

The liberal feminist approach concentrates on increasing the access of women (particularly microentrepreneurs) to credit or markets, and is best exemplified by the Women Leaders' Network in APEC (a network which is heavily supported by CIDA). Noteworthy is the attempt to establish a Women Leaders' Network of the Americas based on this same elitist model. On the other hand, the socialist feminist approach focuses on an overview of women's (and particularly the National Action Committee on the Status of Women – NAC) advocacy on trade issues beginning with the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, and leading up to the recent establishment of a Women's Forum in the Hemispheric Social Alliance, and the Centre of Concern meeting in Grenada. In recent years, advocacy on trade issues has led to an increasing internationalization of women's economic analysis and activism. The discussion here also highlights some of the problems with this approach, including the fact that the mainstream women's movement in the US lacks any economic analysis, that Third World women's organizations are less likely to reject trade agreements in the same way NAC does, and the danger of imposing First World perspectives and showing insensitivity to Third World women's perspectives. The paper ends with a discussion of various reasons to explain why Canadian trade policy remains gender blind, and concludes with the possibility that spaces for feminist struggle may be opened up by the consolidation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Section Three: Discourses and practices related to women's rights

“Women's Human Rights and Canadian Foreign Policy”

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This paper begins with a discussion of the tradition of the division between civil and political rights on the one hand, and economic, social and cultural rights on the other. This division, initiated by the elaboration of the two UN central Covenants on human rights, has created a distinction between formal equality, and substantive equality. Despite the fact that this division is perpetuated within Canada, for women from other countries, Canada appears to be a leader on women's human rights issues. Canada is considered one of the progressive countries by many. However, Canada's leadership role at the international level is not paralleled by leadership at home. It is notable that Monica Townson has just reported that women's poverty and economic inequality in Canada has not changed significantly in 30 years, that is since the time of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women.

Consequently, there is a kind of schizophrenia in Canada's approach to women's human rights. Canada has a desire to be, and to be seen to be, a leader on women's human rights at the global level and simultaneously, at home, refuses to treat international human rights commitments to women as serious matters. Some UN treaty bodies are beginning to scratch away at Canada's teflonized reputation on human rights, taking account of representations made by women's organizations and other NGOs regarding Canada's failures to comply with central undertakings in the human rights treaties that Canada has signed. The Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1998) and the UN Human Rights Committee (1999) are recent important examples of this. The paper concludes