal*, 8 December 1965; "Poverty: Million Can't Read or Write," *Toronto Telegram*, 8 December 1965, RG49, reel 260, Archives of Ontario. Details of the Economic Council of Canada report cited in Andrew Armitage, *Social Welfare in Canada: Ideals, Realities and Future Paths*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988), 277.

Croll Committee provided money to help the poor organize, present before the committee, and protest outside the committee hearings, thus receiving media attention.

From April 1969 to November 1970 the Special Senate Committee on Poverty held hearings across Canada. The national and local media covered the Croll Committee members as they travelled, met in hotel ballrooms, and heard briefs. The committee members were criticized for holding their hearings in ballrooms, so they began taking tours of the "slums" of Canada's cities with the media in tow. This was front-page news day after day. And the committee hearings provided a national forum for low-income voices. This was the first time federal funding was available to poor and low-income groups, which in turn used this strategically to form, organize, protest, and attract media attention. This sparked hundreds of antipoverty groups to organize and raise their voices.[4]

I am being a stickler on the dates of these developments for the RCSW and the Croll Committee on Poverty because I want you to see the extent to which issues of poverty were in circulation during the announcement, hearings, and report of the RCSW. In December 1970, just seven months after the Croll Committee hearings ended, the RCSW report was released. And yet, despite all this public attention to poverty, the RCSW's report states, "The specific situation of women in poverty was an *unexpectedly significant finding* [my emphasis] in our investigation."[5] Unexpectedly? This phrase in the RCSW report was written four and a half years after Prime Minister Pearson declared war on poverty, after low-income groups had begun to organize in almost every city, and after poverty had become a front-page news story with the Croll Committee members touring the country.

How could the RCSW be surprised by the breadth and depth of poverty that women experienced? To understand this more fully, I examined how many low-income women's groups submitted briefs to the RCSW, what specifically they said about poverty, and what they recommended as solutions.[6] First, of the 468 briefs submitted to the RCSW there are only *three* from explicitly low-income women's groups. Second, all three advocated strongly for a Guaranteed

4. For details about the Croll Committee's impact on antipoverty activism, see Little, *No Car, No Radio*, 148–149.

5. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Ottawa 1970), 331.

6. In regards to my methodology, I explore all briefs written by organizations that could clearly be determined to represent low-income women. I also read the summary and analysis provided by the RCSW staff at the end of each brief. I did not explore briefs by individuals. I did not explore the letters to the RCSW, which Joan Sangster has done so well previously. I did not read the transcripts of the hearings. So, this research is based solely on the briefs written by low-income women's groups and other Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI) advocates that have been digitized and are publicly available. Sangster, "Invoking Experience as Evidence," *Canadian Historical Review* 92, 1 (2011): 135–161.

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Table 1: The Timeline of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the Senate Committee on Poverty

Timeline	Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW)	Special Senate Committee on Poverty (Croll Committee)
Announced	16 February 1967	8 October 1968
Hearings held	April–October 1968	April 1969–November 1970
Report released	7 December 1970	November 1971

Annual Income (GAI), a regular government payment that would guarantee low-income women economic security. Given that race and colonialism can deeply affect poverty, I also explored all groups that identified explicitly as racialized, ethnic, immigrant, and Indigenous. And when I discovered that the three low-income women's groups were distinct from ethnic/immigrant and Indigenous women's groups in their strong demand for GAI, I explored what other groups that were not marginalized by race, Indigeneity, or poverty also advocated for GAI. Here I discovered that six of the other 465 briefs advocated for GAI.[7] In all of this archival research, I did not explore reports submitted by individuals. I also did not assess the strengths and limitations of the RCSW generally, which Jane Arscott, Joan Sangster, Toni Williams, and many others have done.[8] Instead, I simply focused on groups that can be clearly understood as low-income, racialized, ethnic, immigrant, or Indigenous, as well as other groups that advocated for GAI, according to the RCSW index.

7. I used the RCSW index to determine which briefs address GAI. The index is more than 100 pages and appears quite detailed; see "Standing Committee on Women," n.d., Royal Commission on the Status of Women: Briefs and Transcripts of Public Hearings, Canadiana Collections, accessed 22 February 2022, https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c4883/109?r=0&s=3.

8. For the most informative assessments of the RCSW and its limitations in regards to class, race, Indigeneity, and sexuality, see Erika Abner, Mary Jane Mossman and Elizabeth Pickett, "No More Than Simple Justice: Assessing the Royal Commission Report on Women, Poverty and the Family," *Ottawa Law Review* 22, 3, (1990): 575–605; Jane Arscott, "More Explosive Than Any Terrorist's Time Bomb: The RCSW, Then and Now," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Montréal, 2 June 2010; Wendy McKeen, "Seen but Not Heard: The Construction of 'Welfare Mothers' in Canada's Late 1960s/Early 1970s 'War on Poverty,'" *Canadian Woman Studies* 29, 3 (2012): 107–123; Sangster, "Invoking Experience as Evidence"; Joan Sangster, *Demanding Equality: One Hundred Years of Canadian Feminism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021), 249–254; Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, "Patriarchy and Paternalism: The Legacy of the Canadian State for First Nations Women," in Caroline Andrew and Sanda Rodgers, eds., *Women and the Canadian State* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 64–78; Toni Williams, "Re-forming 'Women's' Truth: A Critique of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada," *Ottawa Law Review* 22, 3 (1990): 725–759.

The first striking aspect of the three low-income women's groups that submitted briefs to the RCSW is that they not only spoke in detail about poverty but also advocated strongly for GAI. These groups were the Minus Ones, Winnipeg; Parents Without Partners, Ottawa; and Single Parents Associated, a subgroup of the Social Action Committee, Toronto. Each of these low-income women's groups defined itself as a single-mom group. The details of each brief by these single-mom groups will be outlined below.

While most members of the Minus Ones described themselves as deserted, separated, divorced, or widowed mothers, this group also included "other concerned citizens": lawyers, ministers, and social workers. The group met weekly at the local YWCA. Their first recommendation to the RCSW was GAI for all sole-support mothers. They were particularly concerned about deserted mothers in cases where the fathers did not pay support and the court awards were unenforceable. As the Minus Ones' brief states, "The mothers live in constant fear that the payment will be late or will not be made at all." The group was also concerned that welfare rates not only were too low but were reduced if the single mother had paid work.

> There should be an overt recognition that mothers with families are contributing members of society and are not dependents as such. They are responsible adults making an economic and social contribution to this country and are an economic asset to this country as their children will be in the future. As a consequence of that economic contributions [*sic*], as a right they should receive an adequate economic return which … should be an assured guaranteed income.[9]

Thus, they saw a GAI as a way for the state to financially compensate these single mothers for the hard, caring work they were doing. The brief explains, "This would bring the work performed by the woman in the home into the credit side of our economic ledger and we would be forced to admit their economic contribution to society. It would be proof positive that married women are not dependents but are productive members of society and performing essential services."[10] The Minus Ones appended to their RCSW brief another brief that they had presented with the Married Women Alone group to the Manitoba Legislative Assembly in April 1967. Thus, this group was organized, politicized, and prepared to present briefs demanding GAI for single mothers before various levels of government.

Parents Without Partners (PWP) was an Ottawa-based group that was part of an international organization of single parents. Its submission included a detailed brief plus statistical tables and five individual letters written by single mothers. PWP stated that one in fifteen Canadian families was headed by a single mother. The group made four demands to the RCSW:

9. Minus Ones, Winnipeg, brief 146 submitted to the RCSW, 29 May 1968, 6.

10. Minus Ones, Winnipeg, 18.

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1. more public housing,
2. "supplementary allowances for those whose income is below a decent standard, to provide a Guaranteed Annual Income,"[11]
3. more educational opportunities for girls and women, and
4. more mental health counselling.

The five personal letters from single mothers that accompanied the brief explained in poignant detail the poverty and distress the writers experienced. Four of the five mothers had fallen into poverty because of their family circumstances. In one case the husband had severe mental health issues, another was widowed, and a third had five children and described experiences of discrimination by landlords and teachers. In sum, this brief from PWP was very persuasive with its detailed statistics, its clear demands, and its poignant letters from single moms.

The third low-income group that submitted a brief to the RCSW was Single Parents Associated, under the umbrella of the Social Action Committee in Toronto. Like the Minus Ones, Single Parents Associated was a politically organized group that had advocated at various levels of government. They had presented a petition to the Attorney General of Ontario; a news story about this petition from the *Toronto Daily Star* was attached to their brief. To develop their RCSW brief the organization held a public meeting in Toronto where they devised a questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire demonstrate a very strong demand for GAI.[12]

In summary, all three single moms' groups that submitted briefs to the RCSW advocated clearly and articulately for GAI. This is distinct from the Indigenous, ethnic, and immigrant women's groups that submitted briefs.

Given that race, colonialism, and immigration status can deeply affect poverty, I also sought briefs written by racialized (none), immigrant and ethnic (nine), and Indigenous (two) women's groups. There is much more to discern about race, ethnicity, and immigration status from these RCSW briefs, as Lynne Marks and Sarah Nickel discuss in their recent work.[13] There are no briefs by organizations representing Black or racialized women, as Vijay Agnew, Joanne St. Lewis and Toni Williams previously addressed in their assessments of the racial blinders of the RCSW.[14] The immigrant and ethnic

11. Parents Without Partners, Ottawa, brief 319 to the RCSW, 30 April 1968, 2.

12. Single Parents Associated, Social Action Committee, Toronto, brief 455 to the RCSW, 12 February 1968.

13. Lynne Marks, "Unmarked but not Necessarily Secular: Submissions from Ethnic and Religious Women's Organizations to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women," and Sarah Nickel, "'We Must Make Our Children Proud': Indigenous Women, Activism, and the Aftermath of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women," both papers presented at "Between Postwar and Present Day: Canada 1970–2000," University of Toronto, 8 May 2021.

14. Vijay Agnew, Joanne St. Lewis, and Toni Williams each note how Black and racialized

women's groups that submitted briefs represented what we would now consider white ethnic women and the majority were second- or third-generation Canadians. About half of the immigrant and ethnic women's groups spoke about poverty and the other half did not. The Association of United Ukrainian Canadians Women's Committee, the Canadian Polish Women's Federation in Toronto, the Women's Federation of Allied Jewish Community Services in Montréal, and the B'nai Brith Women District 22 in Toronto did not mention poverty in their briefs.[15] In contrast, the Groupe de Femmes Francophones de la Région de Moncton New Brunswick was aware of poverty and isolation for Acadian women in that province.[16] The National Council of Jewish Women of Canada in Willowdale (Ontario) mentioned in passing a concern about low-income mothers who were forced to do paid work to support their families.[17] And the Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association and Neighbourhood House Services in Montréal were proud of their PWP organization for low-income single moms and demanded further state support mainly through education: public education for three-year-olds; more school programs, including meals for children of low-income single moms; and more adult education programs for these moms.[18] The National Council of Jewish Women in Montréal was very aware of low-income mothers and children, had an extensive preschool project for these children, and argued that the children

women are almost completely absent from the RCSW report. Agnew, *Resisting Discrimination: Women from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean and the Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); St. Lewis, "The Entire Woman: Immigration and Visible-Minority Women," in Andrew and Rodgers, eds., *Women and the Canadian State*, 262–267; Williams, "Re-forming 'Women's' Truth."

15. Association of United Ukrainian Canadians, Women's Committee of the National Executive, Toronto, brief 194 to the RCSW, March 1968; Canadian Polish Women's Federation, Toronto, brief 229 to the RCSW, March 1968; Women's Federation of Allied Jewish Community Services, Montréal, brief 312 to the RCSW, 12 April 1968; the B'nai Brith Women District 22, Toronto, brief 107 to the RCSW, 12 April 1968.

16. Groupe de Femmes Francophones de la Région de Moncton, New Brunswick, brief 404 to the RCSW, 3 August 1968. Marks does not include this organization as one of the ethnic or immigrant women's groups, but I recognize Acadian language and culture as a distinct ethnic/cultural community. Marks, "Unmarked but not Necessarily Secular." It is not surprising to me that this group addresses poverty extensively in its brief given the long history of inequity between Acadian and Anglo citizens in Atlantic Canada and the particular discrimination that Acadians in New Brunswick experienced at the hands of Anglo government welfare bureaucrats. For a more detailed understanding of this social welfare history, see Laurel Lewey, Louis J. Richard and Linda Turner, *New Brunswick before the Equal Opportunity Program: History through a Social Work Lens* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

17. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, Willowdale, brief 361 to the RCSW, 15 June 1968, 1.

18. Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association and Neighbourhood House Services, Montréal, brief 314 to RCSW, 11 April 1968, 1–15, esp. 7.

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had better school reports as a result of the council's interventions.[19] Some of the briefs by immigrant and ethnic minority women's groups thus spoke to issues of poverty, but they did so as advocates for the poor rather than as low-income women themselves.[20] And none of them clearly advocated for GAI.

The two Indigenous women's groups that submitted briefs to RCSW were distinct from the immigrant and ethnic women's groups in that they wrote at length and in detail about poverty and spoke both as low-income Indigenous women and as representatives of other low-income Indigenous women. They explicitly connected colonialism and poverty in all aspects of Indigenous women's lives. Mary Two-Axe Earley wrote on behalf of a group of 21 Indigenous women, whose signatures are included in the brief. Earley eloquently tied Indigenous women's poverty to Indigenous women's loss of rights and status.[21] The Alberta Native Women's Conference in Edmonton gave a very detailed description of poverty that included attention to sanitation, dental care, medical care, alcoholism, welfare, lack of financial loans, housing, a need for more education of children and adults, a need for halfway homes for girls in the city, recreation, legal rights, a need for government funding of home-makers' clubs and friendship centres, *and* a call for self-government.[22] But, interestingly, none of the immigrant, ethnic, or Indigenous women's groups advocated explicitly for GAI.

Given that the demands of the single moms' groups are quite distinct from those of the Indigenous, racialized, and immigrant women's groups, I was curious to know what other briefs advocated for GAI. According to the RCSW index, prepared by RCSW staff, six other groups besides the three single moms' groups advocated explicitly for GAI. They did so for a wide variety of reasons but with rhetoric and argument that was quite distinct from that employed by the three single moms' groups.

The six groups, beyond the single moms' groups, that advocated to the RCSW for GAI were quite diverse in background: A Group of Women, the Fédération des Services Sociaux, the Manitoba Volunteer Committee on the Status of Women, the Voice of Women (VOW) in Edmonton, the NDP Provincial Women's

19. National Council of Jewish Women, Montréal, brief 366 to the RCSW, esp. 3–5.

20. For a more detailed analysis of the briefs presented by immigrant and ethnic women's groups to the RCSW, please see Marks, "Unmarked but not Necessarily Secular."

21. Mary Two-Axe Earley, for a Group of Women, Brooklyn, NY, brief 245 to the RCSW, 20 March 1968.

22. Alberta Native Women's Conference, Edmonton, brief 310 to the RCSW, 12–15 March 1968. While I am simply examining the briefs of these designated Indigenous women's groups, Sarah Nickel places these briefs in the context of other important Indigenous women's activism happening at the time. See Nickel, "'We Must Make Our Children Proud.'" For an understanding of the colonial framework found throughout the RCSW report, see Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, "Patriarchy and Paternalism: The Legal of the Canadian State for First Nations Women," in Caroline Andrew and Sandra Rogers, eds., *Women and the Canadian State*, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 64-78.

Committee in Saskatchewan, and the League for Socialist Action in Toronto. Each of these GAI advocates took one of three distinctive positions. One argument for GAI relied on strong maternalist rhetoric, as seen in the brief by A Group of Women from Ste. Thérèse, Québec. They wrote in French but the brief was translated into English. "We recognize the role of the mother in the home as a specialized career … In return for services rendered, society must remunerate those who serve it; therefore mothers should be paid."[23] Another type of argument for GAI used a group's expertise as social service providers. This was seen in the briefs by the Fédération des Services Seriaux and the Manitoba Volunteer Committee on the Status of Women.[24] The latter was particularly impressive, as it represented 41 organizations in Manitoba including one group of low-income single moms, the Minus Ones, which also presented its own brief (discussed above). The Manitoba Volunteer Committee on the Status of Women comprised an enormous number of committees and subcommittees, and it had set up a committee to work independently and report back in three months' time. The result was a five-volume report to the RCSW. The third GAI argument was presented by three other groups, which situated their expertise within a left-wing political economy analysis. The VOW from Edmonton advocated for GAI on the grounds of both economic equality for women and survival of the species: "We feel that if the human race is to survive in this nuclear age, … women must participate fully in the political, professional and industrial life of Canada."[25] To achieve women's full participation in society, the group stated, required daycare, the end of the dismissal of married women from paid work, and a GAI.[26] The other VOW groups that submitted briefs to the RCSW did not mention GAI, but the Halifax group was one of the few to name race, gender, and poverty together in its brief.[27] The NDP Provincial Women's Committee, Saskatchewan, which represented 40 local NDP women's chapters in the province, advocated for GAI within a comprehensive platform to increase welfare-state provisions (e.g. increased welfare rates, family allowances rates, pay equity, child care, and flexible working periods for young moms).[28] And the League for Socialist Action, Toronto, harkened back to matriarchal times, critiquing maternalist rhetoric that ties women to children: "Woman is victimized both on account of her sex and her state as

23. A Group of Women, Ste. Thérèse, QC, brief 124 to the RCSW, 4 March 1968, n.p.

24. Fédération des Services Seriaux à la Famille du Québec, St. Jean, brief 256 to the RCSW, 21 March 1968; Manitoba Volunteer Committee on the Status of Women, brief 318 to the RCSW, 21 March 1968.

25. Voice of Women, Edmonton, brief 159 to the RCSW, n.d., 1–2.

26. Voice of Women, Edmonton, 4.

27. Voice of Women, Halifax, brief 429 to the RCSW, n.d.

28. NDP Provincial Women's Committee, Saskatchewan, brief 133 to the RCSW, 19 March 1968, 15.

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a worker. Hence she is doubly oppressed."[29] The organization wrote about the oppressive nature of the family, pointing out that women are "tied by a thousand threads to the maintenance of the home ... The family ... has taken on many of the forms of a prison."[30] It advocated for real supports for working mothers (e.g. child care, nursery schools) and GAI to give mothers the choice to stay home. "With the implementation of these propositions, the family could freely evolve into a harmonious relationship between human beings."[31] Thus, the League for Socialist Action proposed a package of supports for mothers who did paid or unpaid work, of which GAI was part, but the group did so in a manner that asserted and critiqued the oppressive care work done in families. This position was distinct from those of the other GAI advocates in its devastating critique of the oppressive conditions of the family. It was also distinct from other socialist/Marxist women's groups that focused on liberation through paid work. For instance, the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) also hailed back to matriarchal times and the evil of private property and was gravely concerned about women's economic dependence on men. But, unlike the League for Socialist Action, the CPC did not mention GAI and saw the solutions solely through better paid employment.[32]

Armed with 468 briefs – following six months of hearings in fourteen cities and one month after the Croll Senate Committee on Poverty had completed its seven months of public hearings – the RCSW released its report on 7 December 1970. One month after the RCSW report was released, following a groundswell of antipoverty activism across the country, the first National Conference of Poor People's Organizations met in Toronto. The National Conference of Poor People's Organizations called for a radical redistribution of profit and formed the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO), which still exists today. And yet despite all of this antipoverty organizing, despite blaring newspaper headlines about poverty and the Croll Committee hearings, the majority of the RCSW briefs and the commission's subsequent report are shockingly muted on the subject of poverty. The report has *only five citations* concerning the Croll Committee. The report does acknowledge women poverty activists: "During the past few years we have seen a more militant spirit develop among some women in low income groups. There are now about 215 organizations of the poor in Canada. They exist in almost every city. A great many of them are led by women."[33] And yet, even though they are aware of women poverty

29. League for Socialist Action, Toronto, brief 163 to the RCSW, 21 March 1968, 6.

30. League for Socialist Action, Toronto, 1–2.

31. League for Socialist Action, Toronto, 2.

32. Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Canada, brief 126 to the RCSW, 14 March 1968.

33. Canada, *Report*, 316.

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activists with a militant spirit, none of this militancy is seen in the group briefs about poverty submitted to the RCSW. Nor does the commission mention this lack of representation in its report. Only three of the 468 briefs to the RCSW were written by low-income women's groups, and these were not of a militant nature.

It is the conclusion of the RCSW report that crystallizes the commission's understanding of women's poverty (as quoted earlier): "The specific situation of women in poverty was an *unexpectedly significant finding* [my emphasis] in our investigation."[34] Unexpectedly significant finding? How is it possible that the nature and extent of women's poverty could be unexpected four and a half years after Prime Minister Pearson declared war on poverty? How could this be written five years after the Canadian Welfare Council study on rural poverty found the "extent staggering"? Or six years after the Ontario Federation of Labour declared that more than 1 million Ontarians were living in poverty?

This huge crevasse between the RCSW and low-income women, as revealed by the briefs and the report, helps us to understand the continued refusal of many prominent feminists to adequately hear and respect the voices of low-income women. Wendy McKeen documents how the leaders of the second-wave women's movement, with their focus on women's inequality in the labour market, did not fully appreciate the deeper structures that devalued women's paid and unpaid work. Instead, both liberal and socialist feminists saw women's salvation in paid work and were deeply uncomfortable with stay-at-home motherhood.[35] This rift became highly visible in 1979, nine years after the RCSW report, with a huge schism between the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), which had been spawned by the RCSW, and low-income women's groups. NAC had invited Dorothy O'Connell, president of the Ottawa Tenants Council, to speak at its annual convention. But the executive, which included both liberal and socialist feminists, had grown increasingly concerned about the Wages for Housework (WFH) groups that highlighted the oppression of women in the home and demanded wages for this unpaid caring work. In a confidential memo, the NAC executive stated that it had decided to refuse membership to all groups who had any association with WFH. O'Connell, WFH groups, and low-income women's groups were outraged. A compromise was arranged whereby low-income women's groups could hear O'Connell speak but could not be members of NAC or vote at the convention if they supported WFH in any way. When McConnell spoke at this NAC convention she criticized NAC's exclusionary tactics and questioned why women

34. Canada, *Report*, 331.

35. Wendy McKeen explores welfare activism in the 1970s and documents how uncomfortable prominent feminists in policy debates were with what they viewed as "welfare dependency." McKeen, "'Welfare Mother' Activism, Mainstream Feminism and the Cunning of History in Ontario's 1970s Welfare Debate," *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 39, 1 (2018): 75–103.

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on welfare should be urged to get paid work. McConnell accused NAC feminists of "downgrading women in the home."[36] This 1979 event crystallized the tensions between the prominent public figures of the second-wave Canadian women's movement and many low-income mothers, many of whom were also Indigenous, immigrant, and/or racialized women. But both the briefs to the RCSW and the commission's report in 1970 had foreshadowed these huge divisions between second-wave feminist leaders and low-income women.

And the same divisions continue today. Many who identify as liberal and socialist feminists have been reluctant to engage in the growing campaign for Basic Income (BI) across the country. Advocates of BI, which is the new version of GAI, call for an income for all low-income citizens.[37] Full disclosure: I am a member of the Kingston Basic Income Group and the national group Basic Income for Women, Basic Income Canada Network. Members of many low-income women's groups, including Indigenous and racialized women, come to our Zoom meetings and advocate for BI.[38] And yet feminists in the organized labour movement and professional women's groups have been reluctant to add their voices and join these meetings. Just like the RCSW report, the current leadership of liberal and socialist feminist groups are slow to appreciate the lived realities of low-income women, nor do they grant these low-income women the choices that they personally take for granted – for instance, the choice to enter and to leave the paid workforce when it is best for themselves and their children. As low-income women know all too well, liberation for them is unlikely to occur in their part-time, minimum-wage-with-no-benefits

36. For a more detailed examination of this 1979 schism between NAC and Wages for Housework and WFH allies that included low-income women's groups, see Lynne Marks, Margaret Little, Megan Gaucher and T. R. Noddings, "'A Job That Should Be Respected': Contested Visions of Motherhood and English Canada's Second Wave Women's Movements, 1970–1990," *Women's History Review* 25, 5 (2016): 771–790.

37. A number of policy options advocate for BI. Some call for a universal BI that will be taxed back. Others call for a BI targeted for those under a certain income. Some advocate for BI alongside existing social safety net supports including welfare and disability allowances. Others call for the replacement of these abysmal social programs with a BI. Regardless, all are calling for an income, beyond the currently abysmal welfare rates, for all low-income citizens. For a fuller discussion of BI, see Jamie Swift and Elaine Power, *The Case for Basic Income: Freedom, Security, Justice* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2021).

38. Among the advocates for BI are the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Low Income Families Together (LIFT), and the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI). See National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place: Final Report*, vol. 1b (Canada 2019), https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final_Report_Vol_1b.pdf; Josephine Grey, co-founder of Low Income Families Together, interview by Margaret Little, 21 July 2021, Alternative Visions: The Politics of Motherhood and Family among Indigenous, Immigrant, Racialized and Low-Income Women's Groups in Canada, 1960s–1980s Research Project; OCASI, "Submission to Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild," 24 July 2020, Question 9, p. 2, https://ocasi.org/sites/default/files/OCASI%20Response%20to%20TORR%20Consultation%20COVID_0.pdf.

McJobs. They want the option, the choice, to choose when and under what circumstances they participate in the paid labour force. And yet, just like in the 1960s, prominent feminist leaders have been hesitant to listen to the voices of low-income women.[39]

39. While it is too early to tell, I see hopeful signs that perhaps the tide is turning. The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) has recently released a report supporting BI, and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which includes a number of prominent feminist economists, has advocated for a "Canada Livable Income" (similar to BI) in its recent alternative federal budget. Cee Strass, *Basic Income and the Care Economy* (Toronto: LEAF, 2021), https://www.leaf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Basic-Income-The-Care-Economy-Full-Report-Final.pdf; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, *Mission Critical: A Just and Equitable Recovery; Alternative Federal Budget 2022* (Ottawa: CCPA, 2021), 14–17, https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2021/11/AFB%202022.pdf

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