

PDF of paper "The Freedom Movement As A Learning Process: Rediscovering the Family Wage—not 'the Family'—as the Problem and the 'Social Wage' as an Important Step toward the Solution" presented by Marisa Figueiredo, at the Redstockings Panel "*Tools of Radical Feminist Analyzing, Organizing and Mobilizing: 'Consciousness-Raising' and 'History for Activist Use'*", on 3/29/14 at 9:30 AM, at "A Revolutionary Moment: Women's Liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s," a conference organized by the Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies Program at Boston University, March 27-29, 2014.

Good morning, sisters and allies. I am fired up and ready to analyze, organize and mobilize—are you? A main reason I have persevered in this movement was Redstockings' think tank resolution that "We are now ready not only to expose and protest, but to begin to propose and fight."

I'm going to be touching upon what Redstockings calls our social wage strategy, some of how we came to it and how we used consciousness-raising to look at how these issues impact our lives right now. I am here to make the case that winning social wage advances—such as free quality childcare, national healthcare not dependent on jobs or a man, paid parental leave, and a shorter work week—is a needed strategy that, when combined with building a powerbase through feminist organizing, can become a springboard toward full women's liberation. How will winning these programs move us closer to full liberation for women? Because of the lack of these programs here in the U.S., women are tracked into unpaid care work within the family, work that the whole society benefits from, and in addition, made dependent on men and employers through the family wage system.

We use the phrase “full liberation” for women and freedom, justice and equality for all, including women, as our goals instead of terms like democracy, socialism and communism because these terms, taken at their best, mean full liberation, and justice, freedom and equality

for all. We see the success of the struggle for FULL and complete liberation, and justice and equality for all women, as the measure of the truth of all these other terms. We also see that the struggle for all these has been a learning process, and is an unfinished and continuous learning process, where we try things, see what happens and try again for something better, and are aiming to do our best to extend this learning process to the whole movement. Many of these ideas get developed in Redstockings' organizing packet *Women's Liberation & National Health Care: Confronting the Myth of America* and it still lays out the basic realization on which we're now operating. Even though it was published in 2001, unfortunately not very much of it is outdated. In fact, some things are getting worse--and even the paltry social wage programs we already have are under relentless attack.

In our public organizing over the decades, we've held consciousness-raising meetings, rallies and Speakouts to spark awareness and anger about the fact that women in the U.S. still lack these universal programs that women in many other countries already have--programs that free up women's time and make our struggles for equality easier.

Until women are freed from the unequal, unfair, and uncompensated share of the responsibility for the work of family and labor of caring for and generating the human workforce, our full liberation is not possible. This labor and responsibility must be equally shared between the sexes. Further, the labor and responsibility should not fall completely on the parent but needs the assistance of the society as a whole, which receives at least as much of the share of the benefits of the new generation as the parents.

The social wage for all, combined with an individual wage for all, is a major step toward a social system for generating and caring for the generations in which human females win the same individual rights, liberties and personal freedoms that men enjoy.

What about my own learning process about what stands in the way of winning a social wage system in the U.S.?

It began with Redstockings deciding to attend a conference called "The First National Conference on Devising a National Health Care System", on May 16, 1987 in Chevy Chase, Maryland. We held a consciousness-raising workshop at this Conference on a topic we probably wouldn't have been caught dead being part of before, didn't think of as a feminist issue and thought it was kind of anti-feminist actually to be involved with: health care other than abortion, birth control and forced sterilization.

When I attended this Conference, I did not fully realize or understand how health care other than abortion, birth control or forced sterilization was anti-feminist.

2 years later, in 1989, I made a banner to hold at the big 1989 Abortion March in Washington, D.C., with sister Redstockings' Colette Price and Susan Jeanchild that read:

"Go for what you really want: Free Abortion on Demand thru National Health Care for All Redstockings of the WLM, 1969-1989".

So, what was the thinking of those of us who made this banner? The groups in the 1970s with

slogans like “Free Abortion On Demand” didn't explain how abortion could be free! Or how the countries where it was free and or on demand had won either or both. The national health care system, with the radical feminist, women’s liberation movement pressure for both is how abortion on demand can be free. The banner in 1989 did not show consciousness yet of using international comparisons of countries whose national health care systems did offer abortion to women and how the existence of a feminist struggle is what won abortion on demand. This deeper understanding is in the 2001 Redstockings organizing packet and the organizing by Redstockings Allies and Veterans in New York City.

The most successful campaign in our feminist fight for national health insurance was the 2000 election referendum in Gainesville. The book is back there on the literature table called Universal Health Care: an organizer's packet Documents and materials from the 2000 campaign for universal health care in Alachua County, Florida. (Compiled by the Alachua County Labor Party, Gainesville Area NOW, Campus NOW and Gainesville Women's Liberation Health Care for All Project.)

Why did we think we could win? Because the data was SO outrageous. The contradictions and paradoxes were so glaring. What happened? We've won some things at this point but not nearly enough and the data is even more outrageous and glaring. MUCH more. U.S. life expectancy is now 49 in the world. Some things have definitely gotten better and specifically in the area of sexism. Insurance companies can no longer charge women more than men for insurance. That was an outrage we didn't fully understand but it was one of the reasons that Insurance companies mobilized against the Equal Rights Amendment. There seems to be some other good things, too,

in terms of paying for contraception but it's clear that we got nowhere near "free abortion on demand" not nearly as close to it as other countries have come.

We do think if people continue to analyze, organize, mobilize and struggle, we can make conditions better here and closer to what they should be—especially given that the data is so much more outrageous and glaring.

Next I want to introduce the idea of "myth America" or "myth of America". Put simply, it is the belief that we have it better than anywhere else in the world and that women here in the U.S. are the most liberated. One of the biggest obstacles in the United States to us winning what women have in other countries, is that we're being lied to consistently and repeatedly, about how great women have it here and how American women are the most liberated. We're being lied to about what people have in other countries in terms of a social wage, and what these gains in other countries mean for women's freedom and independence. We're talking about what will give us the ability to be financially independent from men, about a system where the employer class and individual men do not have any control over our survival and comfort, whether it be housing, healthcare, insurance, or trying to make ends meet by combining our smaller with his bigger paycheck. And we're talking about caring work—childcare, healthcare (including hauling kids to the doctor, doing paperwork), taking care of family members in our homes. International comparisons are a powerful way we can understand how we can have so much more—and level the playing field between men and women. One of strategies has been going after our current healthcare system, not healthcare per se, sexist doctors, and all that. We're talking about the way it is paid for. The way it is paid for puts women in a position of dependency on men and on our employers. What are we saying here? Is health care just another issue feminists should add to our

list of things to do? Has Redstockings given up on the struggle for equality with men and decided to go for this reform instead? Health insurance is a great example to discuss and dissect as it is the flagship of our job-based benefits system. Our employment-based private insurance system has specifically bad effects for women. It shores up male privilege and undermines our independence, our ability to stick up for ourselves at work or with men, or even our ability to either leave a bad job or a bad marriage. Right now in the U.S. women are caught in a trap because our insurance is tied to our jobs, or frequently if we're married, to a partner's job. Further, because we get paid less than men, women more often take time out from paid work for family responsibilities. But when we do take time out from work, we end up relying on others for our income and our health insurance, or go without insurance entirely. If everyone were covered through a national system, we wouldn't have to rely on a partner's insurance, and our having health insurance wouldn't depend on our job situation. When we say universal healthcare, we mean eliminating private insurance and creating a publicly funded system—funded out of corporate taxes and in proportion to wealth and income—which provides healthcare to everyone free of charges, copays, deductibles, paperwork, etc. The government pays for all—it is the single payer model of health care along with all of the other social wage programs I briefly touched upon earlier.

Women's Liberation means extending to females the individual rights and liberties that the world's so called democracies and republics have long structured exclusively or primarily for males that have come through the medium of the one breadwinner family, with that breadwinner intended to be the male individual. The social wage for all, combined with a fair individual wage for all, is a major step toward the free and equal development for all that is at the heart of women's full liberation.

