

The Agitator

A monthly student bulletin from the International Socialists

November 2012

“MEN’S RIGHTS” ARE WRONG UNITE AGAINST SEXISM

“Men’s rights” groups are a growing phenomenon, with “men’s centres”, and “men’s issues awareness” clubs appearing on campuses. Manipulating men’s anxieties faced with neoliberalism and austerity, “men’s issues” groups ignore the poverty, racism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia that men and women face, and instead scapegoat feminist and progressive movements.

“Men’s Issues Awareness at UoF” claims it wants to “build a movement centered on Men’s Issues which will engage in consciousness-raising, public education and efforts to change public policy” in order to “engage in critiques of contemporary society” and “focus on positive activism to advance a healthier society.”

This group is part of the “Canadian Association for Equality”, who claim they “believe the goal of true equality and human rights is best served by conducting inclusive conversations based on facts and evidence, not by promoting ideology or special interest agendas.”

The rhetoric of “equality”, “diversity”, “human rights” and “inclusivity” that these groups use can certainly seem appealing, as can their claim to “provide support for individuals whose equality rights have been denied.” And their claim of “evidence not ideology” gives them a semblance of objectivity, which they apply to issues many people are concerned about:

“men’s health, fathers and family issues, boys issues, suicide, violence, safety, workplace issues, crime and punishment.”



Manipulating men, blaming women, ignoring race/class/sexuality/ability

There is a kernel of truth: men do experience bullying, suicide, occupational injuries, violence, and specific health issues. But nobody has ever denied that (contrary to claims that these issues are being ignored in general, and undermined by women’s issues specifically).

The problem with “men’s rights” is how they generalize these experiences, who they ignore and who they blame. These groups claim there is a “large societal pattern of discrimination, ignorance and harmful public policy that disadvantages boys and men.” This implies that men are oppressed as men, and in relation or because of women—a claim that is justified using

simplistic sound-bites and “evidence” that is cherry-picked, ideologically-driven, and easily debunked.

1) health: “breast cancer gets more funding than prostate cancer”. This falsely claims women’s health undermines men’s health, ignores how women’s health has been reduced to breasts and ovaries, and ignores the constant attacks on women’s reproductive choice.

2) bullying: “boys have higher rates of being bullied.” This implies boys are bullied by girls for being boys, ignoring the racism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia driving bullying, and ignoring the sexism that drives boys to bully girls.

3) suicide: “men have higher suicide rates.” This ignores the poverty and oppression that drives

men to kill themselves, and ignores that women have much higher rates of attempted suicide often linked to sexual abuse.

4) violence: “more men are killed on the job and in battle.” This ignores the class dynamics: that it’s (mainly male) generals and bosses responsible, not women. And this minimizes domestic violence and sexual assault victims, who are mainly women.

5) education: “women do better on some educational indicators, like test scores or enrolment.”

This ignores the corporatization of education that threatens enrollment, divides the unity of men and women needed to fight it, and ignores that these gains have not improved the labour market for women.

6) legal: “women have higher rates of custody over children.”

This ignores the unpaid labour women do raising children, and ignores the failure of the legal system to address domestic violence and sexual assault, and ignores the high incarceration rates of indigenous, racialized and poor people.

7) work: “men’s issues’ groups don’t talk much about work. In the home, women still do the majority of unpaid labour, and despite entry into the labour market still earn 70 per cent of what men earn

Framing these issues as “men’s issues” erases the dynamics of race, class, ability and sexuality that are at the heart of so many experience of men (and women), and instead scapegoat women. This rhetoric appeals people interested in equality, but is driven by misogynists.

Misogyny, women's oppression, and resistance

Contrary to claims of inclusivity free from ideology, "men's issues" groups directly attack feminist and progressive movements.

Paul Nathanson, who the Men's Issues Awareness at UoT invited last month, has written extensively on so-called "misandry." His theories begin with a heteronormative view of human society as rigidly divided between men and women. His view of hunter-gather societies claims humans began with social structures like the 1950s (the era to which "men's rights" look to with so much nostalgia), where men hunted for all the food and women provided the babies. According to Nathanson, the whole march of civilization has been a series of attacks on the mythical male identity, and particular targets include any deviation from patriarchal family—including single mothers, same-sex marriage and abortion rights.

Warren Farrell

Warren Farrell, author of *The Myth of Male Power*, is one of the most misogynist of their leaders, and has built a career promoting and profiting from the backlash against women—dismissing women's oppression and comparing feminism to Stalinism.

Farrell has dismissed statistics on women's oppression as "victim data" used to "catalyze Victim Power." He has also defended rape, claiming: "If a man ignoring a woman's verbal 'no' is committing date rape, then a woman who says 'no' with her verbal language but 'yes' with her body language is committing date fraud, and a woman who continues to be sexual even after she says 'no' is committing date lying... We have forgotten that before we began calling this date rape and date fraud, we called it exciting."

This is the hardcore misogyny at the heart of mens groups,

which is why they have been labeled hate groups. But how can they pretend to be building a progressive movement, promoting "equality" through "consciousness raising," and appealing to men's perception of powerlessness? Understanding the roots of women's oppression, and changes of last couple of generation, explains how mens groups attack women directly and scapegoat them for mens anxieties.

Women's oppression

Turning Paul Nathanson's version of history right-side up, the evidence shows that for most of human history people lived in equality, with no rigid division between production/reproduction. There are obvious biological differences regarding child-bearing, but child-raising was a collective task—and women also gathered food (which often provided more food than the hunt) and had equal say over community decisions. Without the nuclear family there was a free range of sexualities, and without a capitalist labour market there was neither racism nor disability oppression.

When the agriculture revolution provided a surplus, a small class emerged to control it and the nuclear family emerged to pass on private property. This produced a rigid and unequal division between the sexes: women were separated from production, confined to reproduction, and made subordinate to men who controlled production and the state.

As Engels described in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, the emergence of class society marked "the world historic defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children."

Capitalism remains dependent on women's oppression for unpaid labour at home and reduced wages at work—with 30% more wages going to the boss—and attacks any alternative expression, including abortion rights, queer rights, or single parents. Capitalism has also bred racism and disability oppression to lower wages and divide resistance.

Neoliberal backlash

Capitalism has restructured in the past few generations, with women entering the labour force while still doing unpaid labour. With these changes the women's movement emerged to fight for equality, alongside anti-racist and queer liberation movements.

These has been both a specific backlash against progressive movements and a general neoliberal and austerity offensive against working class. As Susan Falludi, feminist author of *Backlash*, documented in book *Stiffed* "the post-war restricting of the economy" has led to a "crisis in masculinity." (We don't need "men's studies" to study masculinity, we have feminist and socialist analysis)

Men are socialized to be dominant and in control. But with capitalist restructuring, working class men are in precarious work, unable provide for their family as they were socialized to do. Working class men work harder for less pay, more tuition, less job security—and don't see the 30% pay gap that goes to the boss.

"Men's rights" groups blame this experience on few gains of women's and queer liberation movements, while ignoring racism and disability oppression. This homogenizes men, and tries to dupe them into thinking they have more in common with 1% of men who exploit most men and women, than the rest of the 99%. The 1% uses sexism to further the austerity

agenda—like Ontario Conservative attempts to defund abortion—while dividing resistance movements of the 99% along lines of gender, race, sexuality and ability.

No free speech for hate speech

If we want "positive activism to advance a healthier society" we have to identify sexism and the backlash against women as a major barrier, and mobilize men and women against it. This means challenging "men's rights" groups who attack women, manipulate men, and don't care about poverty, racism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia.

Challenging these groups includes patiently explaining to people who are legitimately concerned about equality but have been misled by false rhetoric—and firmly exposing and challenging the misogynists at the core, because free speech doesn't include hate speech.

"White power" groups that promote attacks on people of colour shouldn't be welcome on campus and have access to campus resources, and neither should "men's rights" groups who attack feminism, legitimate rape culture, and divide real social movements.

Liberation

Though the process of struggle—uniting the 99% by challenging the systemic oppression that divides it—we all win.

Women were critical to the 1937 Flint sit-down strike that sparked a unionization, and the Canadian labour movement has been strengthened by the fight for maternity leave and abortion rights. Chicago teachers and Quebec students fought united strikes against attacks on education, and on November 14 there were general strikes against austerity in Europe. The real fight for "men's rights" is against misogyny and capitalism.

Bahraini students: the struggle continues

Students and workers in Bahrain have played a primary role in what's known as the Pearl Revolution. They continue their fight against the Western-backed Al-Khalifa monarchy despite the systematic and ongoing oppression of the state.

More than a year ago, protesters flooded the streets of Manama and other Bahraini cities and villages in February 2011. They occupied the Pearl Roundabout, which was the Bahraini version of Tahrir Square. The government forces raided the roundabout killing, injuring and arresting peaceful protesters. The Bahraini monarchy invited troops from Saudi Arabia (armed by the West including Canada) and United Arab Emirates to aid in the crackdown on peaceful protesters. Since then, forces have attacked protesters, besieged villages and cities, raided homes in search for activists, and thrown US-made tear gas canisters on people's homes.

Student protest

Outraged by the governments' attack on peaceful demonstrators, students at the University of Bahrain decided to protest against the violations. They organized a peaceful protest on March 13, 2011. The university granted permission to protest, but Mohamed Al-Khaqani described this as "a trap" to launch a crackdown. Al-Khaqani was a professor at the University of Bahrain and was dismissed after the attack on peaceful students and professors.

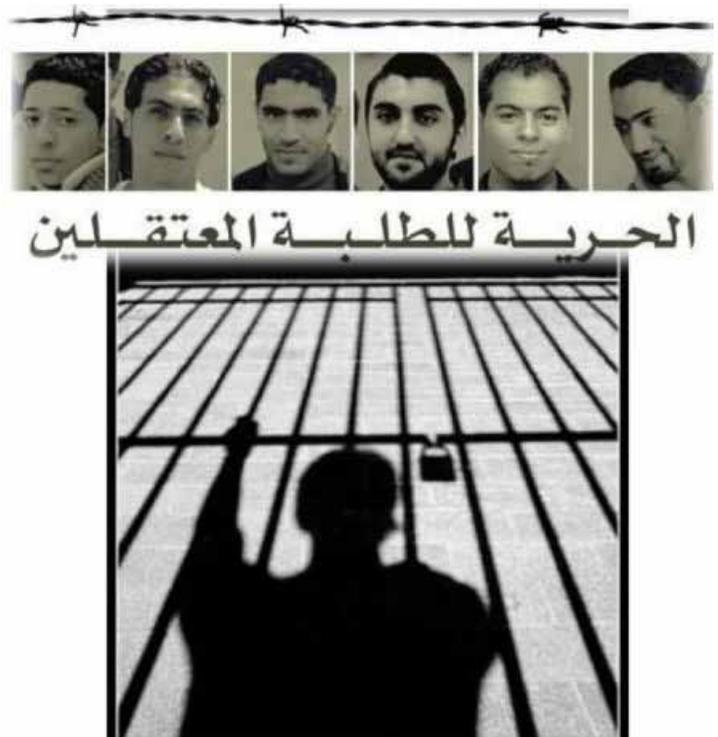
Pro-government thugs attacked the university, vandalizing buildings and threatening students. Eyewitnesses report that the police surrounded the university, protecting and giving a legitimate cover to thugs who were holding batons, knives and swords, and thus not letting students escape the brutality of the attack. Instead of investigating the case and holding the thugs responsible for the attack,

the government of Bahrain held the innocent peaceful pro-democracy students responsible for vandalizing the university and intimidating others. Many students were arrested, tortured and forced to confess to crimes they have never committed. Al-Khaqani was at the university on that specific day. He confirmed that thugs were the ones who vandalized the building. He tried to prevent them from entering the building where he was, but he could not. He defended his students from the vicious attack of the pro-government thugs. As a consequence, "homes of professors and instructors were raided," said Al-Khaqani. Al-Khaqani was dismissed from the university, and was separated from his students who loved him.

Repression and brutality

The regime in Bahrain has attempted to silence protest but has not been successful. Massive numbers of students and workers have been struggling. "At least 4,000 people who stayed away from their jobs during the arrest or believed to have participated in the protests were sacked or suspended, including nearly 300 from the state-owned Bahrain Petroleum Company. Dozens of students were dismissed from universities, and others studying abroad had their grants suspended," reports Amnesty International.

Jassim Al-Hulaibi is a 19 year-old first year student at Bahrain Teachers College with outstanding academic achievements—and a goal to become a teacher and influence his students to build a better future for Bahrain. The regime decided to shatter his dreams (and some of his colleagues'). On March 27, 2011 police raided Al-Hulaibi's home at 2 am. Numerous police cars surrounded his home. They terrorized the children and arbitrarily arrested Al-Hulaibi. They dragged him out of his home, and started verbally and physically abusing him.



Al-Hulaibi was subjected to torture. Prison guards covered his eyes, tied his hands, beat him regularly and offended his religious beliefs. He was forced to confess under torture, and charged with vandalizing a university building during the protest in the University of Bahrain on March 13, 2011 and attempting to kill some of those who were in that building. But medical reports prove that on March 13 he was recovering in hospital after being shot in the leg by regime police. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison, and he remains in prison until today.

So far, Al-Hulaibi has spent more than a year in prison, he was dismissed from university and his grants were suspended. In addition, Al Hulaibi's father received an official document from the Ministry of Education demanding him to pay BD 1416 (\$3766) compensating for the suspended grants.

There are many students like Al-Hulaibi facing unbelievable sentences for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. There are other students who lost their lives fighting for freedom and democracy. One of them is Ali Al-Moemin, who Al-Khaqani salut-

lecture at the University of Bahrain. "Yes, I needed to salute my student. Ali Al-Moemin was my student. He used to sit on the front. He is my student and I love him. You killed my students and charged us for our solidarity with them. You are charging me for loving my students, and my students love towards me," said Al-Khaqani. Al-Moemin remains a symbol of a martyr who scarified his soul for real democracy.

Protest and solidarity

The fight for freedom continues in Bahrain, despite the government's brutality. Their demands are basic— an end to the ongoing repression, oppression, and discrimination that the majority of the Bahraini population face by the Al-Khalifa ruling family.

Imperialists have played a major role in the crackdown on pro-democracy activists, students, workers and protesters. The West's support to the monarchies in the Gulf provided impunity for human rights violators. The only way to help students in Bahrain is to denounce the hypocrisy of the Western governments (including Canada) that sells arms to the oppressive monarchies in the Gulf.

GENERAL STRIKE AGAINST AUSTERITY: EUROPE IN REVOLT



TUESDAY NOVEMBER 20, 6pm at OISE (252 Bloor St West)

On November 14 there will be general strikes against austerity in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, and other demonstrations across Europe. Join a public forum to hear an eyewitness account from Greek activist Nikos Loudos (via skype), and discuss how we can bring the lessons of Europe home to fight austerity here.

Socialist Worker

A monthly revolutionary anti-capitalist newspaper of the International Socialists

web:
www.socialistworkercanada.com
phone: 416.972.6391

To subscribe to Socialist Worker, please send a cheque or money order made payable to "Socialist Worker". Prices per year (CAD dollars): Regular subscription: \$30; Institutions, First Class delivery and U.S.: \$50; Other international: \$60. Mail to:

Socialist Worker
P.O. Box 339, Station E
Toronto, ON M6H 4E3

NO FREE SPEECH FOR HATE SPEECH:

why 'men's rights' groups shouldn't be on campus

Monday November 19, 2pm Sid Smith lobby

So-called 'men's rights' groups claim they have a right to campus resources like any other group, and that their opponents are infringing on free speech. Join a discussion on why safety and equality on campus means fighting hate speech.

organized by UofT International Socialists

Join the International Socialists

To fight for a world without oppression, imperialism and war, join the International Socialists

Contact us by email:
iscanada@on.aibn.com

Or visit us at
www.socialistworkercanada.com