

Joan Sangster, *Demanding Equality: One Hundred Years of Canadian Feminism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020)

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people concerned would open up to a good interviewer. If Spaner tried to get them to talk, there is no evidence of that in this book. He evidently wanted to tell the story from the point of view of left activists, and he did that reasonably well. If you want to know what those people were thinking and doing at the time, this is a good source.

As for other questions, you will not find the answers here. For me, one of the puzzling things is why the newly re-elected Social Credit government decided to bring everything in its radical program forward at the same time. The package of twenty-six bills that the government introduced in July 1983 managed to engage human rights activists, anti-poverty campaigners, environmentalists, and a host of others while posing a fundamental threat to organized labour. So all the government's usual opponents were attacked at once. The result was that people who previously had little to do with one another – or even were seriously at odds – came together in a common campaign that was quite threatening to the government. Did the government's leaders not anticipate that, or were they hoping to trick the opposition into a struggle they were bound to lose? A more cautious approach, followed by most governments on the right, has been to focus on one thing at a time and avoid getting everyone riled up at the same time.

One of the complaints about the July legislative package is that it had not been foreshadowed in the legislative campaign just two months before. What Spaner and his friends missed in the subsequent debates on the left – but which the politicians of the NDP well understood – is that, despite this, the Socreds would have been re-elected with an even bigger majority had they been forced by a general strike to call a snap election. The Socreds knew this too, which perhaps accounts for their

lack of caution. It is one thing to get your people out onto the streets waving banners; it is another thing to get people who wouldn't vote for you before to do so now in support of the protesters. The Socreds were confident that their traditional supporters would stick with them. The electorate can be surprisingly forgiving of politicians who promise one thing and do another: it all depends on what the alternatives are, and in BC the majority of voters have generally been unwilling to entrust the NDP with governmental authority. (The present situation is anomalous in that regard.) The politicians in the NDP – and the labour movement – have always understood that they are fighting an uphill battle. Whether circumstances could change is an open question. In retrospect, it seems clear that BC was not as ready for fundamental change in 1983 as many members of the Solidarity Coalition hoped.

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Joan Sangster, *Demanding Equality: One Hundred Years of Canadian Feminism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020)

THERE ARE FEW, if any, historians better placed than Joan Sangster to write a history of a century of feminism in Canada. The author of numerous books on women, work, protest, progressive politics and, most recently, of the overview of women's fight for the vote in Canada, published in the multi-volume UBC Press series entitled "Women's Suffrage and the Struggle for Democracy," Sangster has produced innovative scholarship in the field of women's and gender history for over thirty years.

The book under review here is a thematic synthesis consisting of ten chapters, framed by an introduction and a

conclusion. It draws largely on published scholarly work, including the many publications of the author herself, but also on printed (and even manuscript) primary sources. Feminism is broadly construed and is treated in its multiple incarnations, from the 1880s to the “1990s and Beyond” (a period somewhat longer, in fact, than the 100 years announced in the title). Defining feminism as women’s “equality-seeking efforts,” (10) Sangster’s synthesis is oecumenical: she examines campaigns to obtain the right to vote in various Canadian jurisdictions, but also labour and left feminism, agrarian feminism, anti-racist mobilization, pacifism, attempts to ensure women’s access to paid work and decent salaries, and the particular contours of feminism in Quebec and within Indigenous communities. The author pays careful attention to these diverse and sometimes hybrid movements for the entire period under study, from the 19th century to the present.

While those well versed in the history of women in Canada will find much familiar material and a series of well-known events here, they will also discover, or be reminded of, lesser-known actors and “equality-seekers.” One of the most important contributions of the book is to introduce readers to an extensive cast of persons, almost all women, who dared to speak out, voice unpopular opinions, and defy the prejudices of their time. These include well-known figures such as Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Joséphine Marchand Dandurand, and Emily Stowe, but also authors and activists less familiar to most scholars and students, such as Sui Sin Far (Edith Eaton), Bertha Merrill Burns, Pearleen Oliver, Sophia Dixon, Pat Schultz, and Jeannette Corbière Lavell, to name only some of the remarkable women to whom this book calls attention in a series of biographical vignettes that serve to illustrate and underpin the

analysis. Another key contribution made by this book to our collective knowledge is the author’s emphasis on women’s print culture (newspaper articles and columns, short stories, novels, plays, magazines), in all periods and regions – a reminder of how essential the written word has been, over the last century and a half, to attempts to denounce injustice and persuade opponents, the resistant, and the hesitant of the importance – indeed, the necessity – of women’s equality-seeking efforts.

The book includes excellent regional coverage, reflecting the state of the published literature but also, in some ways, compensating for its gaps and absences: there is plenty of material on the Maritimes, particularly Halifax, lots on British Columbia, and considerable information on all geographic points in between. The author has clearly made a conscious and consistent effort to devote space and attention to Indigenous women, women of colour, and settler women – Francophone, Anglophone, and migrant.

Sangster largely discards the well-worn “waves” metaphor in favour of United States historian Nancy Hewitt’s “radio waves” analogy: that is, feminist currents as “multiple, overlapping, with different frequencies and channels.” (8) Her evidence certainly supports Hewitt’s argument that different manifestations of feminism can be found at any given moment throughout the period under study, including during the so-called “trough” between the first and second “waves.” That said, as Sangster acknowledges, in the Canadian context we do see intense political mobilization by women at particular moments, notably the first decades of the 20th century and then the period spanning the years from the beginning of the 1960s to the end of the 1980s. This suggests, as historian Christine Bard has recently observed in her book *Mon genre*

d'histoire (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2021), that the wave metaphor is not without its uses.

Sangster's synthesis of feminist thought and activity in Canada ends on a decidedly ambivalent note. The author's discussion of the political and economic impact on women of advanced capitalism, neoliberalism, and the dismantling of the welfare state leaves little room for optimism. It is clear that she has mixed feelings about the potential and possibilities of what some have called the "third-wave" feminism of the 1990s and the turn of the 21st century. Sangster refuses the label "post-feminist" for our current age. Rather, she invites 21st century feminists to engage in Utopian thinking. While "utopian feminist impulses" can only help, it is not entirely clear what kind of future the author sees for feminism in what she calls "the nightmare of our current world." (371)

Demanding Equality is a book that is at once capacious in its scope and accessibly written. Very complete endnotes and a detailed index compensate for the lack of a bibliography. This book certainly could – and should – be used in classes on women's and gender history. Ideally, it would also be assigned to students taking courses in political history, the history of social movements, and the history of ideas. It will undoubtedly be useful for students enrolled in feminist studies classes who are familiar with insights forged in other disciplines but unaware of the deep roots and lengthy history of feminism in Canada – a history that, as the author demonstrates beyond a doubt, was dynamic, complex, and diverse long before the 1960s.

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Sean Carleton, Ted McCoy, and Julia Smith, eds., *Dissenting Traditions: Essays on Bryan D. Palmer, Marxism, and History* (Edmonton: AU Press, 2021)

BRYAN PALMER emerges in this *fest-schrift* as a historian of great insight, prescience, and a pronounced preference for polemic and heated debate. "Brought up in a house without books," Palmer became invested in the study of history not through the university lecture hall (he dropped out after his first year), but rather through his experiences amidst the 1960s New Left scene in New York City. (6–7) He eventually returned to Canada to finish his undergraduate degree before completing his doctoral work under the tutelage of Melvyn Dubofsky. He became a leading scholar of Canadian and American labour history (and, it should be added, an important figure in the making of this very journal). With 14 books, 50 journal articles, and nearly 80 graduate students to his credit, Palmer has certainly been prolific.

His approach, as summarized by Alvin Finkel, has been to look at the totality of the working-class experience, the dimensions of class conflict, and the contours of class resistance: "What were the circumstances of [working people's] lives in various periods, how did they assess those circumstances, and what did they do to try and change them?"(44) In answering those questions, Palmer developed a methodology that blended aspects of Marxism, Leninism, Trotskyism, and the New Left: "As a Marxist, [Palmer] has placed his main focus on class struggle, and as a Leninist, he has shone a spotlight on the vanguard of organizers for social change. As a product of the New Left, that spotlight has been a critical one that has assessed whether the leadership that has arisen at various points has been democratic, anti-authoritarian, and sought the full liberation of workers," or has simply