

December 6, 2022 - No. 55

33rd Anniversary of Tragedy at École Polytechnique
Ending Violence Against Women Requires
Concrete Measures to Improve Conditions



- **Unacceptable Statements by Women and Gender Equality Canada and Prime Minister**

33rd Anniversary of Tragedy at École Polytechnique
Ending Violence Against Women Requires
Concrete Measures to Improve Conditions

December 6 marks the anniversary of the 1989 École Polytechnique massacre in Montreal, when an individual opened fire on twenty-eight people, killing fourteen women and injuring ten more as well as four men. This year, this tragic event is being commemorated in Quebec with 12 Days of Action that began on November 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against

Women proclaimed by the United Nations in 1999. The November 25 date commemorates the assassination of the Mirabal sisters, three political activists in the Dominican Republic who were brutally executed in 1960 for their work to oppose the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo.



November 25 also marked the beginning of the internationally recognized 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign, which ends on December 10, International Human Rights Day.

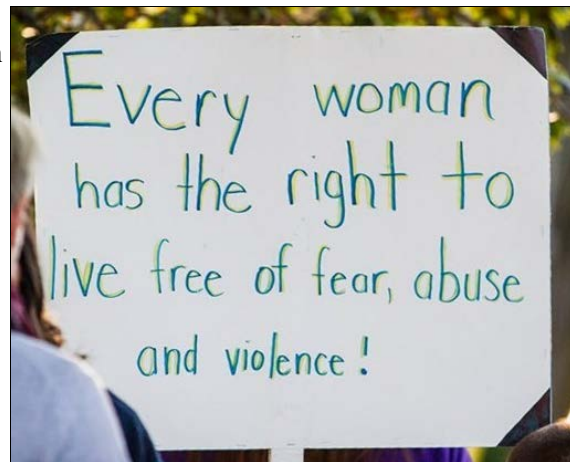
The Quebec 12 Days of Action Collective writes: "In 2022, we live in a society where violence affects many communities. Sexism, sexual violence, racism, and homophobia affect the world's women at the very root of their existence. Indeed, this year we wish to uproot it

at its origin, where violence becomes systemic and imbues society's vices."

The collective states that by addressing the root causes of violence against women, it seeks to heal the many mental, moral and physical wounds this violence leaves in its wake.

The neo-liberal anti-social offensive has deteriorated the conditions which breed violence against women. Governments at both the federal and provincial levels have ministries said to address society's obligations to women and to oppose gender violence but they are neo-liberal governments which do not even recognize that there is a society with social responsibilities. The party system of government is designed to keep people out of power and disseminate an outlook which disinforms the peoples' struggle for the affirmation of their rights. It also adopts budgets which hand out monies piecemeal, many times through the constituency offices of MPs as a method of buying votes and currying favour with people who become tied to them in a begging relationship. What these governments do not do is provide affordable housing or access to social programs, including childcare, that assist women to participate fully in work and guarantee that their children can be raised worry-free.

Women are forced to form organizations to lobby governments for funds, provide shelter for women and children suffering abuse and this in turn is fostered by governments which force everyone to fend for themselves. It is a cruel world for those in need who are ruled by those who are not peers who share their conditions but instead behave like condescending saviours on matters that belong to people by virtue of being human.



The Trudeau government has appointed many women ministers and praises itself for championing the rights of women but these women read from a government script to promote warmongering and anti-social pay-the-rich schemes while they advocate the restructuring of the state to concentrate decision-making power in narrow private interests. The recent statement on the part of the Minister of Finance, who uses every opportunity to say she understands the problems women face because she is a woman, shows callous contempt for the plight of the people. She reduced coping with the rising cost of living and economic crisis to a matter of personal choices. Her family has also had to make sacrifices in this difficult period of rising cost of living, she said. To cope, the family made the personal choice to give up its subscription to the Disney TV channel.

Subscriptions to Disney Plus in Canada cost \$11.99 a month or \$119.99 for a year. The media

dubbed this an unfortunate statement but acknowledged nonetheless, as if it is a minor matter, that the finance minister does not share the same problems as those faced by the people she claims to represent.

What is most significant, however, is that governments do not accept that providing rights with a guarantee is a responsibility, not a choice. They sing the tune that violence is inherent in everyone and everyone should undergo sensitivity training and educate themselves so that they understand how to behave better. Meanwhile, they abscond with the social wealth to pay the rich and step up war production at the expense of social programs.



Today, more than ever, working people are aware of the attacks on public health care, education and housing, which are being systematically defunded, privatized or outrightly dismantled. Ending violence against women can only happen in the context of opposing the anti-social offensive and ending the political marginalization of women and all working people. The people cannot rely on governments to do this but are fighting to do it themselves.

The 12 Days of Action Collective has issued the following demands:

- To recognize universal accessibility as a vested right and not an accommodation;
- To fund organizations in light of their mission and enable them to provide services that are adequate and long-term, with the commitment to reach the groups that they serve;
- To recognize the competence of and the need for organizations dedicated to marginalized women by adequately funding them;
- To recognize the existence of systemic violence and its impact on women.

"Violence against women is everyone's business!" the Collective points out.

The Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) strongly supports these demands and calls on its members and sympathizers to give them their full support. CPC(M-L) calls on its members and supporters to join the vigils and activities being held, to emphasize the importance of supporting the movement for the elimination of all forms of violence committed against women and gender violence.



Unacceptable Statements by Women and Gender Equality Canada and Prime Minister

Statements issued by Women and Gender Equality Canada (previously known as Status of Women Canada) and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as part of the days of action against violence against women are as scripted and mindless as they are hypocritical. The Prime Minister's perpetual repetition that he and his government champion women's rights, while women's conditions deteriorate as a result of the economic and political policies his government adopts, reveal the need for people's empowerment.

Women and Gender Equality Canada writes: "Achieving a Canada free from gender-based violence requires everyone living in this country to educate themselves and their families and communities on gender-based violence, centre the voices of survivors in our actions and speak up against harmful behaviours."



In a similar vein, Prime Minister Trudeau writes, "Every day, women, girls, and gender diverse people across Canada experience violence because of their gender, gender expression, or perceived gender. Certain groups, such as Indigenous women and girls, racialized women, women living in rural and remote communities, people in 2SLGBTQI+ communities, and women with disabilities, are at even greater risk to experience gender-based violence. This is unacceptable. But together, we can end the cycle. It is everyone's responsibility to take action against gender-based violence regardless of

whether it's physical, emotional, financial, or sexual violence. Through this year's It's Not Just campaign, the Government of Canada is raising awareness of the different forms of gender-based violence, and we're providing resources so we can all play a role in preventing it."

Looking into the It's Not Just campaign takes one to a page on the website of Women and Gender Equality Canada titled "Gender-Based Violence: It's Not Just." It gives this definition of gender-based violence (GBV): "Gender-based violence is any act of violence based on someone's gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender." The page states that GBV typically falls into these four categories: emotional violence; physical violence; financial violence; and sexual violence, giving examples of each. It gives examples of those who are affected by GBV: young women and girls; black and racialized women; newcomer women to Canada; women with disabilities and so on. Suggestions are given for how to help someone subjected to GBV. The page concludes by saying "It's not just up to you. Everyone is responsible for helping to end gender-based violence. By taking it seriously, learning to recognize GBV, and apologizing and learning if you say or do something that hurts someone else, you can help prevent and stop GBV." Even the most elementary discussion of what causes the social conditions and social relations that lead to "gender-based violence" is absent from the government's It's Not Just campaign.

The posturing is endless. The Prime Minister adds: "The work to end gender-based violence is far from over. We continue to work with Indigenous families, Survivors, leaders and partners, as well as the provinces and territories, to implement the federal pathway to ending the tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people. We will continue our efforts until every person in Canada -- regardless of their sex, gender expression or perceived gender can feel safe and respected."

The emphasis on the "federal pathway" is noteworthy because it is not the same as the pathway the Indigenous peoples and Canadians from coast to coast to coast have come up with "to ending the tragedy of missing and murdered Aboriginal women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people."

To blame harmful behaviours on individuals who don't know better is to deny the material conditions which force everyone to fend for themselves. Today, the conditions have deteriorated to such an extent that the climate of anxiety, tensions and violence is palpable in every sphere of life, with women, children, 2SLGBTQI+ people bearing the brunt of all the problems which plague the society as a result of an economic system and government anti-social offensives which go against their interests.

Statements such as those issued by Women and Gender Equality Canada and the Prime Minister are

all the more cynical when one considers that their abstract conception of violence against women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people hides the government's warmongering and anti-social measures which glorify and promote the use of force to settle problems. The Canadian state cannot be absolved of responsibility for the anarchy and violence in the society arising from the anti-social offensive implemented by governments that serve supranational interests like NATO and the financial oligarchy, not the people.

The "federal pathway" to address missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is but one example of how the government perpetrates fraud. This pathway claims to uphold culture, health and wellness, human safety and security and justice for Indigenous Peoples. In reality, the RCMP and the courts are brought in to defend corporate interests in the name of rule of law. Violence, abuse and trampling the right to be is their stock in trade.



Meanwhile the housing situation is dire, the foster care system is in urgent need of reform to end discrimination and abuse and so too in all fields of endeavor. The statistics are devastating. Two years ago a CBC investigation found that almost 19,000 times a month women and children are turned away from shelters in Canada.

In the present economic situation in which all working people, and especially women, are bearing the brunt of hardships that deny them the right to housing and food, the direction of the economy must be changed to one which is human-centred. The economic update recently announced by Canada's Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister only serves to cover up the precarious situation facing women. The Finance Minister's mantra that living within one's means is a matter of personal choice -- with the example of her family's choice to give up an \$11.99 monthly Disney+ streaming subscription -- is beneath contempt. She not only appears to hold Canadians in contempt but she and her government reduce the problems of coping with the material conditions whereby people cannot afford to pay rent, provide food and care for their families to a matter of making frivolous choices.



The number of women and children seeking help and refuge in the face of domestic violence continues to rise drastically, well beyond what the women's centres and shelters are capable of dealing with, or school teachers and support workers can handle. The conditions show that this matter must be taken up as a political issue of empowerment which does not permit the matter of rights to be reduced to charitable acts.

It must be tackled in a manner which vests the decision-making power in the hands of the working people and ensures that women put themselves in the front ranks of every fight. Only in this way can they make certain that their concerns are not put in second place.

It is the people themselves, with women in the forefront, whose militant organizing and refusal to succumb are decisive in affirming rights in practical and concrete ways, including making headway on identifying and ending violence against women.

